

# EDWARD W. SAID

Author of *The Politics of Dispossession* and *Culture and Imperialism*



## PEACE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

ESSAYS ON PALESTINE IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

“Said is a brilliant and unique amalgam of scholar, aesthete and political activist . . . He challenges and stimulates our thinking in every area.” —*Washington Post Book World*

PREFACE BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Edward W. Said

*Peace and Its Discontents*

An internationally renowned literary and cultural critic, Edward W. Said is University Professor at Columbia University. He is the author of fourteen books, including *Orientalism*, which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Culture and Imperialism*.

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# Peace and Its Discontents



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*Essays on Palestine  
in the Middle East Peace Process*

Edward W. Said

*With a Preface by*  
Christopher Hitchens



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*For Professor Israel Shahak,  
Champion of Peace and Justice*





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Finally, a word about the form of the articles themselves. Although in many ways they overlap one another and reiterate themes and observations, I have edited them only to eliminate too insistent repetitions and very occasionally to clarify and bring up to date what I did not know at the time of writing. In any event these pieces were written above all else as eyewitness reports and commentaries to accompany (and to demystify) momentous de-

velopments whose purport was often misleadingly interpreted or deliberately falsified. They have been kept pretty much as they are so that the English and American reader can find in them a dissenting record of what took place for almost two years, from the "historic handshake" on the White House lawn in 1993 until, roughly speaking, its second anniversary.

# Contents

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| PREFACE <i>by Christopher Hitchens</i>  | xiii  |
| INTRODUCTION  | xxiii |
| <br>  |       |
| <b>1</b> The PLO's Bargain ( <i>September 1993</i> )                              | 3     |
| <b>2</b> The Morning After ( <i>October 1993</i> )                                | 7     |
| <b>3</b> Who Is in Charge of the Past and the Future?<br>( <i>November 1993</i> ) | 21    |
| <b>4</b> Facts, Facts, and More Facts ( <i>December 1993</i> )                    | 26    |
| <b>5</b> The Limits to Cooperation ( <i>Late December 1993</i> )                  | 32    |
| <b>6</b> Time to Move On ( <i>January 1994</i> )                                  | 40    |
| <b>7</b> Bitter Truths About Gaza<br>( <i>Late February, early March 1994</i> )   | 46    |
| <b>8</b> Further Reflections on the Hebron Massacre<br>( <i>March 1994</i> )      | 54    |
| <b>9</b> "Peace at Hand?" ( <i>May 1994</i> )                                     | 62    |
| <b>10</b> The Symbols and Realities of Power ( <i>June 1994</i> )                 | 68    |
| <b>11</b> Winners and Losers ( <i>July 1994</i> )                                 | 74    |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>12</b> The American "Peace Process" ( <i>August 1994</i> )  | 85  |
| <b>13</b> Decolonizing the Mind ( <i>September 1994</i> )  | 92  |
| <b>14</b> A Cold and Ungenerous Peace ( <i>October 1994</i> )  | 100 |
| <b>15</b> Violence in a Good Cause? ( <i>November 1994</i> )   | 107 |
| <b>16</b> Changes for the Worse ( <i>Late November 1994</i> )  | 112 |
| <b>17</b> Two Peoples in One Land ( <i>December 1994</i> )   | 119 |
| <b>18</b> Sober Truths About Israel and Zionism<br>( <i>January 1995</i> )   | 126 |
| <b>19</b> Memory and Forgetfulness in the United States<br>( <i>February 1995</i> )                                | 135 |
| <b>20</b> Justifications of Power in a Terminal Phase<br>( <i>April 1995</i> )                                     | 140 |
| CONCLUSION The Middle East "Peace Process":<br>Misleading Images and Brutal Actualities<br>( <i>October 1995</i> ) | 147 |
| APPENDIX Interview with Edward Said<br>by Abdullah al-Sinnawi ( <i>January 30, 1995</i> )                          | 165 |

## Preface by Christopher Hitchens

“. . . *And they call it Peace.*”

If it were possible to make one—just one—literary reform in the oppressive litany of clichés and received opinions that is delivered to us by modern journalistic discourse, my nomination for the reform would be this. No editor or headline writer or columnist or think-piece merchant should be allowed to employ the word *moderate* and the word *reasonable* as if they were synonymous or coterminous. Look at what happens in the absence of this reform. Even the noblest of words—the word *rational*—becomes degraded by slothful association. Before too long it is the “moderate and rational forces” who are prevailing. Next it is “the voices of reason” which must be attended to if the “moderates” are to triumph. (We know who the “moderates” are, of course. They are the ones who know what’s good for them. Anyway, they never fail to proclaim themselves and have, by now, earned title to a useless term of art. The feudal absolutists of Saudi Arabia are moderates because they listen to *raison d’état*. Oliver North’s Iranian business partners were—remember?—moderates by definition because they were engaged in bidding for American high-tech weaponry. If this little essay were being written in French, the slight subliminal connection between *reason* and *right* would be enough in itself to convulse the most carapaced cynic with irrepressible mirth.)

Any fool can see how the trick is worked. This man is a critic of

the “peace process” (two other words which we’ll examine in a moment). He is therefore, by his own confession, no moderate. He may even be deaf to the voice of reason. And this, after all we’ve *done* for him. . . .

And here is how “moderation” sounds in practice. We discover it right at home, feet up after a self-satisfied day, in its most secure and contented domicile—the front page of *The New York Times*. The date of the report is September 14, 1993. The occasion is the handshake between Messrs. Rabin and Arafat, encompassed by the burly arms and shoulders of President Clinton, on the White House lawn:

The jaded are awed. Even for a New Age Presidency, there were a lot of men in the audience crying. George Stephanopoulos, the Clinton aide, and Rahm Emanuel, the White House advisor who had helped arrange the logistics, were crying. So was the Hollywood contingent—Ron Silver and Richard Dreyfuss—along with Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of *The New Republic*. “Do you believe this?” Mr. Dreyfuss asked Mr. Wieseltier. “And you’re the guy who saw those aliens land in that movie,” Mr. Wieseltier replied, referring to the actor’s role in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

The same editions of the entire courtier press informed us that Bill Clinton had labored on his own remarks until almost dawn that very day, not feeling he had found the right note until he had a personal encounter with the Book of Joshua. So here is moderation at work, both in its formation and in its expression: consulting holy texts, evoking the New Age, puzzling over the portents and auguries, summoning the sympathetic magic of Hollywood, weeping freely, and invoking the intercession of extraterrestrials. If *The New York Times* was describing any remotely analogous “process” in the Middle East or Africa, we may imagine in what pitying and condescending and “rational” terms it might do so.

As it happens, I was in the crowd on the White House lawn that very morning. I don't often choose to get any wear out of my press pass, because I can't stand to be used as an extra in photo ops that are orchestrated by our masters, and because there is never an opportunity to ask a question. (Unless, of course, one has taken the precaution of acquiring "moderate" credentials, which come expensive even in network terms these days.) Still, curiosity overcame cynicism, and, I will admit, optimism vanquished the long experience of defeat and disappointment. One of my barometers, in the calibration of this fluctuating condition, was Edward Said. We spoke daily; sometimes more frequently. "Come on, Edward, the president has invited you." "Which president?" "Well, I meant Clinton, but if you allude to Chairman Arafat, it's notorious that he wants you too. What can it hurt? It's a mutual recognition, after all." Edward was insistent. Clinton was a phony and a posturing pharisee. (Well, I would say defensively, I knew *that*.) Arafat cared more about being called "Mr. President" than he did about the sufferings of his own people. Here, as a non-Palestinian, I didn't feel that I could urge any more suffering or be more militant than the chairman himself. "But, Edward, you spoke at Algiers. You were one of the authors of the two-state solution. Why make the best the enemy of the good?" He snorted at my gullibility. "This is a sellout, a shabby and abortive thing. Stay clear of it."

Later in the week, White House people came to call. "We want to sell this to Arab Americans. They keep asking: 'If it's so great, how come Edward Said isn't on board?'" I realized that Said could have named his own price for doing what I had done as part of my journalistic daily round and merely agreeing to be in the photo op. Some people adore to be part of the furniture of the stage. It convinces them, and can be used to convince their grandchildren, that they were present when "history" was being made.

In the end, I wrote a column which mentioned all the pitfalls and unfairnesses and absurdities of the agreement but which stoutly argued that it was a believable real-world compromise, and that the forces of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, like the forces of Likud



and Kach, had every reason to regard it as a defeat. I'm telling the story in this way not to emphasize my own paltry role but to show how the temptations of the "moderate" worldview can operate in the mind of one who believed himself relatively immune.

The ensuing essays by Edward Said constitute, quite apart from their force and tenor as a polemic against a specific and ignoble deal, one of the great arguments against the "moderate" cast of mind. A lone individual, who might have done very well for himself either by keeping silent or by playing along, and who had moreover recently been diagnosed as being gravely ill, chose instead to place the emphasis on unwelcome truth, on "what people do not want to hear." One of my earliest quarrels with Edward was about George Orwell. He may therefore not care for this particular compliment, but that, like so much else these days, is just too bad.

Consider merely the question of Gaza. If the Belgians or the Dutch or the British had ever dared run a conquered territory in this way, in the period after 1945, it can be hoped (and it may even be believed) that a torrent of international condemnation would have descended. Nobody has ever visited this part of the projected "Greater Israel" and come away with anything but the most decided revulsion. Having shamed themselves beyond description in this little strip of former Palestine, the Israeli authorities smilingly decided to make a present of it to their former subjects. I should here like to quote from an interview I conducted, in the week of the White House handshake, with Ilan Halevi of the PLO delegation. (Mr. Halevi is a Palestinian Jew and was at the time the ambassador of the PLO to the Socialist International, as well as a strong supporter of the Arafat-Rabin accord.) "When they offered us Gaza as a beginning," he told me, "I suggested that we say, 'Sure. But what will you give us in exchange?'" It may or may not be significant that the only decent Jewish joke to come out of the whole affair was told by a member of the PLO.

The offer was, in other words, always understood at some level as a sordid trap. On the day of the White House accords, I also dined with a senior American diplomat who had once had charge

of Israel-Palestine negotiations. He told me of a previous occasion, when the late Gen. Moshe Dayan had suggested a “Gaza first” ploy. Instructed to wait upon Dayan and tell him that such an offer was too transparent by half, my *vis-à-vis* had found him no whit abashed. “Never mind,” said the hero of 1967, “We’ll still double-cross that bridge when we come to it.”

I suggest that you now turn to Chapter 7 of this collection and read Edward Said’s discussion of the Gaza crisis. Note particularly his dialogue with Sara Roy, the probable world expert on the subject of this neocolonial slum. She is a Jewish researcher whose family was almost obliterated in the Poland of Hitler’s “New Order.” He is a Palestinian intellectual forced into exile in 1948 and domiciled these many years at Columbia University in New York. What you will learn about Gaza in this exchange is that rational people can see plainly what moderate people not only hide from their own sight (which might be reasonable) but also have agreed to hide from the sight of others (which is unconscionable).

Suppose we change the “moderate” designation of Mr. Rabin and Mr. Arafat for a moment, and merely for the sake of argument. What do we divine? We divine two hardened veterans of a long and unsentimental nationalist struggle in which both have authorized and employed revolting methods in order to assert a more or less exclusive (and more or less religious) claim to the same Holy Land. Neither has as much as a useful decade left in him. Both are beset by factions and rivals. Both have become almost physically dependent upon American goodwill and approval. They make a bargain that gives both of them a chance to suck on the twin oxygen tanks of the modernist politician—subsidies and prestige. Why blame them? But why drench them in praise and fervor and (most dubious of accolades) Nobel laureateship? This is not “a peace of the brave.” It is a face-saver mounted by two exhausted opportunists for the benefit of their patrons.

If the real peacemakers were to meet, we would see telecasts of the discussion between Edward Said and Sara Roy. If the brave dissidents on both sides were to be honored for their internationalism,

then the names of Professor Israel Shahak and Danny Rubinstein and Meron Benvenisti would be as well known as they ought to be. Throughout these pages, Edward Said draws attention to the work and the principles of these and other Israelis and Jews. He does not do so in the manner of one who craftily drops a Hebrew name to demonstrate his own breadth of mind. I can assert this much from my own knowledge: Edward Said was pursuing dialogue and reconciliation with Jews and Israelis many years ago, and he engaged himself in political and physical risk in order to formulate, and see adopted, the Algiers Resolution of the PLO in 1988. He really does believe in mutual recognition. But, page by page, he here amasses the proof that the current agreement is neither mutual nor a recognition. It is a parody and caricature of the ideal upon which some rather decent people laid their lives.

The skeptic will—should—have his riposte ready. What about Hamas? What about those who never gave the agreement a chance and who celebrate the deaths of Israeli civilians? Here I need not quote Professor Said's own explicit repudiations of religious violence. I would refer readers particularly, though, to Chapter 15. Either one is prepared to "explain" or "understand" such monotheistic savagery or one is not. Unlike any regime in the region, and unlike many intellectuals in more peaceful climes and contexts, Said is not. I would add, on his behalf, that he wrote these disavowals and repudiations for Arab newspapers in a time and place when many were more prudent, or shall we say more "nuanced"? I also know, again from acquaintance and experience, that Said has defended the rights of Salman Rushdie at chaotic and unpredictable seminars in Cairo and on the occupied West Bank. I can think of many safely domesticated Western intellectuals whose courage on this point (to say nothing of other points) has deserted them with less pretext.

But, of course, if Mr. Arafat is so eager to join the roster of minor Levantine and North African potentates, he becomes part of the problem of fundamentalism rather than the solution. No book can

do everything or say everything, but it is my speculation that every line of Edward Said's political work, since at least 1967, has been explicitly concerned with *preventing* the replication among Palestinians of the banana-republic style and method that has become so dismally familiar in the Arab world. (See, very directly, Chapter 11, but also *passim*.) Yet, in the present cynical dispensation offered by the lordly to the powerless, even the word *Bantustan* seems inadequate as a description of the ghetto state into which the Palestinians are to be herded. *Bantustan*, after all, was once a term of ultimate contempt for the grossest relegation and degradation. Yet now it serves to remind self-respecting Palestinians that even the former lands of apartheid are being transformed while they continue to welter in misery at the end of a flyblown queue. Worse still, this ordeal is sanctified as part of a "peace process," a sort of reified, repetitive thing-in-itself which has lost any connection to original meaning. Not since Gen. Ariel Sharon's laying waste to Beirut in 1982 was described as part of the "Camp David process" has there been such a brainless mangling of the language. (I should say that I used to think that Said was too *uncritical* of Arafat. It was when he returned from South Africa, having met Nelson Mandela, that he began to be more tough-minded.)

Before me is an essay by the Israeli historian Avi Shlaim in *The New York Review of Books* for June 8, 1995. He is considering *This Side of Peace*, a memoir by the charismatic Palestinian negotiator Hanan Ashrawi. Professor Shlaim is a brave and honest scholar who has done much to rescue the Palestinian past from defamation and propaganda. But he, too, makes himself prisoner of the wooden language that has imprisoned this discussion. Here he reviews the brilliant address (written by Dr. Ashrawi) with which Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi of Gaza opened the Madrid Peace Conference:

This was undoubtedly the most eloquent as well as the most conciliatory and the most convincing [speech]. It would have been inconceivable for the PLO, despite its growing

moderation, to make such an unambiguous peace overture to Israel.

And again:

The peace process between the Palestinians and Israel, which culminated in the famous handshake between Yasir Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on September 13, 1993 . . .

Shlaim admires Ashrawi greatly and concedes that she acknowledges the inspiration of Edward Said in the writing of her book. (No student of rhetoric or argument could have failed to notice the resemblance between this now famous speech and Said's essay "Permission to Narrate," first published in *The London Review of Books* in 1984 and reprinted in his *Politics of Dispossession* [Pantheon, 1994]). However, this earns him (and us) an admonition:

Like Edward Said, Hanan Ashrawi understands the importance of Palestinians' telling their own stories; unlike him, she also understands the requirements of pragmatic politics, the necessity of compromise not only with one's enemies but also with one's partners. Both of them are intellectuals with a passionate commitment to the Palestinian cause, and both have considerable expository and oratorical skills. The difference is that Ashrawi can translate ideas into a plan of action.

The automatic terms—conciliatory equals convincing equals moderation and results in peace process—in the earlier extracts prepare us well for the lecture on realism in this one. Yet, as Shlaim goes on to concede as if nothing had happened, both Ashrawi and Dr. Abdel Shafi have become outspoken critics of Arafat's servile minstate in Gaza and have declined to participate in its structure and organization. Had they not declined, they might have been ex-

cluded anyway since, as Shlaim further admits, “the self-styled President of Palestine had intended all along to follow the Algerian model, in which the politicians in exile had returned after independence to rule the country and had excluded from power the local leaders who had fought the French.” And this is why Arafat’s speech on the White House lawn was so empty and frigid; he had refused the services of Ashrawi and, imagining himself on the very threshold of global statesmanship, had elected to speak to power alone. “The next phase,” Ashrawi was brusquely told, “is not one for poets and intellectuals. It’s the era of hard-core politicians, one in which slogans are the weapons of a struggle for power. Self-interest produces clichés, not humanistic visions.”

Why, in that case, does Shlaim not commend Arafat over Ashrawi for his dogged commitment to compromise and pragmatism? Is it because, as Shlaim says later, “His administration has been set up in an area amounting so far to about 6.5 per cent of original Palestine. It is undemocratic and unpopular, and marked by growing repression”? Alas, this scholar does not have the vocabulary to decide what he means. What to do when moderation tells you one thing and reason tells you another? (A better essay on the background to *that* tension is Said’s tribute to the late Hanna Mikhail, Ashrawi’s cousin, Chapter 11.)

Hanan Ashrawi is fond of allusions to *The Pessoptimist*, a quasi-folkloric creation of the Israeli-Arab novelist Emil Habibi (sometimes rendered as *The Opsimist*). Edward Said sometimes puts me in mind of this character too. With the vigilance of the exile, he interrogates each successive news bulletin, each newly returned traveler, and each leak from every camp. Mood swing is the dominant tempo of this activity; at one moment it seems as if democracy will break out in the Palestine National Council, but then a telephone call brings news of the replacement of yet another honest man by yet another timeserver. The Golan is to be returned! Rabin and Peres will discuss the question of refugee rights. But wait—it was all a cover for the same old “Jordanian option,” with the Palestin-

ian leadership snubbed again. Even as I was writing this, in May 1995, the respected and principled Jerome Segal, one of the ornaments of the “mutual recognition” movement, launched a trial balloon in *The Washington Post*, predicting an Israeli concession on the “two-state” solution. (I have been present at many of the launchings of this balloon and hope to be present for many more.) For Palestinians, pessimism is a part of the survival kit, an essential ingredient in their *summud*, or stoicism.

It is entirely possible that Said is mistaken, and that the present neocolonial souk offers the only choice of buyable wares. It is not “unreasonable” to say that the Palestinians should have accepted the insultingly small space that was reserved for them in the Camp David Accords. Many things are thinkable once one has accepted that the Palestinians are a people with no right to determine their destiny, an inconvenient people who must be “taken care of” by others with larger dispensations in mind. But even that assumption would not excuse lying about basic facts and principles, or calling black white, or insisting that two and two did not make four. In the following pages, it is *how* the author thinks, and not *what* he thinks, that counts. And the *how* of his thinking is multiply imbricated with matters such as the importance of dignity, the preeminence of the secular and the enlightened, and the need to tell the truth. In a Middle East that is almost denuded of independent freethinkers, it can hardly be argued that these qualities are too common or that they pose any sort of threat. We could use more of this style in our own hollowed-out public sphere, if it comes to that. Many readers know Edward Said only for his writing on literature and music. I myself have benefited enormously from talking with him about George Eliot and, more recently, about Joseph Conrad. To summarize this collection, then, let me annex a phrase of Conrad’s, which he employed to praise the fighting spirit of his friend Cunninghame Grahame. Of this great critic of imperialism and inequality, Conrad said that he esteemed him for his “magnanimous indignations.”

# Introduction

This is the first of my books to have been written from start to finish with an Arab audience in mind. In an abbreviated form, it appeared in Cairo in November 1994 as a collection entitled *Gaza-Jericho: An American Peace*. These essays were originally written on a biweekly basis for *al-Hayat*, the leading Arabic-language daily edited in London but printed in every Arab capital, and they were also published in Cairo's *al-Ahram Weekly*. A few of them were also published in the French, British, Spanish, and Swedish press; only four, however, appeared in American newspapers and magazines. For this English-language edition, I have added several articles, plus one interview which was done after the publication of the Arab book, and a couple of articles on the United States intended for Arab readers; these may give a sense of what it is like to address an Arab audience unaccustomed to such views. All these pieces coincide with an extraordinarily dramatic and, in my opinion, tragic period in contemporary Palestinian and Arab history, from September 1993 to the summer of 1995, when the Palestine Liberation Organization and then Jordan signed a declaration of principles and a nonbelligerency agreement respectively with Israel under the auspices of the United States. The tragedy is not that peace was achieved but that it was not, even though much of the Western



media have celebrated the achievements of what has been called the American “peace process.”

I was encouraged to publish an English-language version of this collection because of the poor coverage and misreporting of the Middle East peace process in the United States and Europe (the former is a good deal worse than the latter). Arab views are rarely encountered in the mainstream American media. For that reason there has been a unanimity in public discourse in the West that the peace process has been a good thing. When reports of torture and killings of Palestinians by Israeli and Palestinian police appear, they are connected with neither the deeply flawed Oslo Accords nor with an Israeli and, behind it, an American policy which has maintained hundreds of Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, continues to deploy a major army of occupation, intransigently confiscates and builds on Arab land in East Jerusalem (as part of the city’s forced Judaization), and resolutely denies Palestinians true freedom and national self-determination. These pieces are an individual attempt to keep providing the larger picture in the hope that more people will speak up and start to say that enough is enough.

My first piece, which appeared simultaneously in London’s *Guardian* daily, *al-Hayat*, *al-Ahram Weekly*, and *The Nation*, was the only Palestinian dissent against the noisy (but terribly dishonest) celebrations of the Oslo Accords. I have kept up a lonely struggle against the intellectual bad faith and governmental shortsightedness and opportunism that tried to convince the world that peace was finally at hand in the Middle East. Over time, I regret to say, my initial misgivings (described at length in Chapter 2, “The Morning After,” published in *al-Hayat* on October 13 and 14, *The London Review of Books* on October 21, and *The Progressive* in December 1993) have generally been proved right, although the abuse against Palestinians continues.

It has not been easy to keep going. In the past I spoke out for peace *and* Palestinian rights *and* against Israeli practices. All of a sudden the major Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat, signed an agree-

ment with Israel (under United States sponsorship), and I found myself criticizing the so-called peace, as well as the PLO and its titular head. Besides, there was no ready constituency in either the West or the Arab world for views that questioned and steadily went counter to the ready mood of relief and supposed peace. In time, however, more and more readers were won over, and now, in the general despair and disrepair, people have at last begun to ask questions, express opposition, challenge the clammy embrace of Arafat, Rabin, and their apparatchiks, enforcers, and sophists.

My contention in this book is that from the secret negotiations in Oslo between the PLO and Israel to the Israeli-Jordanian agreement proclaimed in Washington, and after, there has run a clear and, to me, unnecessary line of Arab capitulation by which Israel has achieved all of its tactical and strategic objectives at the expense of nearly every proclaimed principle of Arab and Palestinian nationalism and struggle. Thus Israel has gained recognition, legitimacy, acceptance from the Arabs without in effect conceding sovereignty over the Arab land, including annexed East Jerusalem, captured illegally by war. Without declared international boundaries, Israel is now the only state in the world to be recognized as "legitimate and secure" by its neighbors: the formula is unprecedented. Always disunited and dithering, the Arabs have simply lost the will to resist. They now hope to gain acceptance from the United States and Israel by negotiations begun through an act of abjection that betrayed both the cause of liberation and the people—Arabs, Jews, and others—who sacrificed their lives on its behalf.

Though I live and write in New York, at a great distance from the Middle East, I have never been far away from the Arab world in which I was born and grew up. In 1948 my entire family became refugees from Palestine. We lived variously in Egypt (where I spent my youth), Lebanon, Jordan, and the United States. Whether I wanted it or not, the fate of the exiled and dispossessed Palestinian people has been my fate too, although my circumstances have been very fortunate in comparison with those who are still stateless and

under military occupation. On the other hand, I think it is also true that distance gives one a perspective and a certain freedom by which to see and judge matters that might be imperceptible or difficult to assess by those who live in the midst of rapidly unfolding events. I have always believed that there could not be a military solution to the Arab-Israeli, and in particular the Palestinian-Zionist, conflict. I sincerely believe in reconciliation between peoples and cultures in collision, and have made it my life's work to try to further that end. But true reconciliation cannot be imposed; neither can it occur between cultures and societies that are enormously uneven in power. The kind of reconciliation that can bring real peace can only occur between equals, between partners whose independence, strength of purpose, and inner cohesion allows them fully to understand and share with the other.

In the present situation Israel has managed to convince the Arabs, and in particular the exhausted Palestinian leadership, that equality is impossible, that only peace on Israeli terms and those dictated by the United States is possible. Years of unsuccessful wars, empty bellicosity, unmobilized populations, and incompetence and corruption at every level bled the life out of our societies, already crippled by an almost total absence of participatory democracy and the hope that goes with it. We must all take the blame for this colossal failure. Blessed with enormous human and natural resources, the Arab world has declined in production in nearly every sphere: during the last decade the gross national product has shrunk, agricultural output has grown smaller, reserves of money and resources have dwindled, and a whole series of civil wars (Lebanon, the Gulf, Yemen, Sudan, Algeria) have sapped much of the vitality of our societies. Contemporary Arab contributions to the advancement of science and research are practically nonexistent, as they are to international discourse in the humanities and social sciences. Our best writers, intellectuals, and artists are either silenced and tamed or imprisoned and in exile. Arab journalism is at an all-time low. Unpopular opinions are rarely expressed, and in nearly every soci-

ety the media exist basically to further the regime's own version of reality. Yet no countries on earth possess more durable systems of government and power; they have resisted major changes for almost two generations. Little of this can be blamed on imperialism or Zionism. The big question for all of us to answer is, Why have we tolerated such an unacceptable state of affairs for so long?

Not surprisingly then, Arab ruling elites, the Palestinians' included, have succumbed not so much to America but to the myth of America. I have often been shocked and amused to note how little "America" is really known in the Arab world at the same time that reams of attacks and analyses of America and the West provide Arab readers with large amounts of disinformation and crude misrepresentation. These have increased since the end of the Cold War. Moreover, it is assumed that since the United States is the only remaining superpower, we must accept its edicts and follow its pronouncements literally. Along with this there often goes a paradoxically blind hostility to the United States, as if America and Americans are reducible to extremely simple stereotypes. Regrettably, a slave mentality prevails among Arab leaders, for whom a favorable reception in Washington is the summit of their political lives. Little note is taken of how American politics and society actually function; even less is known about America's dealings with the Third World—where its record is positively disgraceful—or how its internal crises have a bearing on foreign policy. Thus the *pax Americana* envisaged by the Middle East "peace process" has been supinely accepted by the Arabs, without adequate coordination between them or real preparation for the details and outcome of the process.

It is amazing to me that what little is known about the United States rests on several invalid and finally inadequate assumptions. The main one is that U.S. policy is beneficial to the Arab people. Yasir Arafat, for example, persists in speaking of his "friend" Bill Clinton, even as (like all his recent predecessors) that "friend" supports Israel unconditionally, has refused to condemn Israeli settler

violence, and has not lifted a finger in favor of Palestinian (to say nothing of the PLO's) well-being. From late 1993 to early 1994, when Israeli troops partly evacuated and partly redeployed in Gaza, Congress voted \$180 million to assist Israel in those moves, in addition to the nearly \$5 billion given annually. Not only does America still officially consider the PLO a terrorist organization but it opposes Palestinian statehood and under Clinton has changed its policy to accommodate Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and the expansion of its over 200 illegal settlements. Official PLO assessments of Israel—whose prime minister is given endless certificates of confidence by the ever-pliant Arafat—are just as foolish and ill-founded. Yet there has never been a coordinated Arab information and cultural policy aimed at addressing the American people, many of whom oppose their government's Middle East policy.

Nowhere have such incongruities been more in evidence than in Palestine, whose cause I served as a member of the Palestine National Council beginning in 1977. In 1991 I resigned from its ranks: I had just been diagnosed with a serious illness, but I had also felt that the terms we accepted for going to Madrid were disastrous. I had voted for the two-state solution at our 1988 Algiers meeting. I could see in 1991, however, not only that the gains of the *intifada* were about to be squandered but that Arafat and a few of his closest advisers had already decided on their own to accept anything that the United States and Israel might throw their way, just in order to survive as part of the "peace process." The major losses incurred by the misguided policies of the PLO leadership during the Gulf crisis, and by the constant mismanagement of funds and assets that were never accounted for, caused the PLO leadership in a panic to concede every single national aim and legal principle to the so-called interim solution proposed by Yitzhak Shamir and seconded by George Bush and James Baker. We received no acknowledgment of self-determination, no certainty of future sovereignty, no right of representation, no mention of reparations (and this

from a state which received billions of dollars from Germany for the Nazi Holocaust).

And if that was not bad enough, the Oslo Declaration of Principles celebrated on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, was actually a good deal worse. For the first time in our history, our leadership had simply given up on self-determination, Jerusalem, and the refugees, allowing them to become part of an undetermined set of “final status negotiations.” For the first time in our recent past, we accepted the division of our people—whose unity we had fought for as a national movement since 1948—into residents of the Occupied Territories and all the others, who happen today to constitute over 55 percent of the Palestinian population; they exist in another, lesser category not covered by the peace process. For the first time in the twentieth century, an anticolonial liberation movement had not only discarded its own considerable achievements but made an agreement to cooperate with a military occupation before that occupation had ended, and before even the government of Israel had admitted that it was in effect a government of military occupation. (To this day Israel has refused to concede that it is an occupying power.) We now also know that the Palestinian side had no legal consultants to help it conclude a binding international agreement, that its tiny handful of secret negotiators were untrained, poorly educated, and unmandated “guerrilla” leaders who ignored Palestine National Council resolutions as they set about dismantling the whole structure of Palestinian resistance without a decent map, without any real command of the facts and figures, without any serious attention to what Israel was all about and what the Palestinian people’s interest dictated.

Subsequent events and agreements have proved my views correct, although I wish that I had been wrong. When it was announced, I considered the Oslo Declaration to be an instrument of capitulation, and when I was invited by President Clinton’s office to attend the White House ceremony, I refused, saying that for all Palestinians September 13 ought to be a day of mourning. Since

that signing, the record speaks for itself. Of course we have failed as a people in our struggle to restore our rights. Israel has maintained its settlements and very partially redeployed its army. It controls land, water, security, and foreign policy for the Palestinian “self-rule” authority. But what made the American peace process and its celebrations so vulgar and distasteful was that all along the Palestinian leadership has pretended that it won a great victory, and that its deal with Israel gave us real independence. When Israel still has the right to control exits and entrances to Gaza and Jericho, when it must approve all laws passed and appointments made, we can hardly speak of independence. How much more dignified and admirable it would have been to admit defeat and ask the Palestinian people to rally in order to try to rebuild from the ruins.

In all this one imperative kept me at my desk: the need to tell the truth and not to let the language of hypocrisy, flattery, and self-delusion rule. Most Palestinians, I am convinced, feel the utter indignity of our situation. Israeli soldiers prevent our people from traveling on what is supposed to be our territory, kill innocent civilians, torture prisoners to death, steal their land, imprison them, and destroy their houses and vineyards while Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres flaunt their new victories as successes of peace and humanity. But what has seemed to me most troubling is the absence of a language that is critical and responsible at the same time. Why do PLO representatives say one thing in private (for example, that Arafat is a megalomaniac) and its exact opposite on television? Why don't our intellectuals feel it their duty to tell the truth about the pitfalls of Gaza-Jericho and to say that we have signed an agreement that gives Israel control over our affairs with *our cooperation*? Perhaps too many of us have internalized the norms prevailing in most of the Arab world, that you must always serve a master, that you must defend your patron and attack his enemy, and that you must be careful not to harm your chances of a good career and a handsome reward. Language has been degraded into slogans and clichés.

To some extent, this insecurity is the result of the moral and intellectual penetration of our ranks by Israel and the United States, so that it becomes the goal of an Arab or Palestinian intellectual not so much to struggle for the independence of his or her people but to be accepted by Israeli politicians and academics, or to get a grant from the European community, or to be invited to a conference in Paris or New York. What one misses in current Arab and Palestinian culture is a moral and intellectual standard by which truth and falsehood can be distinguished and according to which intellectuals act regardless of profit or patronage. Perhaps the Islamic resurgence with which I am not in sympathy speaks to that lack.

The omens for the future are not good. Shortly after Yasir Arafat entered Gaza in early July 1994, it was reliably reported that five, or six, or maybe even seven intelligence services (many of them affiliated with the Shin Bet and Mossad) were reporting to him; since that time the number has increased to *nine*! People have been tortured to death. Newspapers have been closed. His opponents are being rounded up. And still he rules, and most of his people either endure that rule silently or try to get a position in it. His appointments have been an insult not just to the present but also to the past. He appoints his former ambassador to Tunis, a man whose office was penetrated by the Mossad in 1992, as overall coordinator of intelligence and security. The military commander of Jericho is the very man accused in 1982 for desertion and cowardice in South Lebanon. Reports of large-scale corruption involving various international crooks emanate from PLO headquarters. And, despite having himself signed every agreement he made with Israel, Arafat declares to the world that he is "frustrated" and "humiliated" by Israel. What did he expect when he signed an agreement with his people's oppressor, and when he canceled that people's past and its future rights, as well as its present hopes?

Well-meaning critics have suggested to me that I have made my critique of the Palestinian scene too personal, and that I have unfairly concentrated on the personality and indeed the person of



Yasir Arafat. Partly because of our history of being colonized, our tragedy as a people and as a movement is that we have few institutions, no civil society, no properly constituted process of accountability and redress. What we have instead is an all-powerful ruler who survives despite a seemingly unending record of failure. The major benefit of the Gaza-Jericho agreement is that it restored Arafat and a small band of cronies to relative power and authority; this may serve the peculiar purposes of the "peace process," but it does not serve Palestinian interests.

There are chaos and desperation in Gaza and Jericho today. Surely the Israelis are glad to be rid of Gaza (Rabin openly said that he wished Gaza would sink into the sea, so great were its problems, so unruly its people), crowing as they watch an ill-equipped, understaffed, woefully incompetent Palestine National Authority struggling unsuccessfully to keep hospitals open and supplied, pay teachers' salaries, pick up garbage, and so on. And all this with the same aging former *feda'i* totally in charge, unwilling to delegate authority, postponing elections, ranting and railing at the absence of money, leading to the demand that he safeguard Israel's security, crush his opponents, act as Gaza's new military governor.

I remain convinced that reforming Yasir Arafat is impossible. He fulfilled his functions as Palestinian leader until the September 13 signing, which is entirely his achievement and responsibility. There is no doubt that today Israel, the United States, the Europeans, and the Arabs need him: his presence in Gaza testifies to the durability of an agreement that ensures Palestinian dependence and subservience. That is why it has so much international support. Gaza may slowly acquire a successful separate independence, although in April 1995 Arafat turned down Shimon Peres's suggestion that it be made an independent state. But now that Jordan has signed its own agreement with Israel, we can be certain that a tiny West Bank Palestinian protectorate or Bantustan, sandwiched between the two new allies, will be ground further and further down. Poverty and the absence of any sort of real independence will be its

continued fate, although ironically of course the Israelis hold Arafat responsible for enforcing the peace and for assuring the "security" of over 300,000 Israeli settlers (including those in East Jerusalem), many of them violent and abetted by the army in their crimes. In the meantime, according to Israeli figures, 20,000 more acres of Palestinian land have been expropriated or designated "security" areas since September 1993.

Other than that it seems obvious that the leadership that signed an agreement with the Israeli occupation really must remove itself, or be removed by some sort of election procedure. I believe it is impossible to argue or act on the flawed premise that these peace agreements with Israel represent a beginning on which we can build for the future. How can such agreements as the May 4 Cairo treaty succeed except in *further* legalizing Israeli control over the Occupied Territories? I agree that these agreements constitute a new reality, but what we now need is an open debate by all Palestinians and concerned Arabs on the future of our region. I should think that non-Israeli and Israeli Jews, as well as Americans and Europeans with a commitment to real peace in the Middle East, ought to feel a part of that debate. We Palestinians must still reconcile ourselves with our history, and with the perhaps futile sacrifices of the past century. And we must restore Palestine to its place not simply as a small piece of territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River but as *an idea* that for years galvanized the Arab world into thinking about and fighting for social justice, democracy, and a different kind of future than the one that has been imposed on it by force and by an absence of Arab will.

In a very modest way, therefore, this book is meant to stir up debate and to open up discussion. I am neither a political scientist nor a prophet with a new vision. I would like, however, to try to say things that need to be said but have not been, and to ask questions that others, living close to the tumultuous events of the past two years, have been perhaps unable to raise.

I believe we need to connect, rather than forget, the years of sac-

rifice and struggle with both the present and future. I should also like here to suggest that no society can go forward without ideas and values to guide it. It is simply not enough to say that we live in the New World Order, which requires "pragmatism" and "realism," and that we must shed the old ideas of nationalism and liberation. That is pure nonsense. No outside power like Israel or the United States can unilaterally decree what reality is, any more than a tiny handful of local leaders can say, Yes, those are our new ideas and we shall go along with them obediently. These are matters for intellectuals, concerned citizens, and partisans from within our society to contribute to, and if I have any hopes for this book, they are, first, that it will supply a truthful record of what the great changes in our area have wrought and, second, that it might serve as a starting point for a debate on our collective future.

Certainly the shape of that future is formed by American and Israeli power. The peace process will grant Israel what it has wanted from the Arabs, an unequivocal legitimacy as a state built on the ruins of an Arab society and, perhaps more important, an opportunity, with the United States, to enter and benefit from a vast new Arab market. There is much talk of a Middle East common market; of cooperation in joint ventures between Western capital, Israeli know-how, and Arab labor and consumer appetites. Trade and tourism are touted as eradicators of barriers. Harmony and friendship, perhaps even a bit of democracy for the oppressed and downtrodden, are projected for the future. How all this is supposed to occur in a region where the wounds of war and conflict still fester, where refugees stagnate in camps, where millions are denied the right to vote in meaningful elections, where women, the poor, minorities, and the gifted are still treated as lesser human beings, and where the governments offer little inkling of how it is they are going to convert a culture of hostility and belligerence into one of peace and openness: all this is not talked about or debated.

As for Israel and the Palestinians, we can speculate as to whether their agreement can survive in its current form. Will Palestinians in

the Occupied Territories long endure the servility and incompetence of their leaders as well as the continued unfairness of an occupation regime and its vast web of colonial settlements? Can Arafat last in his people's eyes as simply another Arab despot, albeit one working hand in glove with the very state that destroyed his people's society and has enslaved and persecuted their survivors? Will the Gaza–Jericho enclaves collapse under the pressures of poverty and hopelessness? Will a new vision, a new leadership rise from Palestinian ranks to project renewed hope and determination? These are questions no one can answer now. But what we can say is that no scheme, no plan, no deal, no imposed "peace process," no matter how powerful, can completely destroy our alternatives. I feel that as Palestinians we must have faith in ourselves as a people with important resources of hope. And as Palestinians and Arabs we must remember that our desire to coexist in peace with each other and with our neighbors is sustained not by blind loyalty to one or two personalities and their rhetoric, but by an abiding faith in real justice and real self-determination.



# Peace and Its Discontents



# I

## The PLO's Bargain

*(September 1993)*

The "historical breakthrough" announced recently by the PLO and the Israeli government is basically a joint decision to signal a new phase of reconciliation between two enemies; but it also leaves Palestinians very much the subordinates, with Israel still in charge of East Jerusalem, settlements, sovereignty, and the economy. Though I still believe in a two-state solution peacefully arrived at, the suddenly revealed peace plan raises many questions.

The plan is unclear in its details (no one seems fully to grasp all its aspects), plain enough in its broad outlines. All to the good, Israel and the PLO will recognize each other. Israel will allow "limited autonomy" and "early empowerment" for Palestinians in the Gaza strip and Jericho, a small West Bank town sixty miles away. Yasir Arafat is reported to be allowed a visit first and residence later; a few hundred members of the Palestinian Liberation Army, at present in Jordan, will be permitted to handle internal security, that is police work. Health, sanitation, education, the postal service, and tourism will be handled by Palestinians. The Israeli Army will reposition itself away from population centers, but will not withdraw for a while. Israel will control the land, water, overall security, and foreign affairs in these "autonomous" areas. For the undefined future, Israel will dominate the West Bank, including



the corridor between Gaza and Jericho, the Allenby Bridge to Jordan, and almost all the water and land, a good percentage of which it has already taken. The question still remains, *how much* land is Israel in fact going to cede for peace?

There has been much talk of vast sums for development: one prominent Arab daily reported that Arafat was bringing \$2.7 billion to the deal. The West Bank is supposed to get an additional \$800 million. The Scandinavian governments are said to have pledged considerable amounts for West Bank and Gaza development; Arab governments and the United States are expected to be asked for money, although given the unfulfilled promises of the past Palestinians are justifiably skeptical.

Clearly the PLO has transformed itself from a national liberation movement into a kind of small-town government, with the same handful of people still in command. PLO offices abroad—all of them the result of years of costly struggle whereby the Palestinian people earned the right to represent themselves—are being deliberately neglected, closed, or sold off. For the over 50 percent of the Palestinian people who do not live in the Occupied Territories—350,000 stateless refugees in Lebanon, nearly twice that number in Syria, many more elsewhere—the plan may be the final dispossession. Their national rights as a people made refugees in 1948, solemnly confirmed and reconfirmed for years by the UN, the PLO, the Arab governments, indeed most of the world, now seem to have been annulled.

All secret deals between a very strong and a very weak partner necessarily involve concessions hidden in embarrassment by the latter. It's true there are still lots of details to be negotiated, as there are many imponderables to be made clear, and even some hopes either to be fulfilled or dashed. Still, the deal before us smacks of the PLO leadership's exhaustion and isolation, and of Israel's shrewdness. Many Palestinians are asking themselves why, after years of concessions, we should be conceding once again to Israel and the United States in return for promises and vague improvements in the occupation that won't all occur until

“final status” talks three to five years hence, and perhaps not even then.

We have neither had an explicit acknowledgment from Israel that it is an occupying power nor an agreement to end the occupation, with its maze of laws and complicated punitive apparatus. Nothing has been said about the 14,000 political prisoners who remain in Israeli jails. We must put into whatever is going to be signed (no one is sure by whom) that Palestinians have a right to freedom and equality and will concede nothing from that right. Can the Israeli army march in at will; who decides and when? After all, limited “self-rule” is not something around which to mobilize or give long-term hope to people. Above all, Palestinians now must have the widest possible say in their future as it is largely about to be settled, perhaps irrevocably and unwisely. It is disturbing that the National Council has not been called into session, and that the appalling disarray induced by Arafat’s recent methods has not been addressed.

Two weeks ago the only really independent members of the PLO Executive Committee, Mahmoud Darwish and Shafiq al-Hout, resigned in protest; a few more are said to be considering the move. Hout said that Arafat had become an autocrat whose personal handling of Palestinian finances was a disaster and, worse, accountable to no one. I am aware of no more than a handful of people including Arafat who, with scant legal background or experience of ordinary civilian life, holed up in Tunis, hatched these decisions affecting almost 6 million people. There has been no consultation to speak of, and no coordination with Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. In the territories, the occupation has been getting worse, and this after ten rounds of fruitless negotiations. When I was there this past summer no one I spoke to failed to make the connection, blaming Arafat and the delegation members in equal measure. Then in July three leading negotiators resigned, bewailing Arafat’s undemocratic methods, implying that while they bled themselves dry with the Israelis, Arafat had opened up a secret channel for his own negotiations. They were subsequently brought

back into line, leaving their fellow negotiator, the respected Gaza leader and delegation head Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi to issue statements calling "for reform and democracy."

With the PLO weakening and in disarray and conditions in the territories abysmal, there never was a worse internal crisis for Palestinians than the one that began this past summer—that is, until Arafat gave in to the Israeli plan. In one stroke, Arafat has been propelled on to center stage again, and the Israelis are rid of an unwanted insurrectionary problem, represented by Gaza, that Arafat must now work at solving for them. I admire those few Palestinian officials who bravely concur that this may be the first step toward ending the occupation, but anyone who knows the characteristic methods of Yasir Arafat's leadership is better advised to start working for a radical improvement in present conditions.

Of course no political settlement of a long and bloody conflict can ever fit all the circumstances. To be recognized at last by Israel and the United States may mean personal fulfillment for some, but it doesn't necessarily answer Palestinian needs or solve the leadership crisis. Our struggle is about freedom and democracy; it is secular and, for a long time—indeed, up until the last couple of years—it was fairly democratic. Arafat has canceled the *intifada* unilaterally, with possible results in further dislocations, disappointments, and conflict that bode poorly for both Palestinians and Israelis. In recent years Arafat's PLO (which is our only national institution) refused to mobilize its various dispersed constituencies to attract its people's best talents. Now it may try to regain the loyalty and compliance it expects before it plunges into a new phase, having seemed to mortgage its future without serious debate, without adequate preparation, without telling its people the full and bitter truth. Can it succeed, and still represent the entire Palestinian nation?

*Guardian*, September 9, 1993

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, September 9, 1993

*Al-Hayat*, September 11, 1993

*The Nation*, September 20, 1993

# The Morning After

(October 1993)

Now that some of the euphoria has lifted, what emerges from the Israeli-PLO agreement is a deal that is more flawed and less favorable for the Palestinian people than many had first supposed. The vulgarities of the White House ceremony, the degrading spectacle of Yasir Arafat thanking everyone for what, in fact, was the suspension of most of his people's rights, and the fatuous solemnity of Bill Clinton's performance—like a twentieth-century Roman emperor shepherding two vassal kings through rituals of reconciliation and obeisance—all these only temporarily obscure the truly astonishing proportions of the Palestinian capitulation.

So first of all let us call the agreement by its real name: an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles. What makes it worse is that for at least the past fifteen years the PLO could have negotiated a better arrangement than this modified Allon Plan, one not requiring so many unilateral concessions to Israel. For reasons best known to the leadership it refused all such previous overtures. In the late 1970s, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance had asked me to persuade Arafat to accept Resolution 242 with a reservation to be added by the PLO (accepted by the United States) which stipulated an insistence on the national rights of the Palestinian people, as well as Palestinian self-determination. Vance said that the United States would immediately recognize the PLO

and inaugurate negotiations between it and Israel. Arafat categorically turned the offer down, as he did similar offers. Then the Gulf War occurred, and because of its disastrous positions then, the PLO lost even more ground. Except for the resolutions of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the gains of the *intifada* were squandered away, and today advocates of the new document say, "We had no alternative." The correct way of phrasing it is, "We had no alternative because we either lost or threw away a lot of others, leaving us only this one."

To go forward in the march toward Palestinian self-determination—which has a meaning only if freedom, sovereignty, and equality, and *not* perpetual subservience to Israel, are its goal—we need an honest acknowledgment of where we are, now that the interim agreement is about to be negotiated. What is particularly mystifying is how so many Palestinian leaders and intellectuals persist in speaking about the agreement as a "victory." Nabil Shaath has called it one of "complete parity" between Israelis and Palestinians. The fact is of course, as ex-Secretary of State James Baker said in a TV interview, that Israel has given up nothing, except a bland acceptance of "the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people." Or as Israeli "dove" Amos Oz reportedly put it during a BBC interview (September 14, 1993), "This is the second biggest victory in the history of Zionism."

Arafat's recognition of Israel's right to exist carries with it a whole series of renunciations: of the PLO Charter; of violence and terrorism; of all relevant UN resolutions, except 242 and 338, which do not have one word in them about Palestinians, their rights, or aspirations; by implication, the PLO set aside numerous other UN resolutions (which with Israel and the United States, the PLO is now reportedly undertaking to modify or rescind) that have given Palestinians refugee rights since 1948 including either compensation or repatriation. In the past, the Palestinians had won numerous international resolutions including those passed by the EEC, the Non-Aligned movement, the Islamic Conference, the

Arab League, as well as the UN, which disallowed or censured Israeli settlements, annexations, crimes against the people under occupation.

It would therefore seem that the PLO had ended the *intifada*, which embodied not terrorism but the Palestinian *right to resist*, even though Israel remains in occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The primary consideration in the document is Israel's security, with none for the Palestinians from Israel's incursions. In his September 13 press conference Rabin was straightforward about Israel's continuing control over sovereignty; in addition, he said, Israel would hold the River Jordan, the boundaries with Egypt and Jordan, the sea, the land between Gaza and Jericho, Jerusalem, the settlements, and the roads. There is nothing in the document to suggest that Israel will give up *its* violence against Palestinians or compensate the victims of its policies for forty-five years, as Iraq was required to do after it withdrew from Kuwait after an eight-month occupation.

Neither Arafat, nor any of his Palestinian partners negotiating with the Israelis in Oslo, has ever seen an Israeli settlement. There are now over 200 of them, principally on the hills, promontories, and strategic points throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Some may shrivel and die, but the largest are designed for permanence. An independent system of roads connects them to Israel and creates a disabling discontinuity between the main centers of Palestinian population. The actual land taken by these settlements, plus the land designated for expropriation, amounts—it is guessed—to over 55 percent (and more according to some estimates) of the total land area of the Occupied Territories. Greater Jerusalem alone, annexed by Israel, comprises a huge amount of virtually stolen land, at least 25 percent of the whole. In Gaza the settlements in the north (three), the middle (two), and the south along the coast from the Egyptian border past Khan Yunis (twelve), comprise at least 30 percent of the Strip. In addition Israel has tapped into every aquifer on the West Bank and now uses about 80 percent of the water there

for the settlements as well as Israel proper. (There are probably similar water installations in Israel's Lebanese "security zone.") So the domination (if not outright theft) of land and water resources is either overlooked in the case of water, or postponed in the case of land, by the Oslo accords.

What makes matters worse is that Israel holds all of the information on settlements, land, and water, and hasn't shared most of this with the Palestinians, any more than it has shared the inordinately high taxes it has imposed on them for twenty-six years. There have been all sorts of technical committees set up for such questions by the PLO in the territories (in which non-resident Palestinians have participated) but there is little evidence that committee findings (if any) were made use of by the Palestinian side in Oslo. So the impression of a huge discrepancy between what Israel got and what the Palestinians conceded or overlooked remains unrectified.

I doubt that there was a single Palestinian who watched the White House ceremony who did not also feel that a century of sacrifice, dispossession, heroic struggle, had finally come to nought. Indeed what was most troubling was that Rabin in effect gave the Palestinian speech, whereas Arafat pronounced words that had all the flair of a rental agreement. Far from being the victims of Zionism, the Palestinians saw themselves characterized before the world as its now repentant assailants, as if the thousands killed by Israel's bombing of refugee camps, hospitals, schools in Lebanon, its expulsion of 800,000 people in 1948 (whose descendants now number about three million, most of them stateless refugees), the conquest of their land and property, its destruction of over 400 Palestinian villages, the invasion of Lebanon, to say nothing of the ravages of twenty-six years of brutal military occupation, were reduced to the status of terrorism and violence, to be renounced retrospectively or dropped from reference entirely. Israel has always described Palestinian resistance as terrorism and violence, so even in the matter of diction it received a moral and historical gift.

In return for exactly what? Israel's recognition of the PLO, un-

doubtedly a significant step forward. Beyond that, by accepting that land and sovereignty are being postponed till "final status negotiations" the Palestinians in effect have discounted their unilateral and internationally acknowledged claim to the West Bank and Gaza: these have now at most become "disputed territories." Thus with Palestinian assistance Israel has been awarded at least an equal claim to them. The Israeli calculation is that by accepting to police Gaza—which Begin tried to give to Sadat fifteen years ago—the PLO would soon fall foul of local competitors, of whom Hamas is only one. Moreover, rather than becoming stronger during the interim period, the Palestinians will grow weaker and more under Israeli control, and thus less able to dispute the Israeli claim when the last set of negotiations begins. But there is an absence of any specified mechanism of how to get from an interim status to a later one. Does this mean ominously that the interim stage may be in effect the final one too?

Israeli commentators (for example, Uzi Benziman, *Ha'aretz*, September 3) have been speculating that in a matter of six months the PLO and Rabin's government will negotiate a new agreement further postponing elections, thus allowing the PLO to continue to rule. It is also worth mentioning that at least twice during the past summer Mr. Arafat has said that his experience of government consisted of the ten years that he "controlled" Lebanon, hardly a comfort to the many Lebanese and Palestinians who recollect that sorry period. Nor is there any concrete way now at hand for real elections to be held should they even be undertaken. The imposition of rule from above, plus the long legacy of the occupation, have not contributed much to democratic, grass-roots institutions. There are some unconfirmed reports in the Arabic press (for example, *Al-Hayat*, September 1993), that the PLO has already appointed ministers from its own inner circle in Tunis, and deputy ministers from among trusted residents of the West Bank and Gaza (Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi turned down one such offer). Will these ever open up, evolve, into more truly representative institu-



tions? One cannot be very sanguine given Arafat's absolute refusal to share or delegate power, to say nothing of the financial assets he alone knows about and controls.

Regarding both internal security and economic development, Israel and the PLO are now supposed to be working together. PLO members or consultants have been meeting with Israeli officials since last October (see *Boston Globe*, September 17, 1993), to discuss security problems, including Arafat's own security. And this at a time of the worst repression of Palestinians under Israeli military occupation. The intent of this particular collaboration is to silence or deter the Palestinian man or woman who might want to demonstrate against the occupation, which will continue given that Israeli troops will redeploy, not totally withdraw. Besides Israeli settlers will remain and live, as they always have, under different laws, ruled by the army. The PLO will thus become Israel's enforcer, an unhappy prospect for most Palestinians. Interestingly, even after it won political recognition, the ANC always refused to supply the South African government with police officials until after power was shared, precisely in order to avoid appearing as the white government's enforcer. It was reported from Amman a few days ago that 170 members of the Palestine Liberation Army, now being trained in Jordan for police work in Gaza, have refused to cooperate for precisely the same reason. With about 14,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails—most of whom Israel says it may release—there is an inherent contradiction, not to say incoherence, in the new security arrangements being made. Will more room be made in them for *Palestinian* security?

The one subject on which most Palestinians agree is development, which is being described in the most naive terms imaginable. The realities are considerably more complicated. The world community will be expected to supply the nearly autonomous areas with large-scale financial support; the Palestinian diaspora is expected, indeed preparing, to do the same. Yet all development for Palestine must be funneled through the joint Palestinian-Israeli

Economic Cooperation Committee, even though, according to the document, "both sides will cooperate jointly and unilaterally with regional and international parties to support these aims." Israel is the dominant economic and political regional power of course; in addition its power is enhanced by its alliance with the United States. Over 80 percent of the West Bank and Gaza economy is dependent on Israel, which is likely to control Palestinian exports, manufacturing, and labor for the foreseeable future. Aside from the small entrepreneurial and middle class, the vast majority of Palestinians are impoverished and landless, subject to the vagaries of the Israeli manufacturing and commercial communities which employ Palestinians as cheap labor. Almost certainly most Palestinians will remain as they are, economically speaking, although now they are expected to work in the private sector, partly Palestinian controlled service industries, including resorts, small assembly plants, farms, and the like.

A recent study by Israeli journalist Asher Davidi (*MERIP*, no. 184, September/October 1993) quotes Dov Lautman, President of the Israeli Manufacturers' Association: "It's not important whether there will be a Palestinian state, autonomy, or a Palestinian-Jordanian state. The economic borders between Israel and the territories must remain open." With its well-developed institutions, close relations with the United States, the aggressiveness and drive of its economy, Israel will in effect incorporate the territories economically, keeping them in a state of permanent dependency. Then Israel will turn to the Arab world, using the political benefits of the Palestinian agreement as a springboard into Arab markets, which it will also exploit and is likely to dominate.

Framing all this is the United States, the only global power, whose idea of the new World Order is based upon economic domination by a few giant corporations and pauperization for many of the lesser peoples (even those in metropolitan countries) if necessary. Economic aid for Palestine is being supervised and controlled by the United States, bypassing the UN, some of whose agencies

like UNRWA and UNDP are far better placed to administer aid to the Palestinians. Take two recent examples, Nicaragua and Vietnam. Both are former enemies; one, Vietnam, actually defeated the United States but is now economically in need of it. A boycott against Vietnam continues and the history books are being rewritten so as to show how the Vietnamese sinned against and "mistreated" the United States for the latter's idealistic gesture of having invaded, bombed, and devastated their country. Nicaragua's Sandinista government was attacked by the United States-financed Contra movement; the country's harbors were mined, its people ravaged by famine, boycotts, and every conceivable type of subversion. After the 1991 elections, which brought a United States-supported candidate, Mrs. Chamorro, to power, the United States promised many millions of dollars in aid, of which only 30 million have actually materialized. In mid-September 1993 all aid was cut off. There is now famine and civil war in Nicaragua. No less unfortunate has been the fate of El Salvador. In sum, to throw oneself as Arafat has done on the tender mercies of the United States is almost certainly to ensure the fate the United States has meted out to rebellious or "terrorist" peoples it has had to deal with in the Third World, *after* they have promised not to resist the United States any more.

Hand in hand with the economic and strategic control of Third World countries that happen to be close to, or possess, necessary resources like oil for the United States, there is also the media, whose reach and control over thought is truly astounding. For at least twenty years, Yasir Arafat symbolized the most unattractive and morally repellent man on earth. Whenever he appeared in the media, or was discussed by it, you could not imagine him without the single thought that he was supposed always to be entertaining: kill Jews, especially innocent women and children. Within a matter of days, the "independent media" had totally rehabilitated Arafat. He was now an accepted, even lovable roly-poly figure whose courage and realism had bestowed on Israel its rightful due. He

had repented, he had become a “friend,” and he and his people were now on “our” side. Anyone who opposed, or criticized what he had done was either a fundamentalist like the Likud settlers, or a terrorist like Hamas. It became nearly impossible to say anything except that the Israeli-Palestinian agreement—mostly unread or unexamined, mostly unclear, minus dozens of crucial details—was the first step toward Palestinian independence.

The problem of the media, so far as the really independent critic or analyst is concerned, is how to free oneself from the ideological system which both the agreement and CNN now serve. Memory and skepticism (if not outright suspicion) are requisites. Thus even if it is patently obvious that Palestinian freedom in any real sense has not been, and is clearly designed never to be, achieved beyond the meager limits imposed by Israel and the United States, the famous handshake broadcast all over the world is supposed a) to symbolize a great moment of success, and b) to blot out past as well as present realities.

Given a small modicum of honesty, Palestinians should be capable of seeing that the large majority of people the PLO is supposed to represent will not really be served by the agreement, except cosmetically. True, residents of the West Bank and Gaza are rightfully glad to see that some Israeli troops will withdraw, and that large amounts of money might start to come in. But it is rank dishonesty not to be alert to what the agreement entails in further occupation, economic control, and profound insecurity. Then there is the mammoth problem of Palestinians who live in Jordan, to say nothing of the thousands of stateless refugees in Lebanon and Syria. “Friendly” Arab states have always had one law for Palestinians, one for natives. These practices have already intensified: witness the appalling scenes of delay and harassment occurring on the Allenby Bridge since the agreement was announced. There is no small irony in the fact that the new Palestinian bureaucracy is reportedly being trained in Egypt, surely the most deadly of all bureaucracies, one with a particularly unsavory record toward the

130,000 Palestinians resident in the country since the late 1940s who must still make monthly appearances to the equivalent of a local parole board.

So what is to be done? The first thing for Palestinians to do is to spell out not only the virtues of being recognized by Israel and accepted at the White House, but also what the major problems are. Pessimism of the intellect first, then optimism of the will. You can't improve a bad situation that is largely due to the technical incompetence of the PLO, which negotiated in English, a language that neither Arafat nor his emissary in Oslo knows, with no legal adviser (the PLO's two main legal negotiators resigned in protest some time ago; Arafat and his three or four subordinates alone faced an entire corps of Israeli Foreign Ministry experts), until on the technical level at least you involve people who can think for themselves and are not mere instruments of a by now single Palestinian potentate. I find it extraordinarily disheartening that so many Arab and Palestinian intellectuals, who a week earlier had been groaning about Arafat's dictatorial ways, his single-handed control over money, the circle of sycophants and courtiers that have surrounded him in Tunis of late, the absence of accountability and reflection at least since the Gulf War, should suddenly start applauding his tactical genius, and his latest victory! The march toward self-determination can only be achieved by a people with democratic aspirations and goals, or it is not worth the effort.

After all the excitement celebrating "the first step toward a Palestinian state," we should remind ourselves that much more important than having a state is the kind of state it is. The modern history of the post-colonial world is disfigured by one-party tyrannies, rapacious oligarchies, economic ruin, the distortion of society caused by Western "investments," and large-scale pauperization through famine, civil war, outright robbery. Mere nationalism is not, and can never be, "the answer" to the problems of new secular societies. Potential statehood in Palestine is no exception, especially given so inauspicious a start, where alas one can already see the lin-

ements of an unappetizing marriage between the chaos of civil war in Lebanon and the tyranny of Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

To prevent such an eventuality, a number of quite specific issues need to be addressed. One of course is the diaspora Palestinians, who originally brought Arafat and the PLO to power, kept them there, and are now relegated to permanent exile or refugee status. Since they comprise more than half of the total Palestinian population, their needs and aspirations are not negligible, especially if, as has already begun to happen, their financial as well as political support is being solicited for Gaza and Jericho. A small segment of the exile community is represented by the various political organizations "hosted" by Syria. A significant number of independents (some of whom like Shafiq al-Hout and Mahmoud Darwish resigned in protest from the PLO) still have an important role to play, not simply by applauding or condemning from the sidelines, but by advocating specific changes in the PLO's structure, trying to change the triumphalist ambience of the moment into something more closely resembling the realities, mobilizing support and building organization from within the various Palestinian communities all over the world for continuing the march toward self-determination. These communities have been singularly disaffected, leaderless, indifferent, since the Madrid process began.

One of the first tasks is a Palestinian census. It is interesting that Israel, the United States, and the Arab states have always opposed a census: it would give the Palestinians too high a profile in countries where they are supposed to be invisible and, before the Gulf War, it would have revealed to various Gulf governments how dependent they were on an inappropriately large, usually exploited, "guest" community. Above all, opposition to the census stemmed from the realization that were Palestinians to be counted all together, despite dispersion and dispossession, they would constitute a nation, and not just a collection of people. Now more than ever, I think, the process of holding a census—and perhaps later even worldwide elections—should be a principle agenda item for Pales-

tinians everywhere. It would comprise an act of historical and political self-realization outside the limitations imposed on them by the absence of sovereignty. And it would give body to the universal need for democratic participation, now ostensibly curtailed by Israel and the PLO in a premature alliance.

The question of return for those Palestinians who are not from the West Bank and Gaza would certainly once again be raised by a census. Although this issue has been compressed into the general "refugee" formula deferred until the final status talks sometime in the future, it needs to be addressed now. The Lebanese government, for instance, has been publicly heating up the rhetoric, fed by every faction in the country, against citizenship and naturalization for the 350,000–400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, most of whom are stateless, poor, permanently stalled. A similar situation exists in Jordan and Egypt (see *Christian Science Monitor*, September 28, 1993). In the meantime, Israel enjoys the Right of Return for every Jew in the world: they can become Israeli citizens and live in Israel at any time. This extraordinary inequity, intolerable to all Palestinians for almost half a century, has to be rectified. Certainly it is unthinkable that all the 1948 refugees would either want to or could in fact return to so small a place as a Palestinian state, but on the other hand it is unacceptable for them all to be told to "resettle" elsewhere, or drop any ideas they might have about repatriation and compensation.

One of the things the PLO and independent Palestinians should therefore do is to pose a question not addressed by the Oslo accord's, thereby preempting the final status talks, namely, to ask for reparations for Palestinians. Although it is the Israeli government's wish (expressed quite forcibly by Rabin at his Washington news conference) that the PLO should close, in his words, "its so-called embassies"—a pattern already discernible in the string of many, now bankrupt, PLO offices around the world, hundreds of unpaid workers, deep discouragement and low competence in their performance—these offices should be kept open selectively so that claims such as those of repatriation, compensation, and reparations can be made and pressed.

It is clear that we need to move up from the state of supine abjectness with which the Oslo accords were negotiated (“we will accept anything so long as you recognize us”) and pursue parallel agreements with Israel and the Arabs that concern Palestinian national, as opposed to municipal, aspirations. But this does not exclude resistance against the Israeli occupation, which continues indefinitely. So long as occupation and settlements exist, whether legitimized or not by the PLO, Palestinians and others must speak against them. One of the issues not raised by the Oslo accords, the exchange of PLO-Israeli letters of recognition, the White House speeches, is whether the violence and terrorism renounced by the PLO includes non-violent resistance, civil disobedience, and so on. These are the inalienable right of any people denied full sovereignty and independence, and must be supported.

Like so many unpopular and undemocratic Arab governments, the PLO has already begun to appropriate authority for itself by calling its opponents terrorists and fundamentalists. This is demagoguery. Hamas and Islamic Jihad are opposed to the Oslo agreement, but they have said several times that they will not use violence against other Palestinians. Besides, their combined sway amounts to less than a third of the citizens of the West Bank and Gaza. As for the Damascus-based groups, they seem either paralyzed or discredited (for obvious reasons). But this by no means exhausts the Palestinian opposition which, as Mouin Rabbani analyzes its various constituencies in an excellent article (*Middle East International*, September 24, 1993), includes well-known secularists, people who are committed to a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and who are realists and democrats. I include myself in this group which is, I believe, far bigger than is now supposed.

Central to the opposition's thought is the desperate need for internal reform within the PLO, which is now put on notice that noisy claims for “national unity” are no longer an excuse for incompetence, corruption, autocracy. For the first time in Palestinian history such opposition cannot, except by some preposterous and disingenuous logic, be equated with treason or betrayal. Indeed our



claim is that we are opposed to sectarian Palestinianism and blind loyalty to the leadership; we remain committed to the broad democratic and social principles of accountability and performance that triumphant nationalism has always tried to annul. I think that the emergence of a broad-based opposition to the PLO's history of bungling and incompetence will emerge in the diaspora, but will also come to include people and parties in the Occupied Territories.

Lastly there is the confusing matter of relationships between Israelis and Palestinians who believe in self-determination for two peoples, mutually and equally. Celebrations are premature and, for far too many Israeli and non-Israeli Jews, an easy way out of the enormous disparities that remain. Our peoples are already too bound up with each other in conflict and a shared history of persecution for an American-style pow-wow to heal the wounds and open the way forward. There is still a victim and a victimizer. But there can be solidarity in struggling to end the inequities, and for Israelis in pressuring their government to end the occupation, expropriation, settlements. The Palestinians, after all, have very little left to give. Now the common battle against poverty, injustice, and militarism must be joined seriously, and without the ritual demands for Israeli psychological security, which if they don't have now, they never will. More than anything else, this is the test of the symbolic handshake, if it is going to be a first step toward reconciliation and real peace.

*Al-Hayat*, October 13 and 14, 1993

*London Review of Books*, October 21, 1993

*The Progressive*, December 1993

*The Politics of Dispossession*, 1994

# 3

## Who Is in Charge of the Past and the Future?

*(November 1993)*

One of the consequences of the PLO-Israeli Declaration of Principles and the accompanying documents on mutual recognition is a sudden shift in perspectives for which very few people are prepared. Of course these documents themselves do not yet constitute a full peace agreement nor, despite statements made by numerous dogmatic optimists, does an independent Palestinian state—with Jerusalem as its capital—actually exist. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable change in the atmosphere surrounding the struggle over Palestine, some of which is both comic and tragic at the same time. A few days ago at a poorly attended conference in Washington mounted by the National Association of Arab-Americans (NAAA)—a lobbying group that purports to speak and act on behalf of “Arab” interests—former Secretary of State James Baker gave a remarkable speech, whose main point seemed to be that the top Palestinian priority today was not independence, statehood, or human rights but Israeli security. “If autonomy does not improve security for Israel,” he said, “there will be no Palestinian autonomy.”

For the past two decades one American administration after another has poured a total of over \$80 billion into Israel's security. Baker's idea is that only by continuing to do this, with Palestinians

adding their voices to the campaign, can the United States assure peace, and Israel's compliance with the agreement on principles it signed in Oslo. The facts of course tell a different story, that American support for Israel made possible the various invasions of Lebanon, the twenty-six-year-old occupation of Arab territory, and the continuing military superiority of Israel over all the Arab states. In addition the United States vetoed twenty-nine UN Security Council resolutions censuring Israel for its illegal settlements, its deportations, its contraventions of the fourth Geneva Convention: all this assured Israel of its "security" at the same time as it also assured Israel's imperviousness to the pressures of the international community.

Far from falling on entirely deaf ears, Baker's speech did get some affirmation among various Arab-Americans. James Zoghby, one of the most energetic, brilliant, and committed partisans of Palestinian rights, was quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* as having said that continued aid to Israel was a priority for him. Without it, he explained, the peace process between the PLO and Israel was at risk. This surprised me, since Zoghby was one of the founders of the Palestinian Human Rights Campaign almost twenty years ago; long one of the targets of the pro-Israeli lobby, Zoghby now seems to be taking up a position that contradicts his earlier loyalties, and indeed explicitly aligns him with the numerous American-Jewish organizations whose main purpose is to secure American funds for Israel. When I spoke to him about this he said he had been "misquoted" by the *Monitor*: he then promised me an explanatory letter, which as of this writing I am still awaiting.

Similarly the National Association of Arab-Americans has been widely reported as giving a Washington luncheon for the Israeli Minister of Housing, Ben Elizar, who has some responsibility for the settlements and is certainly not known for his partiality toward Palestinians. Washington-based Clovis Maksoud (former Arab League ambassador) and Professor Samih Farsoun of American University were both invited but declined. The strong impression

persists that both in Europe and the United States the PLO has begun to see its interests tied to Israeli interests; there has been no widespread or open discussion of this quite remarkable development, nor has a meeting been called by the PLO to discuss the new situation in the Occupied Territories as it affects diaspora Palestinians who—the financiers, engineers, economists, and physicians among them—are being solicited for help in reconstructing Palestinian life within the projected autonomy.

This takes us back to the radically opposed visions that the PLO and Israeli government have of the Oslo Declarations. From the Far East to Morocco, PLO leaders have been saying that what was achieved was a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Whereas both the actual documents themselves (has anybody bothered to read them?) and Israeli leaders say only that there will be a redeployment of troops; Israeli army chief of staff Ehud Barak stated in a Rosh Hashanah radio broadcast, “We are preparing for the redeployment of the forces in the Jericho area and the Gaza strip. As to all the rest of the places, our tasks have not changed, and everything continues as usual.” Certainly the Israelis have the power to enforce their case and, it must be said, sketchy though they are, the Oslo accords tend to bear out their interpretation. The difficulties now being encountered by the Palestinian delegation in Taba are a sign (as if any were needed) that PLO and Israeli interests are not the same, and really should not be acted on as if they were.

The larger problem is the PLO’s current vision of itself, its own history, and its own goals. Many of us supported the PLO not only when it promised to liberate Palestine, but also when in 1988 it accepted partition and national independence for 22 percent of Palestine. The new Declaration of Principles is extremely short on anything resembling Palestinian rights, partial or full. Israel still refuses to apply the fourth Geneva Convention; it reserves authority for itself in areas of the Territories, according to its own terms, that provoke violations; the status of Palestinian refugees is un-

changed; there is no mechanism for redress for what the Palestinian Human Rights Information Center calls “past Israeli gross and systematic violations of human rights.” In other words, Palestinians who still feel, as I and many others do, that the PLO as an institution should still represent the battle for Palestinian rights and self-determination also feel that it has overlooked or underestimated the need for continued vigilance and independence where Palestinian rights are concerned.

The Oslo Declaration, as well as the secret “security” meetings between PLO-delegated Yazid Sayigh and Ahmad Khalidi and Israeli officials a year ago, focused only on Israeli security for settlements and army in the Territories. Today the settlers can do what they wish since both the army and the Declaration of Principles protect them; on the other hand Palestinians are unprotected and their rights, to say nothing of their security needs, have been left in a kind of limbo, suspended or deferred pending further negotiations.

There has been a dramatic, if unacknowledged, transformation in the PLO’s sense of identity. From being a partisan against Israeli actions it has now become a (perhaps unwilling) partner. And this has had a decisive effect on our idea of our history. If September 13, 1993 is viewed as the climax of history, then most of our rhetoric and actions in the past may now somehow seem to have been a grand error, a sustained mistake for which we are now atoning and which we are beginning to correct. But has it really been our hidden ambition as a people to guarantee Israel’s security, and to pressure the United States to continue to send it \$5 billion per year in military and economic aid?

Unfortunately, to misread your own history is also to misread that of others. For can we say—and with what proof?—that Israel has always been looking for a way to safeguard Palestinian interests, and has now at last found it? Of course there has been a modification in Israeli behavior (partly because of Palestinian resistance) but we cannot assume that Israel has given up its past, its claims to

sovereignty, its sense of itself, its Law of Return, and so on. Besides, the realities of everyday life, which so many of us are trying to improve for all (and not just West Bank and Gaza) Palestinians, are in effect a battle of opposed wills—ours and theirs.

Peace really means peace between equals; it means freedom and equality for both peoples, not just one, nor peace for one as a lesser appendage to the other, who has full rights and security. Above all it means understanding the coherence and integrity of our own history as Palestinians and Arabs. The Zionist movement (though not every Israeli or every Jew) has always falsified our history, and a major part of our struggle has been to disprove the myths of our absence and of our non-independence. We acquired a modern political identity by virtue of that struggle, which is very far from over. Today our sense of our own history and past should be fuller, more critical, more insightful, not less. Above all, it should be written by us, not the American Secretary of State, nor the Israeli government. If we do not take charge of our history what future, if any, will be left for us to think about and implement?

*Al-Hayat*, November 12, 1993

# 4

## Facts, Facts, and More Facts

(December 1993)

As the weeks grind on it becomes clearer and clearer that a weak, unprepared and essentially divided Palestinian population is slowly being forced into positions on the ground that have already been prepared by the Israelis. Holding most of the cards—land, water, settlements, security, and, above all, Jerusalem—the Israelis are negotiating the details of the Oslo accords from a posture of consolidated strength. In Cairo the security committees have hit numerous snags, all of them the result of belated Palestinian efforts to challenge Israeli control, which was of course conceded in Oslo. These committees have been meeting in secrecy principally, I believe, to hide the weakness, lack of coordination, and absence of preparation of the Palestinians, who face Israeli experts armed with facts, files, and power that have no equivalent on the other side. We have been unable so far even to undertake a census of our own people. We rely on Israel for facts about land and water, and to this day have rarely produced our own sources of reliable information. Is there an accurate and usable *Palestinian* map of the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem?

More and more Palestinians are discouraged, now that the money hasn't come, that the news of PLO incompetence, autocracy and corruption emerges daily, that the brutalities of the occupation (to say nothing of uncoordinated Palestinian resistance) seem to increase as the days go by. Wherever one goes there are complaints

about the absence of alternatives (are we ruled by predetermined fact so totally?) and the need for “constructive” criticism. A large obstacle seems to be our historical inability as a people to focus on a set of national goals, and singlemindedly to pursue them with methods and principles that are adequate to these goals.

Since the beginning, the struggle over Palestine has been a battle over territorial sovereignty: “another dunum, another goat” was the motto of the Zionist settlers under Chaim Weizmann. Israel is now in sole possession of the territory of historical Palestine, although of course a relatively large population of Palestinians—including the 800,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel—is also resident there. The Zionist idea has always been to coordinate specific concrete steps with a guiding principle which rarely changes. Thus the Israelis assert sovereignty *and* they build settlements: they take land and water, build roads, deploy armed forces, and they proclaim their wish for peace. The Arab technique has always been to make very large general assertions, and then hope that the concrete details will somehow work out later. Thus the PLO accepted the Oslo Declaration of Principles on the grounds that Palestinian autonomy would somehow lead to independence if enough rhetorical statements about an independent Palestinian state were made; but when it came to negotiating the details (for instance, what parts of Jericho and Gaza were in question?) we had neither the plans nor the actual details. *They* had the plans, the territory, the maps, the settlements, the roads: *we* have the wish for autonomy and Israeli withdrawal, with no details, and no power to change anything very much. Needed: a discipline of detail.

A general idea like “limited autonomy” might certainly lead either to independence or it might equally well lead to further dependence and domination. In either case, however, the main task for Palestinians is to know and understand the overall map of the territories that the Israelis have been creating, and then devise concrete tactics of resistance. (In the history of colonial invasion maps are always first drawn by the victors, since maps are instruments of conquest. Geography is therefore the art of war but can also be the



art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counter-strategy.) The essence of the Israeli plan for territorial control, both in theory and in detail, is a) total control over the land within its pre-1967 boundaries and b) prevention of real autonomy of the Palestinian inhabitants of the Occupied Territories by maintaining an ever-expanding united Jerusalem as the core of a web extending into the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli plans for and practices in Jerusalem are therefore the central challenge facing Palestinians.

Jerusalem has never been the focus of a concentrated Palestinian strategy, nor has there ever been a campaign systematically to resist Israeli control over the city and its surroundings; "Gaza-Jericho" thus seems even more like a trap or a kind of elaborate distraction, so that Palestinian energies will be absorbed in controlling and administering the peripheries, while the core is left to the Israelis. As described by the Dutch expert Jan de Jong, the idea is to surround the whole of Jerusalem by two rings of settlements (one, Ramot, Neve Yacov, Talpiot and Gilo; two, Rekhes Shujat and Har Homa, where building is now taking place), one enclosing the other; in area this comprises most of the central West Bank from Bir Zeit in the north to the outskirts of Hebron (al-Khalil) in the south. Within this very large area Israel will largely be unchallenged, although there and elsewhere in the Territories autonomy will be allowed "in separate territorial units." The whole of the West Bank and Gaza is thus already divided into ten or eleven cantons, with corridors running from Jerusalem to the east and south for settlements and roads—all controlled by Israel—cutting between them. There has even been a proposal to build a new city of 300,000 called al-Quds near Hizma (well beyond the two circles). It has been suggested that this will be offered to the Palestinians as a substitute for the real Jerusalem.

De Jong's main point, however, is that whereas the Israelis are planning, settling, and controlling, the Palestinians have still not developed a strategy to resist these moves, whether by collective public building projects or by making metropolitan Jerusalem the center of a plan for independence. In both instances, since the Israeli vision is to divide the Palestinian population into "islands,

cantons, small spheres of containment,” de Jong suggests that in response Palestinians “should consider themselves part of a larger unit,” of which Jerusalem is not just Shari Salah al-Din and Sultan Suleiman Street, but a city “from Al-Azzariah to the Beit-Hanina-Shufat area, [where they] can think how to make a prospect for development there.” To discuss that as an alternative, with visible efforts made “on its behalf, will cause people to believe in it,” and can then become the basis for collective, as opposed to individual, action.

There has been much talk recently of experts and professionals being brought in to assist the PLO in creating the infrastructure of a Palestinian state. The idea seems to be that expert opinion on matters to do with development and planning is objective, knowledgeable and less inclined to be political in the narrow sense. Moreover these prescriptions for return and development are seconded by the World Bank, the European Community, and the United States, whose view is that the PLO should turn over its rule to accredited experts who would act according to sounder norms than would a national authority. I must confess to being relatively unmoved by these arguments. The current plight of countries like Egypt and India, to say nothing of numerous Latin American and African countries, is that development has been dictated from the outside, with the World Bank and the IMF acting as agents of the United States to promote a so-called free market; the net result of this has been to pauperize the majority and keep those countries even more politically and economically dependent on the developed countries, for whom the Third World is a source of vast new markets, cheap labor, and relatively inexpensive resources.

There has been a mistaken idea, fostered by both Israel and the PLO since September 13, that security and prosperity now ought to flow for both parties. Nothing could be further from the truth. Israel has pursued a vigorously repressive policy in the West Bank and Gaza, and it has greatly expanded its diplomatic and commercial links with significant non-European countries like China, Indonesia and, according to the Israeli press, Iraq. On the Palestinian

side, the euphoria has now faded almost totally, with deaths, injuries, and imprisonment finally convincing most people that the golden age has not yet arrived. The recent student elections at Bir Zeit University, in which the pro-PLO nationalists lost to Islamist candidates, underscore the point. No money has yet been seen, and the prospects of large-scale prosperity (from large-scale donations) seem increasingly dim. Meanwhile Yasir Arafat travels around the world, the Mossad has penetrated his offices, and his lieutenants and courtiers either squabble with each other or try to look for quick deals on their own.

There is very little in the present situation that experts who sit in Washington or Paris can fix: a plan drawn up by the most brilliant and yet distantly located intellect cannot actually be implemented unless there is a common *national* will, as well as a common national sense of urgency and mobilization. The Arab world, Europe, and the United States are literally filled with extraordinarily large numbers of gifted and successful Palestinians, who have made a mark in medicine, law, banking, planning, architecture, journalism, industry, education, contracting. Most of these people have in fact contributed only a tiny fraction of what they could contribute to the Palestinian national effort. Compared with the Jewish communities in the West we have done nothing, although I am convinced that there is a great potential there. Perhaps the greatest failure of the PLO was not that it signed an ill-considered and stupid declaration of principles, but that it has failed, both before and after Oslo, to mobilize the vast potential of its own people. Most Palestinians today are either disaffected and confused, or they are impossibly optimistic and unrealistic. So the problem is not one of expertise, development, or money, but of focus and concentration.

As an alternative to the present disarray, with our leadership desperately holding on to its eroding authority while 500 schools, and eight universities, plus 10,000 employees in the education sector in the Occupied Territories languish without a budget and no guidance at all (to say nothing of hospitals without medicine), the notion of getting hold of the real facts seems like a good one. Pales-

tinians today are separated by geography and by Israel's designs in keeping us fragmented and isolated from each other; people in Palestine and those outside it lead different lives, with far too little communication between them. To survive as a nation it is not enough to repeat slogans, or only to insist that Palestinian identity will survive. The first thing is to grasp as concretely and as exactly as possible what the facts on the ground really are, not in order to be defeated by them, but to invent ways of countering them with our own facts and institutions, and finally of asserting our national presence. If Jerusalem is the heart of our predicament, it is also therefore the heart of the solution. As the settlement process continues, the Palestinian people must muster the resources and the will to concentrate on seeking to prevent unilateral Israeli control. But this can only be done collectively, and by a people who are mobilized down to the last man, woman, and child. This requires commitment, honesty, and competence. Otherwise it seems to me we will go the way of other native peoples, destroyed by a relentless foe, or absorbed and coopted into schemes controlled by others. Each Palestinian must ask whether enough energy and effort have been expended, not by someone else, but by oneself.

In other words, the immediate need is to start thinking collectively and to stop reacting individually. And the major question, of which Jerusalem is the symbol, is how to resist, not how to profit. The Israelis must be pushed off the Palestinian land they now occupy illegally in Jerusalem and their West Bank and Gaza settlements, yet they can only be pushed off by a people that to a man and woman feels itself to be part of a national effort dedicated to doing so. Those are the facts. There is no such thing as partial independence or limited autonomy. You are either politically independent or you are not. If not, the facts indicate neither sovereignty nor real freedom, and certainly not equality with an Israeli Jewish state that destroyed Palestine in 1948 and is not anxious to give it another chance in 1993. The challenge is obvious.

# 5

## The Limits to Cooperation

*(Late December 1993)*

Almost immediately after the 1967 war various groups of individual Arabs and Israelis in the West began to explore ways of relating to each other that were not based uniquely on opposition and undying enmity. I particularly recall a public meeting that took place at Harvard University in February 1969, during which Israelis and American Jews (such as Shimon Shamir, later Israeli ambassador to Egypt and now its first ambassador in Jordan, and Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, a leading American liberal Zionist) encountered various Arabs and one Palestinian (myself) resident in the United States; the purported aim of the conference was to try to explore ways of getting beyond hostility toward some sort of mutual recognition and understanding. The Arab and Israeli students who organized the conference worked together as a group of young friends motivated idealistically by visions of Arab-Jewish cooperation, but for those of us closer to the immediate realities, the occasion was one to put extremely divergent viewpoints to the other side, with the aim of getting one's opponent to admit moral injustice.

I mention the Harvard meeting only because it was the first in a long series of such meetings, dialogues, seminars that took place from those days until the present. As the official Arab and Israeli positions remained opposed, these more or less private meetings

broke new ground, seeking unofficially to bring the opposed parties closer together. Over the years I attended several similar meetings, although with one exception (a conference at my own university, Columbia, in March 1989) I stopped doing so after 1986. To the best of my knowledge no one on the Palestinian side has published a systematic study of these encounters, which were held in Europe, North America, and, much less frequently, in the Middle East. For after Anwar Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in 1977, Palestinians were more involved than other Arabs. "Peace" was always the subject discussed, and participants ran the spectrum from known members of the PLO to independents and distant supporters. Most were intellectuals rather than politicians, however, and almost all—including myself—were convinced that only a political, as opposed to military, solution to the conflict in Palestine would yield results.

The PLO was usually aware of these often secret meetings. Ever since the 1977 Cairo meeting of the PNC where Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), a Fatah higher-up, delivered a memorable lecture on the need to distinguish between various schools of Zionist thought, there has always been a special Palestinian interest in cultivating the acquaintance and, in time, support of liberal Zionists; many of them, like Yossi Sarid, Yael Dayan, Yeheshofat Harkabi, Matti Peled, and Uri Avineri, were also keen on developing relationships with the PLO. These Israelis came from different backgrounds and had different goals in mind of course, but all of them were Zionists, some more politically ambitious and militant than others. Many were moved by genuine remorse and a desire to make amends to Palestinians; many were also in search of new roles, and even careers, for themselves.

One thing the PLO and individual Palestinians rarely did, however, was to include non-Zionist Israelis in their efforts, people like Professor Israel Shahak, a courageous and brilliant intellectual who without compromise or personal ambition singlehandedly fought against Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. He was ob-

viously considered too marginal, and unlikely to be effective in determining policy, although it would have been a splendid illustration of political principle had he been acknowledged as being of importance to the Palestinian struggle. Similarly when it came to European and American Jews, it was always the people closest to the Israeli Labor party who were sought out, never intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, whose political principles forbade any deals with the Israeli or American Jewish establishment.

For the PLO, one very obvious goal was to break down Israeli and Palestinian restrictions against dealing directly with representatives of the other side. In the beginning this was accomplished by encouraging nationalist independents (like myself) to have face-to-face meetings with Israelis. The idea was to accustom Israelis to Palestinians (and vice versa) who were neither terrorists nor fanatics, but reasonable people with reasonable goals such as peaceful co-existence. In addition—and this is something I myself was particularly interested in doing—many of us thought of face-to-face discussions with Israelis as an opportunity to force them to confront a history, people, and narrative that their state and its official propaganda had both obliterated and systematically misrepresented. Spending time with them or appearing in public together was therefore a kind of resistance, purely verbal and intellectual, to the ravages of military occupation and dispossession. And it must also be said these dialogues were educational for the Arabs as well: we learned about them, how they thought and interacted with each other, what they said about us and our national claims.

Yet after the PLO's exit from Beirut in 1982 an important series of changes took hold gradually and began to trouble a few of us, so much so that we either dropped out completely or began to feel more reluctant about participating. Here I can only speak for myself. In the first place I felt it was always Israelis, Americans, or Europeans who initiated and sponsored the dialogues, rarely Arabs or Palestinians, who neither had the organizations, nor the will, nor the foresight. In the United States, Peace Now and its various sup-

porters were extremely active about setting dates and agendas, contacting participants, arranging for expenses; but so too were the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers), the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, several research institutes and private foundations. The net result of all this activity was that the Arabs involved always felt themselves to be part of something they neither controlled nor fully understood.

In the second place, we never coordinated among ourselves, and so far as I know, we never developed a mechanism for reporting, assessing, or cumulatively developing a strategy for these encounters. Certainly if such a mechanism existed in PLO headquarters in Tunis, I never had anything to do with it, my opinion was not sought, and I never reported to anyone. On the other hand some of us gradually became aware of this larger Israeli and U.S. agenda of which we were a part. One element of it went under the name of "conflict resolution," a relatively new academic field that bridged the gap between psychology and politics. A leader in the field is Professor Herbert Kelman of Harvard University, who more than any single individual was and still is active in promoting seminars and meetings—most of them private—between Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans.

Although I participated in Kelman's meetings (and still consider him a friend) I nevertheless withdrew after 1986. He is undoubtedly an idealist who believed that some, but by no means all, of the problems separating Israelis and Palestinians went back to difficulties of perception, psychological barriers, and decades of misapprehension and misrepresentation. Therefore for years he undertook to gather these antagonists together under his supervision in order to explore and then to dissipate the misunderstandings and barriers. But there was always some governmental interest in what he and others did who sponsored dialogues of this kind. Often there were U.S. State Department officials present, one of whom I recall was the author of an article provocatively entitled "Foreign Policy According to Freud." One of the underlying assumptions seemed



false to me, that the struggle over Palestine was principally not a real or material one, but was largely the result of a perhaps tragic, but certainly rectifiable, psychological misunderstanding. In any case I also felt that the idea of an American sponsor or referee who somehow stood outside the conflict and could either manage or observe it calmly was also an ideological fiction. The U.S. has always been a rejectionist power whose one-sided support for Israel and (until this day) refusal to support Palestinian self-determination made it our enemy. Anyone acting at the behest or with the encouragement of the U. S. government, no matter how idealistic or utopian, was in some way involved in that government's goals, which did not favor Palestinians but rather Israel.

The other problem that turned me against the meetings was that as the weaker, less organized party, the Palestinians could not really benefit from the uneven exchange. Israelis and Americans, on the other hand, could benefit in two ways. First they could get to know and to a certain extent penetrate Palestinian ranks by slowly changing our agenda from struggle and resistance to accommodation and pacification. I have long supported a two-state solution based on the idea of peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine, but my beliefs are predicated on equality between the two peoples, with Palestinians enjoying the same rights—not lesser ones—currently available only to Israelis. I myself see no way of gaining these rights except by struggling directly to end Israeli occupation and dispossession of Palestinians. The thought that by working out an arrangement whereby the occupation might continue while at the same time a few Palestinians and Israelis could nevertheless cooperate on a friendly basis, struck me as false and misleading.

Can one imagine endorsing similar discussions between a few well-intentioned German and French intellectuals during the occupation of France? Only with great difficulty, but something like this scenario kept resurfacing in the seminars and dialogues, and the Israelis always attached conditions to their recognition of Pales-

tinian rights and the end of the occupation. For years we were told “recognize Israel and Resolution 242” or “change the Charter.” There was never any effort made to reciprocate by changing the Law of Return or asking for even the partial demilitarization of Israel. The concessions were most often made by us. We were usually put in the position of being asked to allay the Israeli sense of insecurity, as if the destruction of our society by Israel, the continuing persecution of our people, and the killing of thousands of us did not provide sufficient grounds for nourishing *our* sense of insecurity.

The second way that Israel and the United States benefited from the seminars and dialogues was that they revealed the extent to which Palestinians—disorganized, poorly led, unmobilized—were ready to concede more and more of their strategic goals to something that later came to be called “the peace process.” Madrid was the culmination of years of an eroding Palestinian position. Another way of putting this is to say that we were all affected by the underlying capitulation of the PLO, which after 1982 gradually came to see itself not as a liberation movement but as an independence party willing in the end to settle for municipal, as opposed to national, authority.

It was only after the secret talks in Oslo were made public that I was able to see how the principle of so-called (but always secret) dialogue, not resistance and struggle, really had become the main technique of the PLO leadership. In reality then what the present leadership had had in mind from the beginning, and for which so many intellectuals had perhaps inadvertently paved the way, was that it could gain something in Palestine from Israel by conceding most of its history and claims in advance to Israel. On the one hand, the *intifada* proved that active resistance could have a positive effect on Palestinian will and morale; on the other hand, you could say in private to the Israelis, yes, but we are prepared to live in peace with you if only you accept the principle of talking to us. As if talking to, and being recognized by, your enemy is your major goal. As if the principle of hard work, determination, and committed struggle

could be shortcut by throwing all your cards on the table in return for which Israel only conceded something called "limited autonomy" and "limited recognition."

I am for dialogue between cultures and coexistence between people: everything I have written about and struggled for has pointed to that as the goal. But I think real principle and real justice have to be implemented before there can be true dialogue. Real dialogue is between equals, not between subordinate and dominant partners. That is why I am disturbed both by the history I have just narrated and by the extraordinary haste in which cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis is now being urged. It would therefore be a serious mistake for intellectuals and political leaders to take what in fact was a Palestinian capitulation in Oslo for a license to enter into various cooperative schemes (in culture, or research, or development) with Israelis at this point. There is still a military occupation, people are still being killed, imprisoned, and denied their rights on a daily basis. The main prerogatives for us as Arabs and Palestinians are therefore clear. One: we must struggle to end the occupation. Two: we must struggle even harder to develop our own *independent* institutions and organizations until we are on a relatively equal footing with the Israelis. Then we can begin to talk seriously about cooperation. In the meantime cooperation can all too easily shade into collaboration with Israeli policy.

Yet I do not think that the present leadership of the PLO is capable of doing anything about either of these two goals. Yasir Arafat and his various lieutenants are far too compromised in their "deal" with Israel for the first, far too dependent and submissive in their outlooks for the second. Indeed the PLO has become Israel's captive, dragged from one unmet deadline to another, trying retrospectively but fruitlessly to rectify the concessions it granted at Oslo, finding itself more and more enmeshed in a process whose end is the end of the PLO as an independent national authority.

I am also concerned about Palestinian and Arab intellectuals for whom meetings such as the one convened in Granada in early De-

ember (1993) by UNESCO (and briefly attended by Shimon Peres and Yasir Arafat) are still attractive. To them I should like to say that the culture of peace for which we all struggle cannot be achieved together with even well-meaning citizens of an occupying power. Our first responsibility is to our own people: to raise the level of unity and resistance, to establish self-reliant institutions, to be clear about what we are for and how we aim to get there. Little has been more demoralizing to the cause of Palestinian self-determination than intellectuals whose premature compromises on matters of principle have made the word "peace" synonymous with giving up before getting anything.

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, December 30, 1993

*Al-Hayat*, January 7, 1994

# 6

## Time to Move On

*(January 1994)*

The crisis in the Palestinian ranks deepens almost daily. Security talks between Israel and the PLO are advertised as a “break-through” one day, stalled and deadlocked the next. Deadlines agreed to by both Israel and the PLO come and go, with no other timetable proposed, even as Israel actually increases the number of its soldiers in the Occupied Territories, as well as the killings, the building of even more settlement residences, the punitive measures keeping Palestinians from leaving the territories and entering Jerusalem. Israel has the leverage to do what it wishes, whereas the PLO can only complain or refuse to sign documents it agreed to a day earlier.

As for the PLO leadership, it is wined and dined in London and Paris, while in Gaza and elsewhere leaders resign, its cadres grow more disaffected. No one has anything but complaints about this leadership, so much so that numerous petitions, missions (such as the one led by Haidar Abdel Shafi to Tunis) and articles in the press keep up a fairly constant pressure on Yasir Arafat to reform, change his autocratic ways, open up the decision-making process to talent and proven ability.

A major part of the current crisis can be traced back to the Oslo Declaration of Principles itself. Once described as a breakthrough

document, it has now been revealed as an interpreter's nightmare, a patchwork of old Israeli and American drafts, incomplete procedural suggestions, deliberately ambiguous half-hints and half-obfuscations. In one section the Israeli army agrees to withdraw; in another it is characterized as only redeploying. It would make no sense to detail the many traps in the document, but two major points do need to be clarified.

One of course is that the PLO did in fact sign the document, so there is no use pretending that it can be rethought and renegotiated after the fact. Whatever else they are, the Israelis are literalists and they are serious about enforcing the PLO's compliance, no matter how loudly (and ineffectively) Mr. Arafat complains about being betrayed. Acting on his direct orders, his organization signed the document and must now live with it.

Two is that although some perhaps well-intentioned Israelis talk enthusiastically about the onset of a Palestinian state, the Oslo document (as well as the Israeli government's numerous statements and declarations to its people, and its behavior in the Territories) says exactly the opposite. Moreover the *facts* bear out this depressing message: Israel has not even admitted that it is an occupying power, and through *every one of its actions and statements* has gone out of its way to make the likelihood of an independent Palestine more and more remote. For example, Rabin's government has just announced a \$600 million road system for the Occupied Territories; the system is to connect the settlements to each other and to Israel, thus bypassing Arab areas and completing the Territories' cantonization under Israeli control. One is entitled to ask, if Israel has tacitly accepted the principle of Palestinian statehood, why does it say or do absolutely nothing to encourage such a prospect, especially since Mr. Arafat went out of his way not only to recognize Israel but to assure it of peace and security, with none in return for Palestine?

This lopsided situation—all of it the result of unwise decisions made by Mr. Arafat and his hand-picked subordinates—is rightfully drawing attention to the incapacity of the PLO's present pol-

icy to remedy it. At the core of the problem is a series of misreadings and miscalculations promoted by Mr. Arafat and his supporters. First is the misguided notion that Yitzhak Rabin's Labor Party has changed, and now wants peaceful reconciliation with the Palestinian people. This illusion goes back to the elections of 1992, which were greeted by leading Palestinian intellectuals and strategists as a victory for peace, even though Rabin's record right up to, as well as after, the elections showed no real change, manifesting the same arrogance, violence, and intransigence as the Labor Party. A recent report by B'tselem, the Israeli Human Rights Organization, shows that in its first few months the Labor government took more lives (especially the lives of children) than any previous Likud government. Indeed every "moderate" Israeli establishment politician banked on by Palestinian intellectuals and strategists (including the doves of Peace Now or Meretz) has always voted or acted against Palestinian rights whenever it counted; these so-called moderate Israelis kept on asking the Palestinians for concessions to make them more "credible" politically, after which they never budged from the overall consensus. To this day the real national consensus refuses the very idea of Palestinian sovereignty and independence. And as I said, even a cursory look at Rabin's record reveals no substantial change in his attitudes or practices. For him and his associates in government "peace" means Palestinian subservience.

Second is the wholly mistaken idea that more Palestinian flexibility would mean the probability of American friendship. Mr. Arafat's fatuous comment that he had a friend in the White House suggests the woeful ignorance of a mind untrained in the rudiments of contemporary history. The United States is more allied with Israel, and with Israeli occupation practices, than ever before. There is not one single thing done by Mr. Arafat's White House friend—not one, and I defy anyone to name one—to assist Palestinians, except that he invited Arafat to the White House on September 13 to sign an instrument of surrender. Otherwise the United States continues to oppose Palestinian self-determination,

as it always has. One further sign of American "friendship" for Palestinians is the change in the official U.S. characterization of the Occupied Territories; according to Warren Christopher these are now regarded as "disputed territories." Israel still receives over \$5 billion in annual American aid, and the United States has said not a word about the worsening of Israeli occupation practices since the spring of last year.

Third is the PLO's calamitous misreading of the Arab countries' reaction to the "peace" arrangements it made with Israel in Norway. The Arabic press has recently been full of accounts of how Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, to name only three, have continued to regard the Oslo Declaration with great misgivings. All three countries are crucial to Palestinian politics. Each has a large, extremely vulnerable population of Palestinian refugees whose destiny for the foreseeable future has become extremely problematic (to put it mildly). Under U.S. and Israeli pressure the situation in the Middle East has been changed irrevocably, with leaders and governments in these three countries forced to make crucial decisions that affect their long- and short-term national interests.

The least that might have been expected of the PLO was some modicum of coordination with these governments. Instead the three countries were left out of the picture deliberately, and thereby forced to make of Oslo what they could. Worse yet, whenever the situation (that is the economic agreements with Jordan) called for responsible and serious negotiations, the PLO carried on in a most insouciant, even insulting, manner. Certainly it is true that Palestinian and Arab interests do not necessarily coincide, and that as a group the Arab states are mercurial (not to say unreliable) interlocutors. But *Palestinian* interests require, indeed dictate, greater care and precision than the PLO has shown toward Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Must Egypt always be the *only* Arab country with influence on the PLO?

Finally, the present PLO leadership has so misunderstood its own people that there is now open discontent more or less every-



where that Palestinians live. Take the matter of patronage as one particularly festering issue. No leadership can expect forever to be in sole control of money and political authority, and to dole them out according to its whims. More than most people Palestinians have been the victims not only of Israeli oppression, but of abuses of power by every government—Arab and non-Arab—under whose jurisdiction they have lived. Why should they put up with similar practices from leaders who have neither been freely elected nor who have shown a spirit of self-sacrificing austerity? Why should hard-pressed Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon and Gaza read or see evidence of corruption, Parisian shopping sprees, and continued incompetence without also refusing to be resigned to them? How long can Tunis simply assert its prerogative to be in exclusive control of building contracts, foreign aid, lucrative appointments? Are quick profit and a history of servile loyalty the only criteria for service?

Or consider the information policies of this leadership. It has yet to tell its own people in the Territories, Jordan, and Lebanon the full truth of the present situation. Yes, of course every Palestinian wants an independent state, but what sort of state is it to be? Is there to be resistance to the occupation or not? Are there to be consultative assemblies or not? What do we tell the world—about where we are in our history, about the killings of our own people, and on and on? What is the new entity's economic policy (beyond the silly slogan that Gaza will become another Singapore)?

In short, there is now incoherence and chaos where there should be forward movement, and silence where there should be a message. I have little doubt that despite the present impasse the PLO will finalize its security agreement with Israel . . . on Israeli terms, of course. The Oslo agreement in effect sanctions an Israeli protectorate in Gaza and Jericho, with the PLO's much-vaunted and ridiculously overblown police force doing Israel's enforcement. After that the present PLO leadership can have very little to say and even less to offer.

For the past few months many petitions and delegations have addressed PLO-Tunis with requests for reform, for the building of new institutions and structures, and so on. None of these has had or ever will have the slightest effect. Most Palestinians are firmly convinced, I think, that the present PLO leadership, as well as its creatures in the Occupied Territories and elsewhere, *should* resign, but then again they keep timorously asking, "What is the alternative?" Nearly six million Palestinians can surely find any number of alternatives. The point, however, is that the present mess is intolerable. We should by all means thank the men in Tunis for their past contributions, but we should then take the next logical step and ask them to resign. Their apex was the September 13 Declaration of Principles, which whether we like it or not is their legacy to us. But they can do no more now than hammer out an equally flawed set of consequent arrangements with the Israelis, and then they should quietly retire. That would be the decent thing to do. After that history and their people will judge them in the fullness of time.

The other thing is that responsibility for what happens next is a collective one, and can no longer be the province of a tiny handful of individuals whose offices in Tunis have been penetrated (and no doubt manipulated) by Mossad. We should have no illusions that the road ahead is anything but difficult, or that many of the rosy promises of aid and improvement will prove to be as wishful as a fairy tale. Nevertheless there is no escaping the truth of how we got there, and how we must now try as a people to move beyond it. There is a serious challenge before us. To go on like this is to sink further in the mud, to lose more of our hard-won gains, to make even more needless sacrifices than we already have. Only a major change in attitude and policy can now make a difference. But for that to happen the current PLO hierarchy must resign.

*Al-Hayat*, January 18, 1994

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 20, 1994

*The Nation*, February 14, 1994

## Bitter Truths About Gaza

*(Late February, early March 1994)*

I can quite clearly recall the day in 1986 when I read a hefty study entitled *The Gaza Strip Survey* by Sara Roy. It was part of the *West Bank Data Project*, an analysis of Israeli occupation practices, by Meron Benvenisti, the maverick Israeli former deputy mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. When the Gaza and West Bank studies appeared, the Knesset tried to have Benvenisti and Roy charged with aiding an “enemy organization,” namely the PLO. But the action was discontinued, probably for fear of giving the reports too much publicity. Although I met Benvenisti only once (in 1990), I was impressed by two contradictory things about him: he was an ardent Zionist who believed passionately in the right of Jews to settle in what was once historical Palestine, and his unflinching dedication to telling the truth about what the Israeli occupation was doing to Gaza and the West Bank.

It was his dedication to the truth that put him very much against occupation, although his pessimism about the irreversibility of what the Israelis had done seemed unwarranted. Military occupations have always seemed irreversible, until in fact they *are* reversed, but it always takes the effort of the colonized to roll back what the colonizers have done. Occupations never ended voluntarily, or just because the more powerful nation wanted it, and have

certainly never been the result of a one-sided negotiated settlement initiated and controlled by the dominant power.

Since 1986 Sara Roy has written a continuous series of studies and papers on Gaza, most recently a thoroughly depressing and extremely detailed article on conditions in 1993 which appeared in the *Middle East Journal* (volume 48, no. 1, winter 1994). In it she assessed the effect on the Gaza economy of Israel's continued closure of the Strip as well as the short-term results of the Declaration of Principles. Since I had only met her once I decided to renew my acquaintance with her, both to find out more about realities on the ground in Gaza—from which she had just returned in mid-February—and to find out more about her as a person. I wanted to know why an American should have taken such an interest in a place forgotten not just by many Arabs, but also by many West Bankers and Israelis, for whom Gaza has long been a lost cause.

In my opinion Gaza and Jerusalem are two of the keys to the Palestinian future, the latter (as I argued in an earlier article) because the Israelis attach so much importance to its enlargement and expanded colonization, the former because Gaza is the essential core of the Palestinian problem, an overcrowded hell on earth largely made up of destitute refugees, abused, oppressed, and difficult, always a center of resistance and struggle. Gaza is where the *intifada* began. It is also the place about which Israeli leaders have expressed nothing but dislike and contempt ("I wish it would sink into the sea," said Mr. Rabin a few months ago). And of course along with Jericho, Gaza is where Palestinian autonomy is supposed to start. Understand the realities of Gaza and one also understands the real challenge of Palestine as cause and the Palestinians as people.

When I spent time talking with her over the few days, I was surprised to discover that Sara Roy, thirty-nine, is not only Jewish, but also the child of Holocaust survivors. Her mother and two sisters were in the Lodz ghetto as well as the Auschwitz death camp; her father was one of only two Jewish survivors of the town of Chelm-

now in Poland, the place about which Claude Lanzmann made his film *Shoah*. Although some of her mother's family went to Palestine and Israel, both her parents came to the United States in 1951, preferring to live in a pluralist, rather than a purely Jewish, society. And indeed Sara grew up in what she calls a "reasonable" home: Arabs were not talked about with hatred, they were not considered evil, and general discussion of Israel was not "uncritical." Still, it was a Zionist household and thus, in 1968, along with many of her generation Sara started going to Israel and during subsequent summer vacations would visit family and tour around. It was not until 1985 that she made her first visit to the Occupied Territories, where she was about to embark on field work and research on aid programs for her Ph.D. dissertation. Because of her background she was predisposed to being open, although the main objective of her work was to discover whether development was possible under occupation.

From 1985 to 1988 Roy worked on her academic project. She soon discovered the extent to which Israel was able to stop or inhibit aid efforts instituted in the Territories by private volunteer organizations. Even though some of them received United States AID money, she discovered a pattern by which the United States government (whose money U.S.-AID disbursed) cynically allowed the Israeli government to dictate what aid could be given, what could not. Roy noted that the Israelis always prevented industrial development, preferring to keep Palestinians at a very low level of economic viability, the better to control them and protect the Israeli economy. After she finished her work in 1988 she persuaded her husband, a recently graduated pediatric surgeon, to spend the year with her in Gaza. He worked as a volunteer at Gaza's largest private hospital (*Ahli*), where during the year they spent together half of his patients were children shot during the *intifada*. Once non-political, he was soon radicalized. As for Sara, a dramatic change occurred in her attitudes as a woman, a Jew, a child of Holocaust survivors. And because of the changes in her attitudes while she

was in Gaza that year she scarcely saw her Israeli relatives, who believed that the young couple were living in Jerusalem.

All that time, Sara Roy kept publishing papers and studies in Gaza; they made use of not only UN figures but also Israeli material. Until that time, few paid close attention to Gaza, so in fact today the best overall picture of Gaza's real situation is to be found in Sara Roy's work, which she calls a study not of underdevelopment but of "de-development," a term she uses to characterize a deliberate Israeli policy of retarding as well as preventing the emergence in Gaza of a viable economy. She has documented, for instance, the unbelievable decline in Gaza employment; in 1993 it stood at roughly 50 percent unemployment, versus 35 percent on the West Bank. Everything about the Gazan economy is dependent on Israel, which has at the same time integrated Gaza economically but separated it physically from Israel. Much of this has been due to the Israeli closure of the Territories, now almost one year old, which costs Gazans approximately \$500,000 a day in lost revenues. Oranges rot and remain unsold; vegetables are in plentiful supply, but with no cash to buy them, most Gazans go hungry, and the crops remain unused.

Roy says in her most recent articles that conditions are so bad that when in 1992 UNRWA advertised eight garbage collectors' jobs 11,655 people applied. The *per capita* GNP drop since the closure and the Gulf War has put Gaza at the level of \$600, a level very close to the bottom of the poorest nations of the Third World. And despite the shortage of cash the Israelis increase their demands for taxes, so that frequently the army raids houses at night, takes away identity cards, arrests people, all for not paying taxes for which there is no money. The few hundred people employed by Israel to run the municipality, sweep sand, pick up garbage infrequently, are paid half of what they would earn in Israel.

The result, as anyone who has visited Gaza as I have immediately knows, is an oppressively sad place in which the most abject poverty and a universal despair affect every one of the Strip's in-

habitants. Yet until the Oslo accords there was always resistance; the Israelis found that trying to rule Gaza while keeping it undeveloped, was a most difficult chore. This surely is one reason why Rabin wanted the PLO to take it over.

I asked Sara Roy what effects were observable in Gaza as a result of the accords. Having just returned from there, she supplied me with chilling facts and figures that suggest how seriously matters have deteriorated. For the first time she felt demoralized at the almost total chaos that now reigns in Gaza. True, she said, a lot of new committees sprang into existence last autumn (mostly to start up projects), but their number far outstripped their function; in addition it was clear that West Bankers want no association with Gaza. The various outside funding and development agencies that have expressed interest in helping Gaza do not coordinate between themselves, and nor do individuals.

She mentioned one project for which two separate studies were undertaken, one by U.S.-AID and one by UNDP, with no connection between them. Many of these agencies, however, are holding off for now because they realize that they cannot begin doing anything without Israeli approval, which as yet has not been forthcoming. PECDAR, the Palestinian development agency set up by the PLO after Oslo, has little credibility among donors, who are skeptical about an agency that is staffed both with some competent people as well as purely political appointments. It has had no impact on Gaza at all. Aside from \$5.8 million given to UNRWA by U.S.-AID, no money has entered the Strip.

After people in Gaza saw the handshake between Arafat and Rabin on September 13 it was somehow assumed that money would pour in, the army would withdraw, and for a change jobs would be created. It was Roy's impression—like mine—that few Palestinians who celebrated the Gaza-Jericho agreement had actually read it. None of the expected rewards materialized. Unemployment is worse now, almost 60 percent, and the closures continue, with only 14,000–15,000 workers entering Israel for

work. What is new is that Fatah has emerged as the party of authority, supported both by the Israelis and by outside donors like the EC. Two weeks ago the military withdrew permits to enter Israel from 1,500 workers, the majority of them Popular Front members, and some Hamas people. EC contracts with Tunis have enabled Fatah to get the most money (in promises of course), which puts the EC in the position less of funding Gaza's development than of supporting one political party. Generally, however, Gazans are subsisting at a lower level than before September 13: they have fewer meals, no meat, not enough calories (beans and rice are the main diet), and no cash to buy what is necessary. My impression from what Sara Roy described is of a situation of mass pauperization.

The human rights situation has deteriorated. The Israeli army is slightly less visible now, but clashes with the people are as extreme as ever. Two weeks ago three children were shot, since the army opens fire more readily than before and without trying to hit only the lower part of the body. There are of course many more guns on all sides. In an interview with *The New York Times* on February 17, 1994, Mr. Yasir Arafat complained that the Israelis are deliberately letting arms in. The result is an almost total breakdown in Gaza where the situation is basically lawless and sliding toward anarchy.

Political discourse no longer exists: people discuss matters that affect survival, and politics is discredited, as are the old political groups that have degenerated into factions much less interested in ideology than in local power and authority. The question is no longer how to liberate Gaza, but how to control a street. Hamas is an exception, since its power to persuade people is dependent on the party's ability to deliver food, clothes, money, and jobs, which it does. Younger Fatah members are worried that Arafat is trying to destroy their party in favor of political appointees, some of them suspected of being collaborators, or at least inactive in residence. Grass-roots activists are nervous about their future. Yet the real problem is that some appointments made by Tunis include respected individuals. This unpredictable method renders people



confused and off balance, since good and bad appointments tend to get mixed up.

The most serious consequence of the current crisis in Gaza is that a division has opened up between political and military factions. The spirit of resistance has all but disappeared, replaced now by an atmosphere of violence in which the chief sufferers are the people, not the occupation. Most people in Gaza not only think that the nationalist program has been defeated—this feeling took hold after the euphoric post-Oslo mood dissolved with the worsening of conditions—but that there has been a sell-out. Trapped and despondent, Gazans no longer can mobilize the kind of communal support for resistance that obtained during the *intifada*; the committees, coordinated action, and solidarity of those days have all but disappeared.

I was particularly interested to ask Sara Roy whether, as the person who has done the most work on Gaza and whose information has been the most complete and reliable, she had been consulted by the PLO, which is supposed to be involved in planning for Gaza's future. No, she said, although we both assumed that her work was known to Tunis, as well as other Palestinian researchers. And that is the tragedy of Gaza and of Sara Roy together, so little appreciated by the men who brought us the Gaza-Jericho agreement. Roy is a brilliant Jewish intellectual who because of her tragic background could not allow the victimization of her family by the Nazis to be done by her own people to another victim, the Palestinians. On her own, and partly because she saw a struggle by Palestinians in Gaza for their future, she crossed the line and joined their cause.

That was the genius of the Palestinian revolution, as we used to call it, when despite horrendous attacks on it in the West as only a terrorist organization, the PLO was perceived by its supporters as leading a battle for liberation: Arabs and others were drawn to join an inspiring movement for freedom and justice, across national divisions, boundaries, and language. Palestine concerned everyone so long as liberation was the goal. The present PLO leadership ended

all that by agreeing to become Israel's enforcer in Gaza. But the realities of Gaza, its suffering, bravery, and compounded miseries, will not easily disappear, any more than the difficulties of trying to liberate annexed Jerusalem will go away. But just as the silly agreement about the Allenby Bridge entrances made recently in Cairo will be revealed for the one-sided farce that these negotiations were, so too will Gaza's tragedy soon be made clear. *Someone* has to bear responsibility and be made accountable for what has really happened to us as a people.

The massacre on February 25 in Hebron's mosque underscores both the enormous vulnerability of the Palestinian people, and the murderous anti-Arab ideology, backed by the Israeli state itself, still present within the Zionist movement. Neither of these has been affected positively by the Oslo Declaration of Principles, which has the impunity of Jewish settlers built into it, and indeed an explicit PLO acceptance of their presence. What Palestinian today will not remark bitterly that whenever our people are massacred it is never a question of "terrorism," but "crazed" and "individual" gunmen? And still the PLO leadership proclaims its trust in Mr. Rabin, and its "friendship" for President Clinton, who was careful to exonerate the Israeli troops who were complicit in the massacre and have since killed over eighteen Palestinian civilians. The charade of the "peace process" will of course continue, and so will further PLO concessions. A defenseless subservience has become an official way of life in the Arab world, with no moral or political principles to rectify it.

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, February 24 and March 3, 1994

*Al-Hayat*, March 3, 1994

## Further Reflections on the Hebron Massacre

*(March 1994)*

I visited Hebron for the first time after 1967 in 1992 and was immediately impressed with how, of all places under Israeli occupation, Hebron and the extraordinary conditions under which its mosque had been placed by the Israelis were waiting to explode. That they did on February 25 is surprising only in that the massacre did not take place earlier. It is difficult to describe first of all the sensation of actually entering the mosque, which even more than the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem is guarded with great visibility by Israeli soldiers. The entrances of the Haram are hundreds of meters away from the two mosques; at those doors, Palestinian security men, under Israeli supervision, let people in and out. In the case of the Hebron Mosque all visitors—Muslim or Jewish, local or foreign—enter by a security post situated right at the same doors that allow people directly to enter the mosque's main place of worship.

Just inside the door there is a large table around which several Israeli soldiers sit, some of them with their feet up, all of them quite heavily armed. They communicate a sense of control of course, but also a sense of almost rude intrusion, and what one feels is that a Muslim holy place with armed men of a militantly different faith posted right inside its doors is being deliberately violated. You do

not only feel that a foreign power is using its army to dominate a lesser people, but additionally that one of the monotheistic faiths was intruding itself forcibly on the religious practices of another.

In the mosque's main hall of worship there also stand the tombs of Abraham, Jacob and Rebecca, sacred to Jews and Muslims. Before 1967 a small rabbinical school, located at the back of the mosque, had been unused for generations; after 1967 the Israelis reopened it, built a library there, and re-excavated some more Old Testament tombs (of Leah and Isaac). The problem about the Jewish school is that being in effect in the heart of the mosque, you have to walk through the Muslim prayer area in order to get to it. All this makes for an extremely volatile and uncomfortable mix, with Orthodox Jews jostling pious Muslims, to say nothing of miscellaneous visitors and soldiers in a place that is only a few square meters large.

Just outside the mosque, a few meters to the north of the main market (closed because of a Hamas strike the day we were there), you can see several settler houses inside the old town that overlook both the mosque and the *souk*. So in a space barely larger than a football field Muslims and Jews intermingle in Hebron—where there are particularly ugly memories of inter-faith murders and riots—with every likelihood of more violence at any moment. I recall feeling extremely uncomfortable in Hebron both because a general Palestinian exodus had left the town partially empty and desolate, and also because Hebron, with its unarmed Palestinians, armed Israeli settlers and soldiers, is a symbol of raw religious competition quite unlike any other.

There has been a great deal of talk in the Western media and among policy-makers about political Islam. Very little attention has been paid to the equally problematic resurgence in political Judaism, surely as powerful to its adherents and apologists as Islam is to its enthusiasts. Of all the many commentators in the West who had something to say about the Hebron events, only one, David Shipler of *The New York Times*, made the connection between

Baruch Goldstein, political Judaism, and Zionism itself. All of them, he said correctly, are really forms of each other, not to be broken up into smaller separate units called "single deranged extremist" or "mainstream Zionism." Much of what Zionism has been long telling its supporters is that Zionism and Judaism itself are one and the same; both speak of Palestine as the land of Israel; and both also regard Arabs in "the land of Israel" as aliens and barely tolerated intruders. Above all, Zionism sees itself as redeeming the land whose natives have called it "Palestine" for over a millennium. Zionism redeems this land for the Jewish people *as against* non-Jews.

It is important also to remember that in the doctrines of all three great monotheistic religions are to be found essentially intolerant, not to say hostile, views of so-called "others." Islam and Christianity have much in common with Judaism; they have common principles of humanity, mercy, and so on, each religion emphasizing certain qualities over the other. But all three regard people who stand beyond the boundaries as outsiders, for the simple reason that monotheism itself is exclusive, jealous of its territory. This is not at all to say that *all* Jews, Christians, and Muslims are necessarily paranoid and anxious, but that so great and all-encompassing are the claims of each faith that only with conscious planning can tolerance prevail. Historically, I believe that Islam has had a better record than the others in this respect, but recent trends in the Islamic world suggest a definite change for the worse.

The point today is that religious passion of a specifically monotheistic variety unfortunately affects all three religions adversely and equally. The growth of religious fanaticism in Israel must, I think, be connected to Christian passions in Lebanon, Islamic emotions in Egypt and elsewhere. This is not a matter of deciding which of the three monotheistic religions is less tolerant, but it is a historical fact that Israel, founded in 1948, is the first theocratic state in the Middle East, providing in its laws for "non-Jews" an example of monotheistic xenophobia, exclusivism, and intolerance that has not been good for the other two.

So far as the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is concerned, the unmistakable symbolism communicated to Christian and Muslim Palestinians has been—as in the security arrangements for the Hebron Mosque—gloating triumph by Judaism as embodied in the Israeli army and Israeli settlers, a leading one of whom, Rabbi Moshe Levinger, shot and killed a Palestinian boy in Hebron a few years ago and was given a risible sentence of a few months of “community service” for his crime.

As if the deliberately fanned flames of inter-communal violence have not been enough, there has been added to them a particularly virulent and specifically American component: settlers from North America who have come to Israel bringing as their contribution a horrendous, yet deeply typical combination of ideological heedlessness and very ugly, very indiscriminate and relentlessly bloody-minded violence. Baruch Goldstein is not so exceptional. He was a man steeped in the long-distance fantasies of a Jewish revival in Israel that were cultivated with considerable results in America well before he actually set foot in Israel. He was a disciple of Rabbi Meir Kahane, a man whose calls to open violence against Arabs were regularly broadcast in the United States for years before he came to Israel in 1971. I happened to have been a victim of Kahane’s Jewish Defense League violence in the mid-1980s when my university office was burned; when asked about it his organization said they didn’t actually know who did it, but added approvingly it was the work of a “Jewish patriot.” And while it has become the tendency recently to detach Kahane from “mainstream Zionism” in the United States, and to try to prove that he wasn’t a “real” Zionist, the fact is that Kahane was very much a product both of Zionism and of American culture, its history of exterminations, and its blind arrogance toward people of the wrong or weaker races.

In *Tough Jews*, a book published in 1990, the American historian Paul Breines argues that a significant change took place in the self-image of the American Jew after 1967. Breines examined films, books, and magazines in which American Jews had traditionally

portrayed themselves as mild, bookish, and wise human beings, not given to retaliation or unprovoked violence. After 1967 the Jewish self-image changed dramatically. Jews began to be portrayed as killers, karate experts, detectives, and thugs, whom Breines refers to collectively as Rambowitz. What happened is quite clear: the post-1967 cult of Israeli military prowess, the occupation of Arab lands, the unbroken string of Israeli assaults on Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria amplified and gave rise to a view of the Jew as super-hero, capable of feats for which others were too squeamish, and which the rest of the world was either too weak or too indifferent to stop.

Yet this image had its cultural as well as intellectual equivalents in the transformation of institutions and individuals who did not go so far as Rabbi Kahane but many of whose values they not only shared but promoted, at the same time that they claimed to be different from him. All of the anti-Arab rhetoric to be found in respectable magazines like *The New Republic*, *Commentary*, *Midstream*, and even the liberal *Tikkun*—magazines of an eminently respectable cast that stand near the center of American culture—expressed views that are scarcely different from Kahane's. Among the most frequently circulated images in these journals are that Arab culture is violent and degenerate, that Islam is a religion of terrorism, that Arabs can neither be believed nor in any way trusted, and that the only way to deal with the Arabs is to beat them hard and keep them down by the most humiliating and debasing means possible. Not a single major Jewish American organization has ever unequivocally opposed the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, nor has any major Jewish leader ever said a positive thing about Palestinian self-determination and freedom. The idea that Palestinians either do not exist or are terrorists is something for which in large measure American supporters of Israel are therefore responsible. Israeli intelligence and military prowess are routinely praised by the American media and by scholars as well as clergymen; journalists rarely ask of someone like Rabin, or even Sharon—both of them with

ugly actions in their pasts—how it is that their history includes the ethnic cleansing of Ramleh and Lydda (Rabin in 1948) or the indiscriminate bombing of Palestinian refugee camps, hospitals, schools, and orphanages (Sharon). There is a general consensus that Israeli violence is therefore good, decent, *moral* violence based on what is often referred to as “purity of arms.”

What makes all of this even more frightening is that such sentiments are produced at a great physical distance from Israel. Distance from a complex reality, technological sophistication, and moral righteousness bordering on frenzy: these are hallmarks of an American mentality grafted on to messianic Judaism and left to roam the Occupied Territories fully armed, with Arabs as its only fully qualified victims.

Support for these settlers of course comes from Israel (whose army, it was recently reported, never fired on them, even when they were attacking Arabs or pillaging their property) but it also comes from the United States, whose vast network of Likud and settlement support groups provides recruits and serious amounts of tax-exempt funding. I would also add that it comes from the mainstream Jewish organizations, whose propaganda about Israel and Zionism—never successfully countered by the Arabs—tends to promote hatred, violence, and bigotry against non-Jews, especially Palestinians and Muslims. All one has to do is to look at the editorial pages of *The New York Times*, the United States’ leading newspaper, to read the candid sentiments of William Safire (who openly supports the settlers) and A. M. Rosenthal, a former managing editor of the paper and now one of its leading columnists, who celebrates Jewish power in Israel and insistently excoriates Arab “degeneracy.”

For such people and the sizable constituency they represent, the Oslo accord was an excellent deal precisely because it solidified Israeli power—the distinctions between Israeli and Jewish power are not always very carefully drawn—and left the Palestinians in a state of justified subservience indefinitely. As one of the leading



American-Jewish spokesmen put it, Israel got a fantastic deal, so why criticize it?

All this does not exonerate the PLO, which signed the Oslo accord, one of whose main clauses leaves the settlers in place, along with their hundreds of settlements and unrestricted activities. Yasir Arafat and his minions are directly responsible for accepting a deal that left their vulnerable and essentially defenseless population subject to the depredations and abuses of settlers and army alike. Secret negotiations between the PLO and the Mossad began in Boston in October 1992; their main aim was security for Israeli settlers. Not one word was ever said about Palestinian security, hardly apparent in the many clauses of the Oslo agreement. Moreover anyone who had any concrete knowledge of the situation in places like Hebron, as described above, would have made it a point at the very outset to press for some disengagement of settlers and Palestinian civilians in Hebron and elsewhere, where religious passions stimulated by the inherent monotheistic competition that is the curse of today's Middle East have been waiting to ignite.

In addition, anyone with any knowledge of the extraordinary violence latent in American Zionism would have taken into account the propensity of people like Baruch Goldstein (there are many of them) to want to kill Palestinians, and would have created some defense against it. But not the PLO, which has been too concerned with its relationships with France and England, and Mr. Arafat's lunches and dinners with John Major and François Mitterrand. One also wonders how, with so excellent "a friend in the White House," Mr. Arafat never thought to put the security of his own people at the very top of his wish list.

All this is the result of ignorant and ill-prepared negotiators and of Palestinian officials who live in an intoxicating world of media hype and personal aggrandizement. I vividly recall that just after the accord was announced last August a senior PLO official telephoned to tell me what a great thing the Gaza-Jericho agreement was. When I mentioned that Israeli settlements already accounted

for over 50 percent of the land, he said that that wasn't true; all the Israelis had (I quote him literally) were "a few thousand settlers and 2 percent of the land."

This same well-informed senior official was in Washington last week trying to negotiate the Oslo agreement with some retrospective (and hopeless) renegotiating. On March 4 *The New York Times* quotes him as saying, "The peace process was rudely interrupted with the crime [of the Hebron massacre]. We discovered we really have to protect Palestinians from settlers *and not the other way around.*" This is so amazing a realization as to boggle the mind. This senior Palestinian negotiator only now *discovers*—the word has a contempt for reality that sticks in one's throat—that settlers are a threat, not the other way around, as if to say that he had once believed that Palestinians were a threat to the settlers! Both this eminent gentleman and the President of Palestine whom he serves so faithfully and so well, should simply retire from the scene now, if they had a shred of common decency. But that is not to be, and the negotiations will resume, with virtually nothing changed—the 24-hour curfew continuing, the killing of Palestinians unstopped, the presence of settlers and settlements increasing daily—all in the interests of what is called "the peace process."

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 17, 1994

*Al-Hayat*, March 27, 1994

*London Review of Books*, April 7, 1994

*The Progressive*, May 1994

# 9

## “Peace at Hand”?

*(May 1994)*

A few days ago Israel and the PLO signed an economic agreement for Gaza and Jericho in Paris. On May 4 the two parties will finalize political negotiations that began after September 13, and that have left behind them every previous appointed deadline. Mr. Yasir Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin will sign the agreement in Cairo. Press reports indicate that between them the PLO and Israel will plan a series of measures designed specifically to follow the signing ceremony, measures whose purpose is to dramatize the new but almost comically limited authority given to Arafat in Gaza and Jericho (whose exact size has still not been determined). PLO offices will move from Tunis to Jericho; several thousand policemen loyal to Arafat (and paid by him) will enter the two areas where limited autonomy will take effect; Palestinian officials, all of them appointed rather than elected, will take over some of the functions formerly held by the Israeli occupation authorities. There is new hope being voiced that development monies allocated last autumn will at last find their way into the Territories, thus providing the Palestinians with some visible improvement in their status. Otherwise, few preparations for assuming control over municipal affairs have been put into effect, although Arafat will have considerable authority and some money to gain his way at the outset.

Nevertheless all is not well, particularly when at exactly the same time South Africa, another divided land, has so successfully managed a relatively smooth transition from apartheid to the unmistakable beginnings of full equality between all its citizens. But then Rabin is not De Klerk and Arafat no Mandela. An account in the April 11, 1994 issue of *The New Yorker* by Allister Sparks describes the secret negotiations between Mandela and the South African government that began in the 1980s, several years before Mandela was released and after he had already been in prison, under very harsh conditions, for well over seventeen years. From start to finish Mandela refused to compromise on the ANC's goal of one person, one vote, and the termination of apartheid. And even more important he refused all offers for an early release until every one of his imprisoned comrades was set free *before* he was. It is an astounding achievement, since at the time the ANC was an outlawed "terrorist" organization, with all its major leaders either in jail or exile. Moreover Mandela never gave up the stipulation of armed struggle until after the date for elections had been set. That he had been in prison for a total of twenty-seven years while standing his ground is a sobering fact considering that the Israeli occupation has also endured for twenty-seven years—but with a far less happy outcome.

Even Israeli commentators have noted that Rabin and his generals have conducted themselves in a most unseemly manner during the negotiations, where the Israeli attitude toward Palestinian diplomats has been contemptuous, ungenerous, and totally unyielding. As Rabin said once, let them sweat. There is no vision in the Israeli leadership, no sense that in the long run problems resolved at Palestinian expense now will simply come back to plague both peoples in the future. On all matters having to do with security, sovereignty, water, settlements, and Jerusalem, the Palestinians have in effect gained nothing, as the expropriations have proceeded as before, the settlements have expanded, more of Jerusalem has been incorporated by Israel, curfews, killings, clo-

tures, and imprisonments have continued, and no real end to the occupation has ever been forecast. No less disconcerting has been the largely secret Palestinian negotiating logic, known only to Arafat and a few close associates. They have conceded on both large and small points, without adequate consultations or planning and have never held out for an ultimate goal of independence and full self-determination. Much of this goes back to the weaknesses and inequities in the Declaration of Principles itself, but it is evident that those weaknesses were brilliantly exploited by the Israelis. In addition, the stench of financial corruption overriding the Palestinian camp has become intolerable.

The result of all of this among political leaders in the Territories who have retained some measure of independence is a feeling in which anger, desperation, and even panic are the central elements. A few of them recently released a comprehensive statement announcing their profound dismay at the upcoming Cairo agreement, as well as at the earlier ones that followed the signing ceremony on September 13. In effect these Palestinians say that Israel has continued to impose its control over land and natural resources, but is now doing it through negotiations with the PLO; moreover, the letter and the spirit of Resolutions 242 and 338 have been violated by Israel. Worst of all, Israel has used the peace process as a way of gaining retrospective affirmation of earlier illegal actions, such as the annexation of Jerusalem, the closure of the Territories, and the Jewish state's economic hegemony over Palestinian life. The statement concludes that present agreements between the PLO and Israel which have the effect of securing Israeli power in the Territories shall not be binding, nor have legal force, so far as resident Palestinians are concerned, no matter what the PLO says or does to the contrary.

As the statement also makes clear, the individuals who signed it have long been in favor of peaceful negotiations with Israel; in other words the signatories are neither members of Hamas nor classifiable as downright rejectionists. Many of them took part in the ten rounds of talks in Washington. All of them are respected

members of their various communities. And it is likely that their number has grown significantly since the statement was released in late April (1994). What they have not made clear is the future course they project, what alternative to the already quite far advanced reality that Israel and the PLO, with U.S., European, and Arab backing, have begun to put in place, and on the ground.

I fully agree with the conclusions they have drawn about what has already taken place. But it is now too late to shed tears over Oslo, or over Arafat's autocracy and his staff's incompetence and corruption, or over Israeli nefariousness, or United States hypocrisy. All these things were quite available for critical inspection last September, when out of misplaced optimism or understandable caution many Palestinians of good will went along with the euphoria of the moment. The question is what is to be done now, not just what we should have done then. Reforming the present PLO, any more than hoping for a change of heart from Rabin and company, is quite simply, an unrealistic fantasy, not to say a foolish dream. But it is also wrong to accept the bleak scenario portended by the May 4 agreement—most of whose details have deliberately been kept secret—as finalizing Palestinian imprisonment for the foreseeable future. I think we must assume that Arafat and Rabin will go on as before, the former inattentive to his people's needs and aspirations, the latter anxious to hold on to power over Palestinian territory and water for as long as possible. Addressing either leadership now is a probably fruitless task. We should instead advance a parallel program, one that begins with the premise that the struggle is far from over, and that all the Palestinian people—not just residents of the Territories—must be involved.

The first task is to press for voter registration for all Palestinians. Many people are convinced that the well-known pattern of political appointments will continue once the PLO leadership enters Jericho. This must be opposed, and can only be stopped if the demand for elections not just to municipal councils but to an all-Palestinian constituent assembly is stepped up. Quite clearly also, the PLO intends to control information through the print media,

television, and radio: the imperative therefore is to establish a national newspaper for all Palestinians (refugees, residents and citizens of Israel, residents of the Territories). At present there is neither an information policy nor any information at all about what is taking place under the Israeli occupation, which will certainly continue after May 4. We must have a unified information apparatus composed of independents who will at least keep the pressure up on Israel and the PLO to assure democratic freedoms for Palestinians. With the PLO acting under the mantle of Israeli power it has never been more urgent to let the world know what the real situation is. Hitherto most newspapers and TV in the West have painted a very selective picture of what has been going on, acting (as usual) in tandem with governments who support the American-Israeli peace process as a wonderful thing. This false picture has to be replaced with a sense that the struggle for Palestinian self-determination continues, and that this is not confined to the West Bank and Gaza but concerns all Palestinians everywhere.

I very much fear also that an essential Palestinian right has been lost sight of: reparations for property losses endured by the whole nation since 1948. Who is going to compensate us for the loss consequent on Israel's establishment as well as those losses inherent in the military occupation? The losses of Palestinian lives, property, and well-being in places like Lebanon, where Israel has behaved like an international gangster: is there to be no restitution for that? I am horrified that the PLO has not made reparations from Israel one of its main negotiating goals. For this we need greater, and more vocal pressure on both Israel and the PLO. After all Israel has been the beneficiary of uncounted billions in reparations. Why should not the same principle be applied to it, for its actions, just as it was applied to Iraq for its brief occupation of Kuwait?

Finally, there are two further imperatives about which there has been too much reluctance to act and speak. One is the PLO leadership's unconscionable unilateral control over money. People have to dispute that publicly: money for the Palestinian people is not the

private fortune of a small coterie of individuals. We must also begin the struggle to stop the settlements, which have been appreciating in size and significance since September. The PLO failed even to remove a relatively small number of Jewish extremists from the heart of Hebron, and therefore has no strategy, perhaps even no inclination, to take on the more significant task of blunting the settlement drive elsewhere in the Territories. No one as yet knows how the so-called mixed jurisdiction will be administered, one law for Israeli settlers, another for Palestinians. That a state of apartheid will go on is obvious, but there is still a great deal of uncertainty as to what laws the PLO will be administering (Jordanian? Israeli? new ones?), as well as vacancy where there should be some determination to dismantle the more than a thousand laws passed by the occupation authorities in Gaza alone.

In the extremely volatile and confused state that the PLO will try to deal with from Gaza it is of the utmost importance that popular Palestinian initiatives should begin to appear. Their purpose will be to demonstrate grassroots concern for the collective good, and once and for all to remind the PLO, which still prides itself on having "controlled" Lebanon for ten years, that it cannot have a monopoly over coercion and authority, which are very much what Israel wants it to have for perfectly obvious reasons. In short, there is a genuine national emergency at hand, a lot of it fueled by the sense of confusion and hopelessness that most Palestinians now feel. But this is no time either for desperation or for silent grief. The goals remain the same—political independence and national self-determination—but the methods have to be creative and bold. We must remember that the energies that fed the *intifada* are still there: they must be used now to establish processes and institutions that can take us beyond the pitfalls of the Declaration of Principles and the May 4 agreement, despite the new obstacles laid across our path.

*Al-Hayat*, May 6, 1994

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, May 12, 1994



## The Symbols and Realities of Power

*(June 1994)*

A mood of understandable and justifiable relief—somewhat guarded of course—seems to have gripped many Gazans and residents of Jericho. The sight of Israeli troops finally vacating strong points, barracks, and barricades they have held for twenty-seven years has been an enormous psychological relief for Palestinians in these areas. Yet as General Ehud Barak never tires of reminding Palestinians and Israelis, the occupation forces have in fact redeployed, as well as withdrawn; he says ironically that Israel still maintains 75 percent of the troops it had before the May 4 agreement was signed in Cairo, an observation in keeping with his reminder last September that with the exception of a few minor concessions Israel still maintains control over the West Bank and Gaza. Only reservists no longer serve the occupation, which continues.

Certainly the May 4 agreement itself leaves one with no illusions on that score. Its hundreds of pages, dozens of annexes, thousands of qualifications, reservations, and detailed exceptions to the notion of “limited self-rule” provide a dispiriting reading experience. But what emerges clearly from the text is the Israeli desire to impose as many controls on, and obstacles to, Palestinian success in limited self-rule. Israel retains control over overall security, the idea being

that the IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces, may return any time it wishes, and in any case holds on to borders, water, roads, sovereignty, settlements, and of course, Jerusalem. All Palestinian actions—for example, the designation of members of the National Authority—have to be communicated to the Israelis for approval; the same applies to laws passed, as well as changes in the status of personnel. As the economic accord signed in Paris a few days before the Cairo agreement suggests, Palestinian economic life will be dominated by the Israelis; an interview with Mohammad Zuhdi al-Nashashibi (Palestinian appointee in charge of finance) published in *Al-Hayat* on May 10, 1994 spells this out in depressing detail. Nashashibi says unequivocally that the economic agreement is designed specifically to prevent any sort of Palestinian independence, although he also adds tantalizingly that it *might* have been possible in the document's preamble to indicate that the Palestinian people were entitled to economic independence at some later date. He does not say who is responsible for this astonishing lapse. But since the phrase was not added Israel can, for example, control Palestinian imports and tariffs, and can establish branches of its banks without express permission of the Palestinian authority.

As if this is not bad enough, there have been several reports indicating that the Palestinian negotiators, who were working until the morning of May 4, were trying—again unsuccessfully—to wring symbolic concessions from Israel. One was the right to place Yasir Arafat's picture on postage stamps; another was the privilege of referring to him as "President." Both were refused, although the Israelis conceded that he need not be present when his baggage and passport are to be searched (as they must be) at the border; an assistant can do that for him, in advance of his actual arrival. Still, when it comes to health, sanitation, education, tourism, and the like, the National Authority is going to have limited scope to run things to the best of its abilities. But it will do no good at all to forget that what Israel has in mind is very far from statehood: what is being projected is in effect an Israeli protectorate resembling in its sepa-

rate status for Israeli settlers and settlements, a Middle East version of a South African Bantustan. And indeed, the repeated references in the May 4 document to a "strong Palestinian police force"—the word *strong* appears several times—suggest a cunning Israeli design to play into the PLO's weakness for unilateral authority, that is, in fact, giving the PLO enough clout in the Jericho and Gaza areas to be Israel's enforcer of order and, just as important, turning it into an agency responsible to Israel for any failure in public order.

The consequences of this have been evident in the past few weeks. Because of twenty-seven years of brutal military occupation there are no Palestinian institutions really ready for even limited self-rule. The press has been full of details suggesting incompetence, the absence of funds, as well as the Palestinian police force's inability to uphold order (with no clear law that it is supposed to be implementing, this inability is hardly surprising), and a general air of half-hearted festivity combined with almost total anarchy. The official Israeli and American attitude is now that the Palestinians are being examined as to whether they are ready for self-rule. Underlying that is the barely concealed suggestion that they are not, and that maybe the occupation was not such a bad thing after all.

Can police salaries be paid? Can the hospital oxygen supply be maintained? Who is going to be in charge of the funds, few of which seem to have materialized? As against that, the list of appointments streaming from Tunis suggests a government of personalities—many of whom are perfectly nice people—selected for their loyalty and connection with the Tunis axis rather than for originality or competence. But that too, I think, is what Israel bargained for and it must surely continue to feel a certain amount of satisfaction at the expanding sense of confusion that is slowly overtaking Palestinians as the date for Mr. Arafat's arrival in Jericho approaches. Quite obviously there are considerable numbers of Palestinians in Europe, North America, and the Arab world who have had direct experience of administering institutions, but it will continue to be much more expedient for the PLO to use people

who do not require long and demanding recruitment procedures and who offer themselves immediately, people who do not have the same high level of expertise and exacting standards.

Nevertheless Arafat's provocative remarks about a Jihad in Johannesburg, as well as his performance in Cairo on May 4, suggest an emerging strategy for the PLO under his direction, despite the crippling disabilities of the peace agreement, the wide disparity in power between Israelis and Palestinians, the truly remarkable difficulties facing Palestinians in the Territories as they try to take up where the 27-year-old Israeli military occupation leaves off. What the Israelis want is control and hegemony, and they have tried to write this into their agreement. But no matter how many details are put down on paper, and no matter how many contingencies you try to deal with, you cannot control everything. Arafat, I believe, is correctly banking on the fact that many details in the May 4 accord are simply unenforceable. There are too many people involved and too many situations for the Israelis, despite their army and efficiency, to monitor. One clause in the agreement stipulates, for instance, that neither side will incite nor issue hostile propaganda against the other. Thus Arafat's continued comments about Jerusalem constitute an infringement of that stipulation; he can humiliate be called to account as he has been, but he cannot be stopped. Similarly, as Ahmad Tibi, one of his advisers, said the other day, even though according to the agreement Israel has the right to send its army back into territories it has already vacated, if the IDF re-enters Gaza it will simply drown. So the PLO tactic will be to go on acting as if it were not bound by an agreement that explicitly prevents statehood. This in turn may or may not yield statehood, but it will certainly prove difficult for the Israelis to try to stop. Palestinian bumbling will do the job for them.

The Israeli counter-strategy, alas, is more harsh, and perhaps more effective: it has already been hinted at by Rabin and some of his associates. The more provocative and challenging the Palestinians are, the slower will the Israelis be in implementing the self-rule

clauses beyond Gaza and Jericho. To judge by their recent actions, they have already begun to make life more difficult for Palestinians elsewhere in the Territories. Israeli troops still control all the roads, and can therefore deny access at will. They can impose curfews. They can arrest people, blow up houses, refuse to withdraw. They are neither bound by deadlines nor by the norms of international behavior (as their July 1993 attack on South Lebanon, which deliberately created 300,000 refugees, makes quite plain).

But if there is confusion in Palestinian ranks, there are also a fair number of problems facing the Israelis. Rabin has openly (and, I think, foolishly) allied himself with Ariel Sharon, who is now one of his main advisers. He continues to placate the settlers and the religious right, even though in the process he risks the fragmentation of his ruling coalition. My impression is that a genuine conflict is growing within Israeli society between those who are content with a "normal" country called Israel and those who still stubbornly believe in a kingdom of Judea. Moreover the older generation of Israeli leaders like Rabin cannot rid themselves of their delusions of grandeur, or of their contemptible racist attitudes to Arabs, and will therefore resist a vision and policy of real peace and reconciliation in favor of holding on to an idea of Israel as a superior world power. It is relatively easy to get away with such a policy when dealing with Palestinians who have very few options, but it is much harder to make it work, for example, with Syria, whose leader can afford to wait, resist, refuse.

In all this, however, the real puzzle is to try to understand whether a peace process that is so peculiarly one-sided for the Arabs generally, the Palestinians in particular, can ultimately work to their advantage. I very much doubt it, not just because the Gaza-Jericho accord and its subsequent implementations capitalized on Israeli power in the settlements and the roads, to say nothing of annexed Jerusalem, but also because both the instruments and policies of the Palestinian side are so symptomatic of the underdevelopment that produced the agreement in the first place. What we have

now on the Palestinian side is a situation that can best be described as “business as usual,” with the same faces, the same slogans, the same ideas that produced the debacles of Jordan (1970–71) and Beirut (1982). There has been no change in the cast of characters who with no record of anything but failure and defeat continue to command Palestinian political destiny.

Looked at in this historical framework, the emphasis on the importance of a Palestinian police force—with little money or food at this point—does not augur well. Who can forget the militias and armies produced in Lebanon and Jordan, and what they in the end added up to? One would have thought that once again relying on Palestinian fighters who were converted from revolutionaries into keepers of the PLO’s authority in Fakahani (the West Beirut district where the PLO ruled like a king) was a bad beginning. Why not instead do the innovative thing, and ask the residents of Gaza and Jericho, fed up with the abuses of an occupying force, to begin to take collective responsibility for their own security? The same lesson can be applied to the entire people, asking it as a whole to undertake the national task of building a nation, if that is possible. Instead, we have the same people repeating the same mistakes of the past with the same mediocre results.

This in the end is both an Arab and Palestinian challenge: are we condemned in perpetuity to underdevelopment, dependency, and mediocrity or do we as a people deserve what our resources and past achievements entitle us to? Are we choosing to be a replication of nineteenth-century Africa in the late twentieth century? And are we eternally to be placated by leaders who expect us to be content with symbols and forms rather than substance and real achievements?

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*Al-Hayat*, June 14, 1994

## II

# Winners and Losers

(July 1994)

In the years after the Second World War, approximately forty-nine independent African countries came into existence. India gained its freedom in 1947, Indonesia two years later. Several other former colonial territories in east Asia and in the Arab world followed suit. Only Palestine went against the general current. Its predominantly Arab society was destroyed in 1948, its place taken by a new Jewish state whose purpose was to settle the territory with incoming Jews from all over the world. Yet Palestine was restored to the historical pattern of decolonization when in the post-1967 period a new nationalist and anti-colonial resistance movement took form, with the PLO at its head. Yet, alone among all modern anti-colonial movements, the PLO capitulated to the colonial occupation *before* that occupation had been defeated and forced to leave. This of course has been called a “compromise” as embodied in the Oslo Declaration of Principles, and the subsequent Cairo and Paris agreements, but the various euphemisms do little to conceal what on the Palestinian side was in effect a massive abandonment of principles, the main currents of Palestinian history, and national goals. Every conceivable abridgment of Palestinian self-determination was accepted as part of “limited self-rule,” an arrangement which leaves Israel in charge not only of the exits and entrances to Gaza and Jeri-

cho, but also of a sizable chunk of Gaza itself, and most of the West Bank, where the combination of settlements and roads ensures that Palestinian autonomy will take place in half a dozen separated cantons or ghettos.

Once again the extent of a now official Palestinian amnesia was demonstrated in Yasir Arafat's May 4 Cairo speech. He spoke of Palestinian sacrifices "for peace," as if it was a well-known fact that the Palestinian struggle was really not about self-determination and rights but about getting the dubious achievements of the Gaza-Jericho accord. Whereas Rabin spoke about Israeli blood and Arab terror in his customary repertory of distorted, preposterous lies and half-truths that portrayed the Palestinian victims as the aggressors, Arafat referred passively to his people as "living on their land for the entirety of their history"—as if they had never been dispossessed, dispersed, killed, imprisoned, and militarily occupied by the very Israeli leaders he was now publicly embracing.

I have always been in favor both of reconciliation and negotiation between Arabs and Jews as equals in Palestine, but not at the expense only of the Palestinian people. Why should we be required not only to give up what we have lost to military occupation and pillage but in addition to apologize for having made any claims in the first place? Yet the worst aspect of both the Cairo and Paris agreements (on economic relationships with Israel) makes Israel a senior partner in what goes on within the domain of Palestinian "autonomy." Israel is part of the economic arrangements, Israel must approve Palestinian laws and appointments, Israel has been given extra-territorial privileges for its settlers and military. Thus a new and, in my opinion, crippling dependency for Palestine has been institutionalized and is now set to unfold, with an easily foreseen set of extremely unpromising circumstances as the result. No wonder the PLO now seems so hesitant and unwilling to take up the autonomy it so unwisely agreed to.

Although the Palestinian people as a whole will continue to suffer under the new dispensation, it is not true that all will suffer



equally. If Israel has emerged as a victor, and the Palestinian people as a net loser, within the Palestinian community there are also winners and losers. The current leadership of the PLO (that is, Arafat and a handful of men around him) seems to have gained ascendancy, what with lucrative contracts, political appointments, and authority over the new Palestinian police force as their prize. Relative to Israeli power this of course is almost laughable, but relative to the refugees in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan as well as the poor and landless in Gaza and the West Bank, it represents a considerable amount. What makes it particularly disquieting for the majority of Palestinians is that no system of accountability has yet been instituted. A great leader sitting in Tunis or perhaps later in Gaza can appoint a U.S. bank and a team of Moroccan, Lebanese, and Israeli financial advisers (some of them of rather dubious status in their own countries) to be his "experts" for handling internationally donated funds to "the Palestinian people," and as yet no one can ask why this has been done, and by what authority and in whose interest such people are allowed to determine the future course of Palestinian national development. The new draft constitution (still only a draft, still unimplemented) of the Palestinian entity says nothing about ceding authority to the people, but is quite specific about handing everything to the President (or however he proposes to describe himself) so that he may unilaterally determine what either gets done or does not get done inside Gaza and Jericho. Is this state of affairs and are these Palestinian winners what the immense struggle of the people has been about? Has the goal of the national effort to regain Palestinian rights only been to grant the current Palestinian leadership in Tunis the mantle of unrestricted authority on a tiny fraction of their homeland?

The great German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin once wrote that "whoever emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate." It is the duty of the historian therefore to provide a reminder of that fact, in which the losers

who are lying prostrate and forgotten are connected to the victors who strut and parade over their bodies before the world. In the Palestinian case there can be no better way of doing this than to recount the experiences of a remarkable individual—Hanna Mikhail—who gave his life in 1976 in order that the principles and goals of “the Palestinian revolution” (as it was then called) could be safeguarded and realized. When I think of the present state of affairs, with so much that has been discarded and voluntarily abandoned in our history, when the doctrines of realism and pragmatism are trumpeted by smug and shameless winners, and when a shabby undemocratic Palestinian protectorate under Israeli rule is proclaimed as the fulfillment of our aspirations, I am also led inevitably to think of Hanna Mikhail, in particular his dedication and principled course of action on behalf of his people.

I first met him in the late 1950s in the United States. I was a student at Princeton at the time, he a student (exactly my age, born in the mid-1930s) at Haverford College, a well-known Quaker college about fifty miles from Princeton. He came to Haverford from Ramallah, where he had graduated from the Friends School, I from a Massachusetts boarding school and before that from Victoria College in Egypt. He was studying chemistry, I literature. I was immediately struck both by his extraordinary personal modesty and civility, and by his very sharp intellect. In those days neither of us was political: Ramallah was part of Jordan, and the Arab world at the time was dominated by Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose message of Arab nationalism included but did not limit itself to the special nature of the Palestinian struggle to regain the rights of its dispossessed and dispersed native Arab inhabitants. Both these contexts in a sense were not really ours. After getting our degrees we both ended up as graduate students at Harvard. I recall him telling me that he had changed from chemistry to Middle East Studies (he became a student of H.A.R. Gibb, the famous British Orientalist who had just moved from Oxford to Harvard). I myself had very little to do with the Middle East field—my concentration was on

English and comparative literature—but I do remember that Hanna described his switch as a necessary one for someone like himself who needed to know more about the historical traditions and culture of his people.

Around 1965 I saw him in New York; he was teaching Arabic at Princeton and had just divorced his American wife. Our meetings then were infrequent since I lived in New York, whereas he was only an occasional visitor. After 1967 we lost touch, even though I knew from a common friend that Hanna had moved to the University of Washington in Seattle to become an assistant professor in Middle East Studies there. I did not see him again until the summer of 1970. Like every Arab of my generation I had been deeply affected and indeed traumatized by the 1967 War, and subsequently stirred into political engagement by the emergence of the Palestinian Resistance movement, as it was then known. In August 1970 I traveled to Jordan to see for myself what “our” movement had become. Kamal Nasir (who was then the PLO’s official spokesman) was a distant relative and good friend, and he put me in touch with various comrades in the movement when I got to Amman. Among them of course was Hanna (the two men were both from Ramallah); I was unprepared for the transformation in my gentle, even pacifist old friend, who had now become a full-time partisan, a member of Fatah and an extremely effective information officer in charge of journalists and other outside visitors.

The main thing that struck me at the outset was the grandeur and generosity of his gesture in coming to Amman in the first place. He was a Harvard Ph.D. with a secure academic job in the United States. His future as scholar and professor was assured. Instead he gave all that up for the uncertainties, not to say the dangers of a volunteer’s position in a popular movement that had barely begun, was about as insecure as it was possible to be in a volatile and hostile Arab environment, and above all had proposed the all-but-insane goal of the liberation of Palestine. I never detected any uncertainty on his part about his decision to return. He never al-

luded to what he had left behind, and he always communicated to me the solid principles of emancipation and enlightenment for his people. From then on he remained a Fatah militant, yet I never heard him utter a silly cliché or the slightest pomposity. In time he acquired considerable authority and prestige within the movement, but unlike many of his counterparts he did not abuse or bully underlings with his superior rank and attainments.

Like Kamal Nasir, Hanna Mikhail came from a Christian background; this is something I share with them. As I think about it, the three of us in fact had very different educations and we came to the Palestinian struggle from extremely divergent perspectives. Kamal was a Ba'athist originally; Hanna was a Quaker graduate and a Middle Eastern scholar; though I was born in Jerusalem, and grew up in Cairo, I was almost completely Western in my education and knowledge. None of us, however, felt that we were members of a minority, although of course we were. Each of us regarded our heritage as Arab-Islamic and our cultural perspectives as internationalist. Palestine was a liberation ideal, not a provincial movement for municipal self-rule under foreign tutelage. We saw it as an integral unit within the liberation movements of the Third World—secular, democratic, revolutionary.

Hanna, for example, was a scholar of Arab Islamic thought, a subject that he felt provided a traditional continuity which later generations of Arabs would find useful in their own efforts for national revival and freedom. For the three of us the Christian communities from which we emerged were elements in the larger mosaic of Arab, Islamic, and Third World anti-colonial movements, of which we were proud to be a part, different perhaps, but never separate. Both Hanna and Kamal always impressed me with the eloquence and clarity of their language, which I have always since strived to emulate.

Hanna and I stood next to each other at a mass rally in Amman just before Black September. Yasir Arafat was declaiming from the balcony of a small house that “we” had turned down the Rogers

Plan and that the 15,000 Iraqi troops in Jordan had just committed themselves to "us." Hanna took me to meet Arafat just after the speech, but there were too many people around to say very much except the routine greetings that such occasions usually afford. But I distinctly remember Hanna's discomfort around Arafat. Both of us, I think, felt the power of the man's melodramatic oratory, but we also sensed that though he could speak the language of liberation he was a great actor and a supreme political animal with only a provisional relationship to the truth. The "committed" Iraqi troops were not *that* committed of course.

In 1972-73 I spent my academic year sabbatical in Beirut, where I saw quite a lot of Hanna, whom I had begun to know as Abu Omar, in charge of student contacts, journalists, and various segments of the by now growing Palestinian presence in Lebanon. I never knew or visited him where he lived, nor until later did I know much about his personal life. During those years before his death in 1976 he seemed to me to have completely immersed himself in his role as a political officer in the movement. In dress, manner, and style of life he struck me as ascetic in the extreme. He put on a little weight, but I never saw him wear anything but khaki fatigues until the early 1970s, he never drove a car, and in his manner he never affected anything but a simple, austere rhetoric. He was always anxious to listen. Alone among my Palestinian comrades when he asked me a question about developments in the United States he would actually wait for me to answer; usually when I was asked the same question by some of the other intellectuals and leaders I would be the one who would have to listen to a ninety-minute lecture on what was happening in America, most of it gleaned from *Time* magazine and the Beirut rumor exchange. I remember talking with Hanna about the anti-Vietnam War movement, about Noam Chomsky and others whose work he respected, and about developments in the military-industrial complex. I think by that time he had become a Marxist, but how different from his colleagues in the progressive movement he was! His vocabulary was full of observations about

the human sufferings of people, of deprivation and nobility, of tragedy and hope, of powerlessness and optimism.

Two episodes in Beirut have remained especially clear in my memory. Hanna would often visit me in the little room in my house I used as a study. As we sat going over the latest Israeli raid on Nabatiye, their American planes raining down terror and punishment on innocent Palestinian and Lebanese civilians, I was so upset at their viciousness that I asked him, "Do you feel any hatred for them?" Never was I so amazed as when he expressed surprise at my question, and said, "No, I don't think I can." I saw in a flash both his essential gentleness as a human being and how much more sophisticated politically than me he was: he had affiliated himself with a movement that protected him from transient, and ultimately not very useful emotions, so that a long-term political philosophy and commitment might develop instead. Hanna's answer taught me a lot about dedication and patience.

The second episode took place in early October 1972. I was at home with my family when, late at night, the phone rang. It was Hanna asking whether he could bring Jean Genet around to see me. At first I thought he was joking since for me Genet was a giant of contemporary literature, and the likelihood of his paying me a visit was about as probable as one from Proust or Thomas Mann. No, Hanna said, I'm really serious; could we come now? They appeared fifteen minutes later and stayed for several hours. I have written elsewhere about what Genet said and did during that visit, but Hanna's role needs some comment here. It is clear from *The Prisoner of Love*—Genet's posthumously published book on his love for the Palestinians—that Abu Omar was a crucial figure for him as guide, friend, trusted confidant. Hanna's French wasn't extraordinarily good, but he could manage. As Genet and I talked that night Hanna sat quietly in the shadows, making an occasional interjection, answering a question, laughing at one of Genet's frequent *aperçus*. He never forced himself into the discussion, but instead remained as a patient, modest, and enabling presence. Genet

seems to have felt that like many of the Palestinians he grew close to, Hanna represented a kind of purity and unselfish carelessness about himself that to the great French writer contained the essence of the Palestinian revolution, its wonderful gaiety, its awesome internal (but mostly unharnessed) power, its beautiful ideals. And I felt exactly those things about Hanna as he sat there with Genet. He told me later that he admired Genet because of his special poetical insight into "our" doings, and that, he felt, was much more enriching than dry, textbook political analysis. By sitting there as he did—even though without Hanna, Genet and I would not have met—Abu Omar embodied the prevailing generous and unconventional principles of the Palestinian revolution. It was a moment of illumination for me.

After the Lebanese Civil War began I saw Hanna in Beirut only intermittently, but we always kept in close touch. As the head of the Quaker community in Lebanon my father-in-law Emile Cortas presided over the simple wedding ceremony that joined Hanna and Jihan Helou in a Quaker marriage ceremony (required by Lebanese law) and that fact brought us together for a few social occasions. It was also then that I grasped how Hanna had slowly begun to gather around himself a group of like-minded Fatah members (Fatah for him was the only movement he could belong to because, he once told me, it was broad enough to represent all the people) who were dissatisfied with the political direction taken by the reigning powers. Hanna was against the abuse of power, he was against ostentatious spending and garish lifestyles, and he was one of the first to lament the malign influence of petro-dollars. He soon refused to have anything to do with foreign journalists and dignitaries, believing his task to be "our" self-education. He retained the deliberate, attractive, and self-effacing manner of the teacher. He neither preached nor scolded. Yet he unfailingly expressed his conviction in the principles of popular struggle and revolutionary transformation that were crucial to any real Palestinian victory. Once I recall that he lamented to me of the folly of Palestinian involvement in Lebanese

affairs; he was prophetic, since this was to lead to the disasters of 1982. But he also distrusted conventional Arab politics, a trivial copy of which Palestinian politics had become. Above all he scorned the cult of the gun and of the personality: these he knew supplied superficial and immediate satisfaction, but they were too easily exploited by the opportunistic and unprincipled.

In the months before his death I was impressed with how his dissenting ideas had spread within Fatah in Beirut. He told me of a trip he took to North Vietnam and of how that had strengthened his conviction in both dedication and careful organization and discipline. I had also begun to surmise—I have no hard information on which to rely, except the somewhat precarious evidence I deduced from friends of his—that he had begun to trouble the leadership with his earnest dissent and the growing influence he exerted on those who worked with him. His disappearance in 1976 while on what appeared to be a foolishly contrived mission to go by a small and unprotected boat from Beirut to Tripoli in waters constantly patrolled by Israeli and Phalanges forces seemed like the result of incredibly poor planning and a great deal of unacceptable carelessness. For years after I often thought that that ill-fated voyage had robbed the Palestinian movement of one of its most principled and humanely inspired cadres. No wonder then that so many of his friends and especially his brave widow Jihan refused to accept the fact of his capture as final, and no wonder that so many of us had a strong stake in keeping hope alive for his release and return. I must say in all honesty and sadness that his untoward disappearance and subsequent death seemed to me not to have been so inconvenient for those in Fatah who, while he was alive, found his opposition to political maneuvering, cronyism and the bending of principle so irritating.

It seems to me, however, that his tragically foreshortened life has acquired an even more considerable significance today. Hanna Mikhail is not among the victors in today's peace process. His compatriots are still under military occupation. His co-workers in



Lebanon and elsewhere are still in exile. Worst of all, the ideas and principles for which he quite literally lived and died, principles of humane liberation, decent co-existence between Arabs and Jews, social and economic justice for men and women, all these have been put in temporary eclipse not just by the cynicism of the Israeli Labor party, but by Mikhail's own equally cynical movement. A new ascendancy stressing pragmatic realism now advocates unconditional friendship with a United States that still donates billions of dollars a year to Israel, and that still opposes Palestinian self-determination as the phrase is understood everywhere else in the world.

More perniciously, this ascendancy believes that deals between high-flying financiers are better for "the people" than that people's own efforts. Hanna Mikhail's whole life was focused on a searching radicalism, unsatisfied with the vulgar clichés of politics as business, unconvinced by empty slogans of triumphalist demagoguery, scornful of lazy incompetence and favoritism. In recalling Hanna Mikhail as friend and as a historical figure in the struggle for human freedom and knowledge we need to accept what Walter Benjamin suggests is the historian's task which, he says, is to dissociate oneself from the so-called march of progress, then to provide a different history *against* the main, apparently victorious, current.

Hanna Mikhail was a true intellectual. What I have said about him neither sentimentalizes nor exaggerates his qualities. He retained his original Quaker modesty and plainness. But as an intellectual should, he lived according to his ideas and never tailored his democratic, secular values to suit new masters and occasions. For all Palestinians today, and in stark contrast to the great sell-out and abject surrender of our leaders, he represents a distinguished role model, a man who did not debase himself or his people. He *lived* his ideas, and died for them. It is as simple as that. By his example Hanna Mikhail admonishes those who have outlived him for a while.

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## The American "Peace Process"

(*August 1994*)

American foreign policy under Bill Clinton is in a confused state, even for an administration that has wavered, advanced, and retreated innumerable times on domestic issues. Secretary of State Warren Christopher is certainly one of the weakest members of Clinton's government; rumors that he will be fired for his lackluster performance have been circulating for at least a year; the appointment of Strobe Talbott, one of Clinton's oldest friends, to the number two position at State some months ago was therefore widely interpreted as undercutting Christopher's present tenure. Indeed it is difficult to think of Christopher in connection with any policy at all. He travels a fair amount and makes announcements from time to time, but he has no perceivable idea about anything, and no capacity it seems to formulate his government's position in either a firm or (at least) a memorable way. At best he dresses elegantly. Anthony Lake, the President's national security adviser, is an amiable former academic, who is even less visible than Christopher and just as effective. He too has been the target of reports saying that he will be replaced.

But the fact is that Clinton himself seems as though he does not much care for foreign affairs and has no inclination or gift for articulating and maintaining an American globalism. From the ago-

nies of Bosnia, to the early disgraceful wavering on Haiti, to China, Russia, North Korea, Iraq, Japan, Chechnya, Turkey, Rwanda, Somalia, and elsewhere, Clinton has demonstrated an almost total incapacity for vision and concentration. Not that he does not have enough policy planners and intellectuals around him in Washington and elsewhere clamoring for his attention, and urging smart new theories on the post-Cold-War world. One such candidate has been Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard, who a year ago argued in *Foreign Affairs* that the new world order would be determined by "a clash of civilizations," in which Islam, Western liberal democracy, and Confucianism among others were going to battle each other for supremacy. Huntington's thesis was designed to replace the old U.S.-USSR clash with a new one, but although the argument itself has been much debated all over the country it seems to have had no effect at all on Clinton and his people.

This apparent stagnation, however, does not make the United States any less an imperial power, running not on personalities and ideas, but on institutions and the traditions of a long history of intervention. The military budget is still larger than the combined military budgets of every other country. Nothing can be done (or undone) in the United Nations without the United States and, to make matters more obvious, few governments or groups in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Australia do very much in foreign policy that does not give the United States a central role to play. Reduced though it is (it will be even more), the American foreign-aid package is remarkably potent, with various foreign lobbies in Washington actively competing with each other for larger portions of the annual Congressional allocation. And of course the increasing global American media monopoly diffuses the American view and way of life in often invisible ways.

Only when it comes to the Middle East are U.S. policies relatively stable and, for want of a better word to describe them, successful. Not that there have been no dramatic announcements or quite remarkable changes: there have been, but they have generally

consolidated the broad lines and finer points of a policy that first took shape under Kissinger and Richard Nixon and continues basically unchanged today, except that Israel's position is not only stronger but also essentially unchallenged. Consider as a symbol of this the extraordinary, not to say astonishing presence in the Clinton administration of one Martin Indyk, now (along with Dennis Ross) the principal actor when it comes to United States policy on the Middle East. An Australian, Indyk was employed by the Washington Institute on Near East Policy, a think-tank associated with AIPAC, the pro-Israeli lobby, and the Likud Party. Literally a few days before he was appointed to the National Security Council in early 1993 Indyk was made an American citizen and installed in the White House. (This has never happened before.) His ideas were at the core of a report issued in 1988 on peace in the Middle East, which makes the essence of United States policy an unremitting attachment to Israel, and therefore subordinates everything else (especially peace) to that basic priority. This philosophy guides policy at present, and with Dennis Ross (a colleague of Indyk's at the pro-Israeli think-tank) at State, there is virtually no one besides the two men in the Clinton administration with either seniority or authority to provide any countervailing views. Even the small handful of so-called Arabists—career diplomats like Richard Murphy and Harold Saunders, who had some intimate knowledge of the Arab world—has all but disappeared from the policy and ambassadorial career ranks, leaving Indyk and Ross, plus their hand-picked assistants, more or less completely in charge. Clinton himself is quite pro-Israeli but as former President Jimmy Carter once said, does not have much interest in the area (unlike Reagan and Bush).

I am not saying that Indyk and Ross symbolize a conspiracy, but rather that they represent an aggressively unbroken continuity in U.S. Middle East policy, now pursuing a "peace process" which has had more than its share of well-publicized surprises and apparently dramatic changes. "Peace" has always been a declared policy goal of

the United States, but it is crucial to understand whether the Clinton administration's understanding of the word is markedly different from that of its predecessors. I would say not at all, and not only because Indyk and Ross remain in charge. The real reason is that American rejectionism *vis-à-vis* Arab national goals has been reinforced as Arab aims have either been significantly reduced or, as was the case with the PLO's position at Oslo, openly subordinated to Israel. American "peace" in the Middle East means the normalization of relationships between Israel and the Arab states; that except for Israel no Arab state may possess weapons of mass destruction or pose any challenge either to Israel or to the oil-producing states; the containment and if necessary the punishment of Iran; that the economies of the Arab states should be open to Israeli and U.S. penetration; both conflict *and* dialogue with political Islam; an unrestricted flow of inexpensive Arab oil to the United States; and finally, it means the subordination of all regional and local issues to the United States. The Jordan-Israel pact just celebrated on the White House lawn is a perfect example of all this, as was the clear indication that compliance with the rules set by Indyk and his associates carries with it a real reward. Conversely non-compliance is punishable, and hence the policy of maintaining sanctions indefinitely against Iraq (and later against Iran) is a living reminder of daring to defy the United States.

Not even Latin America has been so relatively docile, so willing to sacrifice long-term interests and almost fifty years of struggle for the privilege of being included under the American umbrella. Thanks to U.S. policy Israel has totally succeeded in winning all its historical strategic objectives. It conquered Palestine by force, dispossessed its native inhabitants, and has now gained not only their acquiescence but their cooperation in continuing to rule militarily over 20 percent of what remains for them of Palestinian territory. Although there are approximately six million Palestinians today, not a single one of whom has been untouched by the whole nation's suffering, dispossession, and exile, it is staggering that no organized

voice has gone out asking that our history be remembered, that our people's sacrifices be not forgotten, and that our rights be retained in theory if not in practice. Not a journal, not a platform, not a newspaper.

The same is equally true throughout the Arab world. Jordan has just signed an agreement with Israel erasing its own history in order that its debt be cancelled. And so it goes, as one country after another assures Israel not only of its legitimacy but also its right for the foreseeable future to rule the Middle East as the regional superpower and America's junior partner. When people speak now of the need for a new culture of peace to replace the old culture of war they seem to forget that the conditions that originally produced the war still exist, and that by sheer force of arms and will Israel has consolidated its original gains against the Palestinians with nothing returned to the victims except the perhaps unsolvable *problems* of health, education, tourism, and taxation in Gaza and Jericho.

The Arab world still possesses a large number of quite sizable standing armies; weapons purchases continue, as does the general state of emergency. I find it puzzling that given American and Israeli hegemony in the region there still is not a single university department in any Arab country (including the Occupied Palestinian Territories) in which American and Israeli societies are studied and taught. The United States and Israel today constitute the most powerful outside (that is non-Arab) force in the Middle East. And yet neither state and society is at all well known; in fact, I would say, both are basically unknown. Most countries that have had systematic dealings with the United States like, for example, Germany, Brazil, and India, maintain institutes of U.S. studies which act as advisory bodies to the governments in those countries, enabling a more sophisticated and sensitive approach to a country whose power itself is neither simple nor uncomplicated. Not even the celebrated American Universities of Beirut and Cairo teach American culture, society, and history in any systematic way, with the result that the Arab world has quite literally made itself more

passive, more unable to respond to what America and Israel unilaterally decide to do. No wonder then that American policy from Carter to Indyk and Ross has remained the same, and no wonder that there seems to be an endless procession of Arab leaders coming to Washington like so many petitioning schoolboys.

Under the banner of its "peace process" the United States is in effect arranging for Israeli-inspired treaties with the Arabs, further dividing and weakening them, further assuring a whole series of upheavals whose time is not so far away. What it reminds me of is nineteenth-century Africa, where European powers would sign pieces of paper called "treaties" with various African chiefs in order that trade and conquest could take place behind a façade of legitimacy, complete with "negotiations" and elaborate ceremonies. The big question facing those few remaining Arab intellectuals and leaders who still believe that the Arab world need not remain forever subordinate to Israel and the United States is how to articulate an alternative vision, one that neither turns in on itself in search of a primitive Islamic or Arabic past, nor one that goes along happily with the status quo. The Arab people certainly want peace and prosperity, but not the humiliating peace imposed on the region by Israel and the United States in which a few individuals will profit, whereas the overwhelming majority will either be impoverished or sucked into a merciless economic and social system controlled by transnational corporations and one or two distant powers. No Arab can be unaffected by the spectacle relentlessly broadcast by CNN of Israel's rulers in Washington bringing one Arab ruler after another to genuflect and apologize for the past. American foreign policy has never had much use for the history and integrity of other peoples. But why should the entire Arab nation collaborate so uncomplainingly and so without a trace of backbone?

Perhaps this total absence of will is the Arab world's last act before it must confront a situation in which neither Israel nor imperialism can explain the absence of democratic freedoms in countries in which press censorship, the government's whims, and "security

considerations" have provided the bulwark of daily life for at least two generations. Now we must ask ourselves at last why our universities are mediocre, why we contribute nothing to modern science, why our cities are falling apart, and why we are poorer as a whole nation than we were a decade ago. I do not envy the rulers today who have bought themselves a little time by cuddling up to Israel and the United States, but who must now face all the devastating social and moral problems they have postponed or ignored for so long.

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, August 4, 1994

*Al-Hayat*, August 11, 1994



## Decolonizing the Mind

(September 1994)

All writers, intellectuals, and citizens necessarily confront the question of how as people living and working in one culture they relate to other cultures. Never has this been more of a challenge than during the post-imperial period when the rise of nationalism has stimulated a more acute sense of ethnic difference and particularity. So long as England ruled India, for instance, the native elites in Delhi and Calcutta who were educated in British schools were taught that the English language, European culture, and the white race were inherently superior to anything that the Orient might produce by way of languages, cultures, or human species. In his famous 1835 Minute on Indian Education, Lord Macaulay actually said so quite explicitly, adding that the whole of Arabic and Sanskrit literature was not worth the abridgments, that is the *summaries* (and not even the books themselves), of great Western literature to be found in the library of "an English schoolboy." For several generations Indians were trained to accept that these observations were literally true, and consequently, that their own traditions and languages were inferior and not worthy of study. The rise of anti-imperialist nationalism in India reversed these notions, stressing the primacy of native Indian values and of the various languages that were considered to be the product of the Indian mind.

So long as the classical colonial empires existed, the dialectics of subjection and later of liberation were the principal aspects of the nation's life. Yet the problem of the relationship between cultures has continued, either as a legacy of the colonial past, or as a modern political issue within the African or Asian country in question. What is the cultural relationship today between Morocco and Algeria on the one hand, and France on the other? Should a Moroccan writer use French or Arabic for the novels, poems, essays produced today? Is there a national duty to use *only* the native language, and to avoid what have been called "imperial" languages like English or French? This is the position of the Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiongo, who used to write in English but has given that up in favor of Kikuyu, his native language. To what extent are languages not simply modes of communication but instruments of power?

There is no easy answer to any of these questions; nor in a sense should there be. Culture is creative and healthy as long as basic questions are debated over and over. The moment issues appear to be resolved—when all the answers have been formulated and settled—the vitality of cultures is threatened by atrophy and insularity.

The modern Arab world, however, presents a different, more troubling picture. Except for the Maghreb, where Arabic was banned by French colonialism, the core Arab countries have always had available to them a solid national culture based on the Arabic language, Islam, and the various historical experiences unique to places like Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and the Gulf states. Since the early nineteenth century the cultural tradition, however, has usually embodied some sort of reaction to the impinging Western powers—principally France and Britain—whose colonial policy was regarded as a threat. There were different reactions to these intrusions. In the early nineteenth century Mohammed Ali, to cite a celebrated instance, inaugurated a program of translations from European languages into Arabic, and at the

same time sent gifted young Egyptians to Paris to learn what they could from the more technically advanced Europeans. Later in the same century, Mohammed Abduh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Rashid Rida saw the West as a threat requiring, in their view, the reform, and possibly the modernization of Islam. Afghani's debate with Ernest Renan in 1883 was a reply to the French scholar's contention that Islam was inimical to scientific progress; Afghani argued that it was not, and that Islam was as fully capable of scientific rationality as the cultures of Christian Europe. Already a defensive tone had developed in Arab and Muslim rebuttals of the arrogance of European imperialism.

At least there was a willingness to debate. Despite the openness and optimism of the *Nahdah*, the modern revival of Arabic culture during the late nineteenth century, the present situation has changed for the worse. On the one hand in the Arab world there are people for whom the West is to be worshipped, emulated, admired without qualification; on the other hand, we have an increasingly large number of individuals and movements who oppose the West in favor of a return to some original authentic and primitive form of Arab and Muslim experience. The trouble is that in both instances there is the problem of believing that the West is a single, monolithic object, which of course, it is not. Indeed one could quite easily describe that particularly false assumption as belonging to the same category of reductiveness as many of the European clichés that have existed for hundreds of years about "the Orient."

Even for people who live in the West, there are many different worlds within the West. All cultures are in fact mixed and hybrid: in theory and in fact it is therefore possible and, I would argue, necessary to identify which "West" one was speaking about. Let me give a simple example from my own experience. During the dozen or so years that I was close to the Palestinian leadership I tried untiringly to suggest that "America" was not just the government, but a very large and very complex civil society. On numerous occasions

in both Beirut and Tunis I not only argued this notion myself but often invited friends and associates from the United States to speak to the Palestinian leadership, in order to explain how American foreign policy, for example, was not decreed unilaterally by the president, but involved the cumulative contributions of many segments in the society—the media, the churches, the universities, the congress, the unions, business, the lobbies, and so on.

The point we were all trying to impress on our listeners was that as the weaker party, the Palestinians had to be more ingenious and more discriminating in their dealings with the United States, to exploit differences between the components of society that happened to be our allies and those that opposed us as a way of putting pressure on Washington. But that would have required work, organization, and a need to keep up very conscientiously with changes and developments in each sector. In 1991 after my trip to South Africa I had been impressed how the ANC had done precisely that, and achieved a major victory at home. I distinctly recall being told by Walter Sisulu in Johannesburg that one reason for the ANC's victory was its *international* campaign against apartheid. Why shouldn't we Palestinians profit from that experience by using similar methods for our cause?

Unfortunately none of my efforts had any results whatever. The only thing that mattered to our Palestinian colleagues was what happened in Washington, as if Washington was all there was to America; to them, if Washington opposed Palestinian self-determination the rest of America did too. I recall meeting a Palestinian woman in Tunis who told me that the PLO had appointed an "America" Committee to oversee the PLO's policy on the United States. Most of the members of the committee did not know English, she said, they never met, and when I asked her what sorts of publications they consulted or had at their disposal, the only one she mentioned was *Time* magazine. Not every week, she added.

No wonder then that without any real knowledge of what the West is we tend to make the most idiotic and grandiose assump-

tions about it. At the other end of the spectrum, defenders of the Western spirit or power in the Arab and Islamic world are, in my opinion, equally mistaken. What they haven't learned is to make the distinction between the rhetoric of Western liberalism, for example, and the fact that it was historically based on discriminations made between advanced and lesser peoples. When John Stuart Mill or Alexis de Tocqueville spoke about democracy and human rights they drew a very sharp line between rights for Europeans and rights for Algerians and Indians; Mill worked for the India Office all of his life, and always opposed Indian independence. De Tocqueville criticized the United States for its treatment of slaves and Indians, but he supported French massacres of the Algerians. In other words, what we do not yet have with regard to the West is a nuanced, critical sense of what it is and what dealing with its various components really means.

The result is that most opinion in the Arab and Islamic world dictates either a general hostility, or a general approbation toward what is called the West. Both attitudes amount to the same thing. They also translate into working attitudes that suggest that the West is to be opposed totally, or, that there can be no higher goal in life than to work for a Western institution. Many of the same polarized attitudes are beginning to appear in Palestinian attitudes toward America and Israel. In all cases what gets overlooked or completely forgotten is the absolute need for a strong sense of our own cultural and political individuality, our own national and cultural interests, which we must develop sufficiently so as to be able critically to enter a real dialogue whether with Israel or the West. But this cannot happen unless we feel ourselves to be *equal* with both, and neither a shrinking rejectionist, nor an uncritically enthusiastic admirer. Both attitudes develop from the same kind of ignorance and a similar sense of defensive inadequacy.

Over the years I have always been struck that Arab students coming to the West were either interested in getting a technical or professional degree in medicine, engineering, business, and so on,

or they were pursuing a degree in some aspect of Middle Eastern history, politics, sociology, literature. Very rarely did they come to Oxford or Harvard to study American or European history. I know a very intelligent young Lebanese graduate student in the process of acquiring a Ph.D. in history from a leading American university. For at least three years I have been pleading with him to write his dissertation and do his research on American (or French, or African, or Indian) history, but instead he has persisted in his wish to write something about Lebanon, and only about Lebanon. This is a common pattern: to come all the way to the West in order to study your own country in the West, thus being further ghettoized. In the meantime there are literally thousands of American scholars whose specialties are the Middle East, China, India, Africa, Latin America. Is there today a major Arab or Islamic contribution to the study of America, or to research on Europe, contributions that would change the nature of the subject, the way European and American contributions to the study of the Arabs or Islam dominate those fields, much more even than Arab contributions?

But even that isn't the main problem. There are whole worlds beyond the West, such as the great civilizations of China, India, Japan, and of course Africa itself. Medieval Arab historians, travelers, geographers were fascinated by these places, and wrote enduringly interesting works about them. This is not as true of modern Arab culture. One way to break the hold of the West on us is to look elsewhere for relationships, cultural formations, sciences. The reasons we are so obsessed with and strangely dependent on the West (whether we hate or love it) is that we have remained so contained within the West, and are consequently so ignorant of other worlds. To change this pattern a new courage and spirit of intellectual adventure is required, very different from the defensiveness and insecurity that keeps so many of us within our own little orbit unwilling to venture out, analyze, criticize, and learn from a standpoint of real knowledge and real sense of self.

The political failures of the past few years have played a part in this. Being completely focused on yourself means that you are far more likely to fall prey to a stronger, more secure and dominating culture. What you don't like or are afraid of you say you do not "recognize": forty years ago this was the core of Arab policy toward Israel, which quite literally has produced nothing for the Arabs and more or less everything for Israel. The sense of capitulation toward Israel and the United States that replaced defiant "non-recognition" and is now so prevalent among our political elites, derives in the end from an absence of self-confidence and a spirit of passivity. Why not study and deal with others the way we are studied by them? Why not feel that it is possible therefore to challenge the supremacy of Israel and the United States neither from a standpoint of blind rejectionism nor from one of exaggerated servility, both of them signs of inadequacy and immaturity? Moreover, rejectionism and servility are in the end little more than a reproduction of the colonial relationship between a weaker and a stronger culture.

I find it unimaginable, for instance, that Jordan, the PLO, and Egypt (perhaps to be followed by several other Arab states) have made peace with Israel at the same time as there isn't a single specialized institute or university department in any of these countries whose main object of study is Israel. Israel of course has several important institutions and departments that are full of experts on each Arab country. How revealing and symptomatic it is that despite our relatively undemocratic societies they are full of foreign researchers studying us, whereas we have devoted very little social and cultural capital to the study of others. It would be quite wrong to ban such researchers from our midst, thereby closing ourselves off even more: but rather we should make it a policy to expand, open out, venture forth into other societies and cultures, to take more, rather than less part in the world of nations.

Modernity is not consumerism, or big cars, or lots of television sets. It is being an integral part of the world of your time, rather

than its fool or slave. The Palestinian failure as represented by the Gaza-Jericho agreement is that poorly educated, hopelessly unaware and unmodern leaders and, yes, a whole people entered into a stupidly limiting agreement with an opponent who knew more about Palestinians than we knew about that opponent. In what world do Yasir Arafat and Abu Mazen live when all last year they kept proclaiming their trust and confidence in Israel, an Israel that had dispossessed our people, and continues to this minute to confiscate land, to increase settlements, kill, and incarcerate thousands of Palestinians? Such Palestinian policies are the result not only of ignorance and incompetence, but also of servility and a total absence of self-knowledge. As a result Arafat can do nothing without Israel's permission and, as General Danny Rothschild said the other day, "early empowerment" means nothing but services rendered to residents, whereas Israel maintains itself as the real power in Gaza and the West Bank.

For those of us who do not have power but are aghast at the shameful spectacle today in Gaza, we cannot simply say that Arafat is our leader and we must be loyal to him. We have to keep demanding not just that he resign as incompetent but that any future leaders must have a sense of self-dignity as well as a real knowledge of Israel and the United States. What we must have in other words are decolonized minds, not men and women who can neither liberate themselves nor their own people. The crucial factors here are the will, and the mind. For even if one has 40,000 policemen and bureaucrats, and perhaps even a little state, the general condition remains enslavement and unawareness.

*Al-Hayat*, September 16, 1994



## A Cold and Ungenerous Peace

*(October 1994)*

That the 1994 Nobel Peace prize was awarded to two Israelis (Rabin and Peres) and (grudgingly) to one Palestinian symbolizes the increasing gap between substance and appearance so far as Middle East peace is concerned. The prize preserves the lopsided imbalance between Israel and its Palestinian interlocutors: for despite its astonishing concessions and the continuing depredations of its people's suffering at the hands of a continuing Israeli military occupation, the PLO is rated at half the value of its partner in peace. In the meantime most of the almost six million Palestinians have only Arafat's presence in Gaza—a decidedly mixed blessing—to be thankful for. Self-determination and sovereignty are still denied them. But of course the steam-roller peace process presses on, celebrated by the victors, and the U.S. media, which except fitfully has practically given up on reporting the actions of the Israeli military.

And despite the dismal events of the past years, Israel continues to be immune from criticism of its outrageous behavior in the American "peace process." This is one of the most striking aspects of the twelve months that have elapsed since the Declaration of Principles and the Gaza-Jericho agreements were signed on the White House lawn. The Israeli record is so disgraceful, the list of

its betrayals even of its meager promises to the Palestinians so long, its shameless disregard of international norms of conduct so flagrant as to make one wonder how a relatively small country can get away with so much, and even gain the distinction of a Nobel Peace Prize for not one but two of its political leaders.

Part of the blame rests with the PLO's current leadership, which from the very beginning saluted Israel's courage in granting Palestinians the right to extremely limited self-rule, which even yet is far from realization. Why the victims of Israel's destructive policies of dispossession, military occupation, and repression should actually thank their persecutors for a grudging admission that they exist is difficult to understand, although Mahmoud Abbas's (Abu Mazen) recently published memoirs provide at least one important clue. It is that the psychological need for recognition from "the Zionist movement" was so great in the minds of people like himself and Arafat as to override almost all other considerations, especially those that concerned the Palestinians' real, long-term interests. This is an indication of how insecure the Palestinian negotiators at Oslo were in their own cause, achievements, and history and how they mistook the satisfaction of their own personal need for acknowledgment for real political victory. But what they got from Rabin was scarcely that. As the Palestinian economist Burhan Dajani has shown,\* the one-sentence "recognition" of the Palestinians by Rabin actually acknowledged no Palestinian rights, but merely an organization said to represent that people as "a suitable negotiating partner." In other words Rabin recognized the Palestinians only minimally in order to wrest concession after concession from leaders who were taken to be speaking for an entire people, whose losses, suffering, and future were consequently handed over to Israel to dispose of as it wished.

What needs to be granted is that far from acting with magna-

\*In "The September 1993 Israeli-PLO Documents: A Textual Analysis," *Journal of Palestine Studies* #91, xxiii, 3 (Spring 1994), pp. 5-7.

nimity and vision Rabin used the Palestinians' self-deception and gullibility to humiliate and further subjugate them, all the while proclaiming the dawning of a new age of peace and prosperity. By the time of the May 4 Cairo agreement Rabin's victory was complete. On May 12, 1994 Meron Benvenisti said in *Ha'aretz* of the Cairo agreement signed between the PLO and Israel:

A perusal of hundreds of the Agreement's pages can leave no doubt about who is the winner and the loser in this deal. By seeing through all the lofty phraseology, all deliberate disinformation, hundreds of pettifogging sections, subsections, appendices and protocols, one can clearly recognize that Israeli victory was absolute and Palestinian defeat abject.

Above all Jerusalem, whose status quo was changing by the minute—since September 1993 Israel had confiscated over 80,000 dunums of Palestinian land, most of it in the Jerusalem area—was ruled off-limits by Israel, and when the agreement with Jordan was signed in late July, Rabin and Peres went out of their way to issue invitations to King Hussein to pray in Jerusalem, a privilege deliberately withheld from Arafat.

What especially bothered me was that the Israelis had compelled the weak, incapacitated Palestinian negotiating team (controlled totally by Arafat) to accept the principle that the areas of limited autonomy and early empowerment which were handed back were returned to the Palestinians without regard for the twenty-seven years of military occupation during which the Israelis destroyed the infrastructure deliberately. In principle this meant that far from vacating the Occupied Territories the Israelis were forcing the Palestinians to comply with continued occupation and, more important, to condone past Israeli practices without reparations. To take a relatively small example, the over 2,000 Palestinian houses that were destroyed by the Israeli military during the *intifada* were not accounted for. Gaza, which the American econo-

mist Sara Roy (see page 46) has characterized as an area purposely de-developed by the Israelis, its population pauperized, its sanitation, health, educational, residential, and commercial services reduced to nothing by them, was dumped in Arafat's lap to rule even though they had made the place impossible to sustain. And the PLO leadership signed an agreement with Israel in effect saying that Israelis were absolutely without responsibility for all the crimes they committed. All the infractions against the Geneva Conventions, UN Resolutions, the international norms of behavior whose contravention the PLO had itself played an important role before 1993 in documenting and charging the Israelis with, were simply forgiven by Arafat and his people.

Even Israelis were shocked at so callous and arrogant an attitude on the part of their government. Whereas few Palestinians have raised their voices against this staggering bit of moral idiocy, prominent Israelis have published denunciations of their government. Shulamit Aloni, herself a member of Rabin's government, said after the Cairo pact was signed, that had the British in 1948 made conditional their withdrawal from Palestine upon as many restrictions and disabilities as imposed by the Israelis on the Palestinians there could never have been a state of Israel. In a long and passionate article published on May 15 in *Ha'aretz*, Danny Rubenstein, Israel's principal (and best) commentator on Palestinian affairs, noted that there was a major difference between the thirty years of British rule in Palestine (1918–48) and the twenty-seven years of the Israeli occupation regime in the Occupied Territories. Whereas during their stay in Palestine the British built the port of Haifa and several airports, six power stations that supplied all of Palestine with electricity, and dozens of roads and public buildings that are still in use in Israel today, the Israelis did not build anything in the Occupied Territories except prisons, now ironically being used by Palestinian police. Then he adds:

I find it curious that the Israelis have the gall to deplore the fact that no infrastructure allowing an orderly transfer of

authority exists in the Territories. After 27 years of oppression, with the Israeli authorities doing all they could to cripple Palestinian society, how could it be otherwise? The Israelis deploring this fact seem to forget how many Palestinians (including hundreds of Fatah militants) have been deported, how many municipal councils dismantled, how many institutions closed, how many travel limitations imposed, and how many newspapers, other publications and the entire variety of cultural activities most rigidly censored. Under those conditions, the underdeveloped Palestinian economy of 1967 had no chance to compete with the well-functioning and generously subsidized Israeli economy, and Palestinian welfare services were prevented from developing beyond what they had been in 1967.

Since the autonomy went into effect, and Arafat returned to Gaza, there have been daily reports buried in the back pages of Arab and a few European journals (and in no American newspapers except for the *Christian Science Monitor*, thanks to the extraordinary reporting of Lamis Andoni) of how the Israelis have continued to humiliate and abuse the Palestinians. Having taken nearly everything from them they are anxious to take whatever little is left. More checkpoints have been added on the West Bank. Thousands of prisoners remain in Israeli jails, and those who are freed are required to return either to Gaza or Jericho, not to their homes. The undercover units continue in their devastations. Visiting PLO officials are forbidden to enter Jerusalem, or are kept waiting for hours at the border; no Palestinian, even Arafat, can enter or leave any part of Palestine without Israeli permission. Many of the main provisions of the Oslo Declaration have been brazenly flouted. The carefully specified timetable in it has been thrown out, with the cavalier pronouncement by Rabin that "no dates are sacred." Passage between Gaza and Jericho, sixty miles away from each other, was supposed to have been guaranteed for

Palestinians; until now it has not been, thereby violating the principle granted by the Israelis that the West Bank and Gaza are one territorial unit. Elections were supposed to have taken place soon after the Oslo Declaration was signed, but there have been no elections, and no agreement on what they are supposed to be for, who is to vote and how, and so on. Palestinians displaced in 1967 are supposed to be able to return, but the joint committee intended for facilitating this hasn't even been named. The Paris donors meeting of September 9 was torpedoed by the Israelis as a punishment to the Palestinians for daring to schedule \$4 million of medical projects in East Jerusalem. In the meantime, and completely against the letter and the spirit of the Oslo agreement, Israel has continued to change the status quo in Jerusalem, and to build a huge road system connecting the settlements, bypassing Arab villages and towns, throughout the Occupied Territories. Israel has continually refused to even describe itself as an occupying power.

The Israeli press is full of reports of how during meetings between high-level Palestinians and Israelis the former are routinely humiliated by their supposed partners in peace. Zeev Schiff, the well-known Israeli commentator who is extremely close to the Israeli cabinet, reported on August 16 in *Ha'aretz* that at their most recent encounter Arafat and Rabin did everything but spit at each other, with Arafat conceding frequently to Rabin, "You are stronger than I am." In the meantime the Israelis parade themselves in Western capitals as visionary men of peace, complimented by Clinton and Mitterrand, honored with even more unconditionally given American money, almost \$5 billion during the past year alone. Left to pay teachers' salaries, hospital expenses, and those of the tiny but still growing Palestinian police force, Arafat must go from place to place begging for a little more money (although he has managed to set up an expensive intelligence operation for himself with at least six and possibly as many as nine branches all spying on each other).

There is no magnanimity, no dignity, no generosity in the Is-

raelis, nor should it ever be expected from them, that is, until the Palestinian will to resist and fight is re-awakened and Israelis are forced to pay a price for their behavior. The great tragedy for the Palestinian people of this American "peace process" is that it exacted the ultimate price from Yasir Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas and they were either too intoxicated with their own momentary importance or too naive and ignorant to see it. In the end, however, these men also are casualties of Israel's systematic war against us. Occasional cries of help emanating from the forlorn and frustrated Arafat in Gaza will do nothing now to ease the pressure. As General Danny Rothschild reminded reporters (*Al-Hayat*, August 25), "We have retained power in the Occupied Territories, despite the transfer of authority that recently took place." When he was asked about the Palestinian National Authority's power he said that its authority was limited to providing "services to residents." Nothing else.

What sort of leaders accept such an arrangement on behalf of their people from a state and a mentality that has waged unremitting war against that people for at least half a century? What sort of leaders describe their failures as a triumph of politics and diplomacy even as they and their people are forced to endure continued enslavement and humiliation? Who is worse, more dishonest and cruel: the bloody-minded Israeli "peace-maker" or the complicit Palestinian? When will the two peoples at last wake up to what their leaders have wrought?

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, September 27, 1994

*Al-Hayat*, October 12, 1994

*London Review of Books*, October 20, 1994

*The Progressive*, December 1994

## Violence in a Good Cause?

*(November 1994)*

Two events in the same week were given international media prominence: the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Hamas, and the stabbing of Naguib Mahfouz in Cairo by what the press has called Islamic extremists. Because these events occurred at roughly the same time, followed a few days later by a devastatingly large bomb on a Tel Aviv bus, the Islamic component in each was therefore emphasized, although this time there was less of the usual outpouring of opinion about the innate violence, repressiveness, and irrationality of Islam that has been so common in the West for the past two decades. What emerged instead was a chorus of approval for the peace process as in effect standing against, perhaps even stopping, Islamic violence. After all, major Arab and Muslim figures like Yasir Arafat, King Hussein, and Hafez al-Assad have been re-conceived in the European and American media as daring apostles of Western-style peace and rationality, so the anonymous perpetrators of these acts of violence could in turn be imagined as either marginal or ineffective, much as—during the same time period—the lamentable Saddam Hussein was also portrayed. In addition, the “victorious” Israeli soldiers who rescued their hapless comrade near Ramallah by killing seven people, seemed to vindicate the standard Israeli policy in peace and war of never making



the slightest concession, even to common sense and humanity. Instead Rabin's decision was interpreted as a stand against Hamas, now synonymous with terror and opposition to peace; that so many people were needlessly killed in the process seemed to justify further Israeli toughness against terror. On the same day of course, Rabin, Peres, and Arafat were announced as sharing the Nobel Peace Prize; that further swelled the chorus for the peace process.

Yet a number of distinctions and demurrals have to be entered, if only to try to introduce a universal standard of truth and justice in the shifting languages and landscapes of our time. Mahfouz's stabbing highlights the total bankruptcy of a movement that prefers killing to dialogue, intolerance to debate, and paranoia in favor of real politics. But it is hypocritical now to say of Mahfouz's assailants only that they are crude fanatics who have no respect for intellectual or artistic expression, without at the same time noting that some of Mahfouz's work has already been officially banned in Egypt itself. One cannot have it both ways. Either one is for real freedom of speech or one is against it. There is little basic distinction in the end between authorities who reserve the right for themselves to ban, imprison, or otherwise punish writers who speak their minds, and those fanatics who take to stabbing a famous author just because he seems to them to be an offense to their supposed idea of religion. Shockingly, there is no more artistic and journalistic freedom in the Arab world during this supposed era of peace than there was during the war years after 1948.

The attack itself is deeply troubling, suggesting the kind of murderous campaign against intellectuals taking place in Algeria. The atmosphere of terror against writers and artists who are deemed an offense to Islam must therefore be denounced categorically. I remain convinced, however, that the real problem at the root of these outrages is the general political failure—secular as well as religious—to come to proper terms with a democratic politics. That is what the Arab world needs now.

Where will this come from? No government or religious au-

thority in history has ever willingly limited its powers, or conceded on its own that its powers should be circumscribed. Marxism teaches that class conflict produces improvements in the lot of the relatively underprivileged, but as we know from the case of Eastern Europe the theory provided no real antidote to the growth of undemocratic, over-inflated bureaucracies and parties. A special burden is thus laid on the intellectual conscience today not to accept general theories or world visions—secular or religious—that postpone or defer the question of democracy, and in particular freedom of expression, until some later time. The time is now, and no amount of verbal fumbling and shuffling is adequate to an occasion that is both urgent and demanding. Support for our cause by European and American intellectuals is welcome of course, but such support from a distance and with no previous history of interest in Arab or Islamic culture is devalued by the fact that the West has little real regard for our world or work. In any event, no matter how sincere it is, it is no substitute for what we must face up to in our own society.

Many of the American reports about Mahfouz's stabbing suggest that he is anathema to Islamic fundamentalists because he has been in favor of peace with Israel. Whether that is true or not, the issue itself has particular significance at this moment. A recent Arab writers' conference in Tunis sponsored by UNESCO nearly fell apart because someone—it is not clear who—invited an Israeli writer to attend. His presence on its own merits was insignificant, but most of the writers there objected to his participation because they did not want cultural "normalization" with Israel, whereas a few others did. In the cases of Egypt, Jordan, and the PLO, they have signed official peace decisions taken by leaders without any democratic debate. Intellectuals are thus placed in a dilemma; either they appear rejectionist and anti-peace, or they seem like instruments of their governments and of Israel by going along with the peace more or less opportunistically.

The fact is that in both instances Arab intellectuals today have

few alternatives. Rejection of normalization as a defense of national culture sounds acceptable in principle, but does not bear much looking into. What sort of national culture is it if it cannot survive contacts with others? And when national governments settle with Israel, why is it somehow acceptable to work and collaborate with those governments and their institutions but illegitimate to have anything to do with Israel?

Because for at least three generations we have identified culture, intellectual responsibility, and artistic creativity directly with nationalism and the national state, there is now extremely limited space for the individual intellectual to stand and to speak his/her own mind freely. Politics has overtaken everything, with the result that our final alternative is, alas, rejection. But rejection on its own is, I believe, neither edifying, nor productive, nor in the end very nourishing. This is why I firmly believe that for the intellectual to be an intellectual in the full secular sense of the term he or she must remain unaffiliated with state, religion, or authority. Only then can there be a space in which to exercise intellectual analysis and will and to be able to express them openly and freely. Only in such a way can we advance beyond rejection into a realm that is genuinely ours, and not an outpost of state power. In the final analysis this must first be an individual matter: a collective intellectual position may emerge later.

As to Hamas and its actions in the Occupied Territories, I know that the organization is one of the only ones expressing resistance and that the kidnapping of the soldier of an occupying army is morally less unacceptable than abducting or killing civilians riding a bus. Yet for any secular intellectual to make a devil's pact with a religious movement is, I think, to substitute convenience for principle. It is simply the other side of the pact we made during the past several decades with dictatorship and nationalism, for example, supporting Saddam Hussein when he went to war with "the Persians." A second, perhaps even more important, point is that, as resistance, such actions do us little good, and except for the *intifada*,

resemble far too much the whole history of Palestinian resistance, full of loss, individual heroism, and no coordinated strategic goal. Bombing civilian buses, on the other hand, is criminal and useless. The real issue now between us and the Israelis is that they build roads and settlements to violate Palestine's sovereignty and have annexed Jerusalem. Much of the labor for that is Palestinian. Why have we no strategy for inhibiting that particular activity? Why can't we see that brutal though Israeli actions were in the kidnapping case they were a net loss to us: more humiliating pressure was placed on Arafat, no prisoners were released, and resistance to Israel appeared even more irrational, terrorist, and "fundamentalist."

Here too there is intellectual responsibility for saying that resistance cannot only take the form of rejection. We must as an alternative revive the secular ideals of liberation and enlightenment and give them concrete applicability to our struggle as a people. Above all we need to think in terms of effectiveness, of actually gaining some ground, and not in terms of pure theory or abstraction. Such a shift from the discourse of politics to an authentic intellectual idiom is long overdue.

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*Al-Hayat*, November 10, 1994

## Changes for the Worse

*(Late November 1994)*

Recent articles in the Arab press concerning U.S. mid-term elections have impressed me yet again with how much disinformation and misrepresentation of the United States is regularly and uncritically carried by that media. One such article by James Zoghby calmly prophesied a major victory for the Democrats in the then upcoming mid-term elections. Zoghby himself had recently accompanied the president on his tour of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia and was reporting on Clinton's numerous successes before and during the trip. He has become a major foreign-policy president, Zoghby said, and this will inspire members of his party back home to take bold initiatives and act in the entirely admirable and bold spirit of the Middle East peace process. In his barely restrained praise for everything about Clinton, Zoghby neglected to mention, for instance, how empty and hackneyed the president's speeches in the Middle East were (he seemed obsessed, in the best Israeli style, with what he kept calling "terrorism") and how his presence in the Middle East on the very eve of crucially important mid-term elections was due to the fact that most of the prominent Democratic candidates fighting for their lives in the United States had asked Clinton *not* to appear in their states. Aside from being an unsuccessful prophet of the im-

pending election results, Zoghby was also writing as if he were a presidential publicist, not a journalist or impartial expert on the American scene.

Far from giving the Republicans only a few extra Congressional seats, as Zoghby prophesied, and far from maintaining Democratic control of both Houses intact, the elections gave the Republicans an absolute majority—and hence control—in the House and the Senate. For the first time in forty years then they have an imposing power base in the American legislative process. Not a single Republican incumbent running for local, state, or national office was defeated, although two prominent figures running as Republicans—Ollie North, an indicted perjurer, in Virginia, and Michael Huffington, a fabulously wealthy California congressman who has literally said and done nothing during his two years in Washington but who spent \$30 million trying to get himself elected, and whose wife is a disciple of a far-out religious cult leader—were dramatically defeated. The Republicans also gained the influential Speaker of the House position (in the person of the now very powerful and demagogic Newt Gingrich) and Senate Majority leader (Senator Bob Dole of Kansas). Most notable were the losses of the two biggest Democratic governors, Mario Cuomo of New York, and Ann Richards of Texas. They were defeated by two candidates George Pataki in New York and George Bush, Jr. in Texas—running on simple-minded, completely unrealistic platforms that capitalized on voter anger and an almost petulant impatience with taxes. Pataki has promised to cut income tax by 25 percent, although the day after he won he announced that he was shocked to find out suddenly that the State of New York was projecting a \$4 billion budget deficit for next (that is, his first) year. How he is going to cut taxes and somehow close the deficit he hasn't yet said.

The main feature of the election, however, was that it provided the most dramatic evidence of American disapproval of President Clinton. Rarely has a president appeared both so unpopular and so

incapable of doing anything about it. He has failed to keep most, if not all of his campaign promises and, with things flying out of control, he has projected no strength of purpose, no clear message, no central theme to engage the voters. He promised to let gays into the military, then backed off. He said he would deliver a new medical reform bill and for two years, along with First Lady Hillary, conducted meetings and hearings about it with increasing numbers of drug companies, doctors' associations, and insurance executives. In fact he has sought the assistance of exactly those people and groups who would not want any change in the present situation. The result was obvious: no bill. He said he would help the Bosnians, he would produce a new policy on welfare, on the deficit, on a number of other things, but he has not. His crime bill was largely an appeasement of the Republicans. Not surprisingly then, it was his own constituency of Democrats who deserted him during the elections, which in any case only drew 39 percent of the electorate. Most Democrats either voted for Republicans or simply abstained. Clinton had no message, no definite image to deliver, and so members of his own party could not support him.

It made matters worse, I think, that whenever he was challenged from the right, Clinton moved to the right. That was certainly the case in the Middle East, where he went along with everything the Israeli lobby—which effectively directs U.S. policy—has wanted. He changed the United States position on Israeli settlements, for example, no longer holding to the line taken by every other president before him, that the settlements were an obstacle to peace. He has made no comment about the concrete deterioration of Palestinian life as a result of Israeli military occupation policy. No president has been as Zionist as he. Thus Clinton set a very low standard for members of his own party to follow. When Pataki in New York said he would cut taxes, Cuomo the Democrat tried to shout as loudly as Pataki that he would cut them even more. Ann Richards, the Texas Democrat, competed with George Bush, Jr. as to who would, or had, built more prisons. Middle-class

voters swung from the Democrats to the Republicans, where they joined an extremely large group of fundamentalist, born-again and right-wing Christian voters who in the end delivered the vote to the Republicans.

The elections of 1994 were especially unusual in that on a very wide front they reflected a quite irrational anti-Washington and anti-government mood. There was considerable irony to the situation of many leading Republicans actively campaigning to be sent by their constituents to Washington in order to work against, minimize, and in as many ways as possible eliminate the power of Washington. America is a complex country, but the current mood has never been more contradictory and frightening. To the extent that he set the tone for the elections and for the "Contract with America" proclaimed by the Republican party as a whole, Congressman Gingrich was in a class by himself. A figure combining great intelligence with resentment and scorn, he focused the latent xenophobia at this society's core, accusing both President Clinton and his wife of being members of what he called the "counter-culture." In effect he suggested that unless you were for "traditional" (and never defined) values, for the family (and therefore against gays, single people, ethnics, abortion, and divorce), for an essentially white and nonminority view of the United States, then you were a pervert, a foreign upstart, and a dangerous revolutionary.

The worst thing about Gingrich and his Republican colleagues is that now they will have a chance to put their political program into effect. Despite brave noises from Clinton—as president he is entitled to veto legislation that he does not agree with—the more likely reality is that he will move even closer to the Republicans by compromising with them on their program. He will do so not because he thinks that they are right, but because as a politician he believes that he can get more votes for himself in 1996. It seems most unlikely, however, despite all his efforts, that he will be reelected for a second term.



The Republican program is based on a few simple and, in my opinion, deeply flawed and unrealistic principles. One is that government is bad: it has a tendency to spend too much, it coddles and otherwise “spoils” the poor and the disadvantaged with welfare programs, housing assistance, and the like, and worst of all, according to conservative Republican dogma, it infringes on personal liberty. Thus taxes are to be cut even though the country faces even more ruinous deficits, and anything that suggests “regulation” will be reduced or eliminated entirely. What is frequently referred to by Republicans as a free and unregulated market means in effect that large corporations are entitled to do what they please without reference to the public interest. If in the past the government regulated and taxed profits, or if it prevented monopolies from fixing prices, or if it prosecuted corporate bandits, these practices, which still gave corporations a great deal of leeway, are now to be curtailed.

The second major principle is that citizens should not be helped by the government beyond an extremely limited minimum. So, as I mentioned, citizens should not be entitled even to expect medical insurance; that is they should be left entirely to the private sector which, according to the notion that government must not regulate the “free” market, means in effect that private insurance companies, doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical corporations should be allowed to charge whatever they wish. I am one of the fortunate people who happens to have insurance provided by my university, which because it is not obliged to provide any coverage at all gives me the minimum. Most of the times my expenses as someone with a serious chronic illness are covered to about 80 percent. Many of my tests, for example, cost \$2,000 and above, and hospital stays are usually billed at about \$1,000 a day; a drug I must often take twice a day costs about \$20 per pill. I am required to take three doses a week of a medicine that is billed at \$120 a dose. If I were poor, or not covered by any insurance, the results would be catastrophic. Similarly Gingrich has vowed to end welfare programs that help

the destitute, the disadvantaged, and the unemployed. Whatever public money is to be generated from his greatly cut tax scheme would not go to the citizens but to defense, to “making America strong.”

Politically and culturally then, the government would not regulate business but would try instead to regulate personal behavior. Prayer would be reintroduced into the schools. Laws against pornography would be enacted and, Gingrich and others have hinted, the government would prevent certain books and ideas from having any currency whatever. The one question they don't answer is who would regulate the regulators, and who would guarantee that a century of progressive social policy would not be completely unraveled in a matter of weeks?

So far as foreign affairs are concerned—with the most reactionary senator in Washington, Jesse Helms, about to take over the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—we would have to expect a new aggressiveness in foreign affairs: there would be little or no money (except for Israel) for foreign aid, there would be more emphasis on selling unnecessary arms to Third World countries, and there would be a harsher policy of retribution and revenge against countries which are perceived to be “against” the United States or resisting it in some way. Israel's enormous foreign-aid allocation may be threatened (although Helms is not only very anti-aid but also a rabid supporter of the Likud); the fact is therefore that the PLO, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and others would be foolish to entertain any hope of a Marshall Plan or any such thing. The mood of the Congress now is quite isolationist; during the recent election campaign foreign policy was scarcely mentioned, much less debated.

For the first time in the post-war history of the United States therefore a remarkably conservative Congress and a deeply uncertain and unfocused president will somehow have to work together on an agenda set up by the extreme right. There may be military assistance programs for the Arabs, but on a greatly reduced scale.

The kind of donations that might have been expected for development will now have to come from corporations looking for investments and profits. Above all, except for assurances that Israel is and will remain the most powerful of all Middle Eastern countries, and that Iran be contained, Arab and in particular Palestinian goals will, I think, be of no interest at all to the United States. A dark period.

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*Al-Hayat*, December 6, 1994

## Two Peoples in One Land

(December 1994)

There is now a glaring, almost surreal disparity between what the overwhelming majority of Palestinians see in their present situation and what, abetted by a selective reading of the editorializing Western media, U.S. and Israeli policy makers see. A perfect embodiment of this gap was starkly displayed in two side-by-side articles in the December 3 issue of *The New York Times*. One headline read "Support for Arafat in Gaza Replaced by Wide Enmity." The other was "Rule by Palestinians Improving, U.S. Says."

Ironically, most Palestinians and Israelis are now exhausted by the futility of conflict, and in various ways have expressed their willingness to live as neighbors in two independent states. Yet neither Rabin nor Arafat has had the courage to let this vision of mutuality and equality guide their actions. Both of them opted instead for a cowardly and protracted "interim" arrangement that got them accolades and the Nobel Prize for "peace" without any change in their real situations.

It has been breathtaking to watch the major television and print outlets go along with, and even endorse, their accommodation without regard for what has actually been happening to the day-to-day reality of Palestinian life, where insecurity, unemployment, frustration, and desperation have become almost unendurable. The

“peace process” has been discussed in the U.S. media only by its supporters, who have also refused to draw the conclusions that the hard evidence warrants. In addition, many Jewish liberals who have long been troubled by Israel’s occupation policies, have convinced themselves—despite the facts—that all is well, and that Arafat is now *their* only answer to Palestinian needs.

The genius of the DOP (Declaration of Principles) was that Israel caught an isolated, bankrupt, and desperate PLO leader in a dilemma whose resolution could have been easily predicted. Having reviled and ignored him for the twenty years during which he really represented his dispossessed people’s national goals, Israel now offered him either an interim settlement that would personally give him limited municipal authority over Gaza and Jericho, with his own police force and the “right” to deliver services to Palestinian residents; or he would face his total marginalization as a result of his catastrophic misjudgments and failures, his alliance with Saddam Hussein being only the latest. He took the former, of course.

For Israel and its Western supporters this was an almost unimaginable coup. The interim settlement left it to do what it wished in Jerusalem, which was seized during the 1967 war, illegally annexed a month later, and vastly expanded to 25 percent of the West Bank. Everything designated a “final status” issue was postponed for five years, although no limit was placed on additional Israeli settlements, expropriations, number of settlers, water use. Israel retained physical control of land, borders, internal and external security as well as the well-being of its now over 300,000 settlers. The army was to withdraw from some places in order to redeploy elsewhere. Arafat renounced the *intifada* and the notion of resistance, to say nothing of even the memory of all that Israel had destroyed or confiscated since 1948, whereas Israel gave up virtually nothing of substance. The PLO recognized Israel’s right to exist in peace with no reciprocation from Israel, and no undertaking from it as to what its borders were. As a people numbering six

million the Palestinians were denied the right to meaningful self-determination, and Israel categorically opposed the right of return or compensation to the over 50 percent of Palestinians who live outside historical Palestine as stateless refugees. All development monies for the autonomous regions had to be approved by Israel, which could authorize or prevent projects as its own interests were affected. No wonder that Rabin and Peres have been jubilant about the "peace" that also brought them an entrée into the rest of the Arab world with all of Israel's strategic goals realized intact. That the Likud spokesman Benjamin Netanyahu has complained about the DOP is an indication of how rigidly ideological in Israel's right wing is the theory that *all* of the "land of Israel" should be held by the Jewish state without even the appearance of sharing it with anyone at all.

In the subsequent Paris and Cairo agreements Arafat gave up even more. Borders were to be controlled by Israeli soldiers, though in true form-over-substance fashion Arafat won the right to have his own police there too; in any case, to leave or enter Gaza he needed Israeli permission. Every appointment to the Palestine Authority, every law, every change in procedures was to be submitted to Israel for approval. Above all Arafat was held responsible to Israel for order in Gaza (a headache for Israel) thus turning him in the eyes of his people into Israel's man.

In effect then Arafat's capitulation saved his own skin for a time, but also converted him from being the leader of his people's quest for independence into Israel's Buthelezi, or the administrator of a Bantustan, or the head of a Vichy government (all of them unflattering categories). Quite as one supposed, Arafat proceeded to fulfill Israel's role for him, and in the process lost his own people's support. Unilaterally he appointed cronies and mediocrities to the various positions of the Authority. He made deals with foreign companies and various middlemen which gave him control over projects and over profits not accountable for nor reported in any public document, but accruing directly to his Palestine Authority.

His number one priority remained to keep himself head of Gaza. The dribble of development money entitled him, he believed, to dispose of it as he wished, unaccountable, undemocratic, aloof and tragically, woefully incompetent to do anything like building a state. Arafat has had no experience of normal civilian life. Poorly educated, megalomaniac, and now living in the terminal dream world of all petty dictators, he cannot and never will be reformed.

The Israelis have reneged even on the schedule they agreed to in the DOP. "No dates are sacred," said Rabin. Gaza and Jericho are sixty miles apart, yet the free passage between them promised by Israel has not been granted. The depredations of Israeli military rule continue all over the territories, with torture rampant (according to Ronnie Shaked, *Yediot Aharonot*, December 1, 1994), houses sealed or destroyed, arrests and summary detentions the rule of the day. Elections have been postponed again and again, although I fail to understand how "free and democratic" elections can be held in the warlike presence of an Israeli occupation army plus Fatah as well as Hamas armed militants. And meanwhile unemployment in Gaza is rising to 60 percent, the streets are only slightly less filthy than before, hope (like food) is in short supply, and Israel can open or shut the borders at will. At least 6,000 Palestinians sit in Israeli jails.

Still, the United States thinks that Palestinians are "improving" in such conditions. President Clinton is indifferent to the daily abuses of Israeli power, and has never said a word in public that expresses the slightest understanding of the Palestinian calvary. When he was in the Middle East last month to attract attention for his faltering presidency he seemed obsessed, Israeli-style, in his speeches with "terrorism," as if everyone who opposed his peace was only violent, fundamentalist, irrational. He seemed totally unwilling to comprehend that for all its unsavory qualities Hamas, formerly encouraged by Israel to undercut the PLO during the *intifada*, is a protest movement using terrorism to express the justifiable frustration and anger of almost the entire Palestinian population.

U.S. policy has shifted under the influence of a cipher-like Secre-

tary of State, and the small group of totally pro-Israeli officials who really run Middle East policy, chief among them Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk. Ross is a Soviet expert and resident scholar at the pro-Israeli Washington Institute of Near East Policy. Whereas the Bush administration had for a time opposed Israeli settlements as illegal, under the Christopher-Ross-Indyk regime the new position refuses to characterize them in the same way; nor does it take a disapproving position on Israeli building in East Jerusalem; nor does it define the Territories as "occupied." Ambassador Edward Djerejian's testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Middle East Subcommittee on March 9, 1993 and Ambassador Pelletreau's testimony before the same committee, March 1 and October 4, 1994 are both quite explicit on the changes. More insidiously than ever, the core of U.S. policy has become fixated on Israel's security, and unconditional Arab subservience.

Americans who recoil from the notion that their country's foreign policy requires the subservience of others should understand exactly how the protection of Israel's security translates into reality for non-Jewish residents in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Israel's vastly superior military might can set up checkpoints and barriers at will, at which Palestinians must go through endless interrogation and search, while Jewish settlers wander about with complete freedom. After the massacre of Palestinian worshippers at Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque last February, the entire Palestinian population of the city was placed under curfew. In addition Palestinian leaders such as Yasir Arafat are required to submit to unending declarations of their concern for Israeli security.

Arafat's acceptance of these terms has now made it impossible for him even to hold a meeting of the PLO Executive Committee. He has been unable to convene the Palestine National Council (PNC). Not a single constitutionally legitimate Palestinian body has gone along with any of his decisions or agreements with Israel. Only a handful of opportunistic intellectuals and die-hard apparatchiks who are dependent on him still speak optimistically of the



skewed “peace” that Israel and the United States are so unwisely pressing on the whole region.

As the peace process unravels in “autonomous” Palestine, some Palestinians now feel that non-cooperation with the Authority is the only responsible political position to take. Arafat, they surmise, will soon outlive his usefulness, even to Israel and the United States. He can no longer enter public places without being booed and attacked; indiscriminate violence, collective arrests, reports of torture, censorship, and thuglike behavior are the hallmarks of his visionless, clumsy leadership. And the future is very bleak indeed, with more civil disobedience and violence in the offing. Sooner or later Israel and the United States may come to their senses, even if they can keep up the ludicrous charade a bit longer. But unless more mainstream Western journalists, liberal Jews, and American taxpayers open their eyes to what in fact is happening on the ground, even lots of money will be useless. Without seriously addressing the underlying substance of the Palestinian case, no peace can ever really be possible.

What is to be done? A curious feature of Arafat’s presence in Gaza is that the organization he theoretically still heads, but does not actually lead, the PLO, still exists as a diaspora but nevertheless national organization with representative offices at the UN, and in a large number of countries. The Palestine National Council, the PLO’s legislative arm, has its offices in Amman, although it has not met in several years. Such institutions are now gradually coming to life again, and are gradually becoming rallying points for the 2.5 to 3 million exiled Palestinians abandoned both by Arafat and the DOP. Arafat himself is slowly losing support from the community. A few successful Palestinian business people all through the Middle East, Europe, and North America are drawing back from him, unwilling to invest in his autonomous domain, disillusioned and angered by his methods. The same is true of competent Palestinians whose skills as engineers, teachers, doctors will be needed in any future state, and who are uninvolved in what is happening now.

I think all these must now galvanize the PLO into reasserting our claims as a people: self-determination, the total independence of the Territories, addressing in a humane and practical way refugee claims for repatriation and/or compensation. Arafat must be forced from office as a result of orderly processes that exist within our only constituted national body, the PLO: he must be voted out by a democratically re-assembled PNC which elected him in the first place. This process may be beginning. It is quite likely the Oslo accord will become unworkable, and so a reaffirmation of willingness for real peace with Israel must be made, and so must its basis: mutual recognition of the *national* rights of both peoples in two independent states. If Palestinian elections might be held in the Territories, every effort must be made not to return Arafat, although all election plans he has approved are guaranteed automatically to make him president for life. This idea must be disallowed and discredited before the elections.

The looming danger is that Arafat's rule if perpetuated might just produce assassinations, chaos, and civil war. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the various Damascus-based guerrilla groups cannot now accomplish the change that is needed, although the likelihood of more cruel bloodshed is extremely high. Our two assets are the capacity to speak out, and to organize courageously in resistance: these served us well in the *intifada*. They must be marshaled in as widespread a way as possible so that Arafat, and the Israelis who have invested so unwisely in him, realize that the real future for two peoples in one land must be a different, more equitable and just one.

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*Washington Post*, December 25, 1994

*Al-Hayat*, December 29, 1994

## Sober Truths About Israel and Zionism

*(January 1995)*

Although he was born and raised in the United States, my twenty-three-year-old son has been spending the year in Egypt in order to perfect his Arabic; he can now speak and read it fluently and so can observe what is happening around him from two perspectives. He was recently in Jordan and reported his surprise to me that an official delegation from AIPAC (the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) was received by the Jordanian government, and described effusively by the Jordanian media. Unlike most Jordanians, however, he knew a good deal about what AIPAC does and what, despite the American peace process, it still represents. He was therefore amazed at the apparent cordiality of the visiting delegation's reception, since anyone who knows anything about AIPAC can immediately tell you that its goal and methods have remained the same: to support and promote Israel's interests (seen from a right-wing perspective) in the United States unconditionally. What can the Jordanian government have had in mind then by hosting a group of this sort? True Jordan and Israel have now signed a peace agreement, but has the Zionist lobby changed its aims, and is there now a complete coincidence of interests between Israel and Jor-

dan? Put differently, the question is whether there has been a fundamental change in the underlying interests of Israel and the Arabs who (with one or two significant exceptions, Syria and Lebanon being the obvious instances) are now rushing to conclude peace deals with each other. Or is it the case that there remains a tragic misunderstanding of Israel and the Zionist movement in the Arab world, and it is this quite serious lapse in judgment and interpretation that has overtaken us at this juncture?

Ever since Camp David there has been a common assumption by Arab ruling elites that the road to success and support in Washington must first pass through Israel, and that the Zionist lobby ought to be placated and won over. It is also supposed that, given the demise of the Soviet Union and the American victory in the Gulf War, the United States is the key to the Arab future. I have always believed that there is no real military option either for the Arabs or the Israelis, and that only a peacefully negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict provides a serious alternative in the long term. For the Arabs, war has had disastrous effects, quite apart from the fact that Israel has remained militarily more successful and powerful throughout. Militarization has corrupted civil society; democracy has all but disappeared; pauperization has increased; and the general level of daily life in economic, cultural, and social terms has fallen dramatically. On the other hand, peace on any terms at all does not strike me as a real solution to our problems as a people, any more than an indiscriminately servile relationship with the United States can be a solution to the radical problems of economic decline, social fragmentation, and cultural backwardness besetting every Arab country today. Such a peace is politically too far-fetched; in addition, the idea that you can achieve peace by eliminating your own self-interest argues too simplistic and mythical a rationale, since it assumes that because one fawns on Israel it is possible to expect U.S. political and, more important, economic support. The truth of the matter is both more complicated and more unpleasant than this rosy scenario presupposes.

The United States is by no means capable of a sustained international role, despite the enormous military power it can deploy (as it did during the Gulf War) and despite its disproportionately influential role at the United Nations. Bill Clinton is now a weak and crippled president as a result of the Republican victory last November. Besides, except for continued aid to Israel, the whole notion of foreign aid is very much under attack in the Congress, as is the proposition that U.S. forces be committed all over the globe. There is simply no popular interest in foreign affairs today, partly as a result of the various social, economic, and even ideological crises besetting the American system, partly because Americans have lost faith in the idea of government itself. It is therefore a cruel irony that at the very moment so many Arab regimes are placing their unrestrained (perhaps uneducated is a better word) faith in the United States, the United States is simply looking elsewhere for things to do and interests to cultivate. This is by no means to say that the military-industrial complex is inactive or that transnational corporations are not busier than ever looking for new markets, cheap labor, and free capital to swallow in the Arab world. Those things are true, but that is very different from anything like the Marshall Plan idea that so many leaders want the United States to undertake and sponsor. Any notion of sudden prosperity descending from America on impoverished Arab countries is a ridiculous chimera.

There seems to be an even graver miscalculation where Israel is concerned. I recall that two years ago I was lecturing at Bir Zeit University and advocating, as I often do, a more scientific and precise approach to an understanding of the United States; I commented also on the absence of any university departments of American studies and of independent (or even governmental) institutes for the study of America. One of the Palestinian students in the audience raised his hand to say that it was a more disturbing fact that no such programs existed in Palestine for the study of Israel.

Take as a case in point the whole matter of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, recently the subject of considerable (if somewhat belated) agitation by the Palestinian Authority and by the energetic citizens of the West Bank. It is immensely important that citizens' groups use the kind of non-violent resistance undertaken by the inhabitants of Khader on the West Bank. The problem with Israeli land seizures is deeper and more complicated. What has not been mentioned in the Arab and Western press is the fact that once land is confiscated for settlement purposes it belongs to "the land of Israel," officially restricted for the exclusive use of Jews. Over 92 percent of Israeli land itself is thus designated according to laws that express the racist aspects of Zionism, and have been on the books since the state was established in 1948. One of the few Israelis to comment on this repeatedly is Professor Israel Shahak, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry at the Hebrew University, founder of the Israeli League of Human Rights, Holocaust survivor from Poland, and in my opinion one of the small handful of Israeli Jews who tells the truth *as it is* and who is therefore a real advocate of peace and equality between Palestinians and Israelis. I quote from his letter to the editor of *Kol Ha'ir* published in Hebrew on January 6, 1995:

It is not only the Palestinians (including those among them who serve in the Israeli army, police and Shabak) who do not have the right to use such land. The racist regulations of the Jewish National Fund which is in charge of such matters, also prohibit its lease or any other use to any non-Jews.

In my view, the thus institutionalized racism exceeds in importance the robbing of the land from the Palestinians. There are many states which systematically robbed land. The U.S., for example, robbed Indian land, transforming most of it into state land. Nevertheless, such land is now available for use by any U.S. citizens. If a Jew were in the U.S. prohibited to lease land belonging to the state only be-

cause he were Jewish, this would be rightly interpreted as anti-Semitism.

Unless we recognize the real issue—which is the racist character of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel and the roots of that racism in the Jewish religious law [Halacha]—we will not be able to understand our realities. And unless we can understand them, we will not be able to change them.

The key aspect of Shahak's letter (and one of the reasons he has been so resolutely essential a presence in Israel) is that most of the truths that he points out are common knowledge, but routinely omitted in political discussions conducted for the benefit of non-Israelis, as well as occasionally by the Israeli press. But since Palestinian land, life, and future are directly influenced by these truths, there is absolutely no reason why *we* should omit them from consideration. What is puzzling in all this is why we should be so cavalier and careless about matters that essentially harm us. By not raising the matter of "Jewish" land, we simply help our enemies—who are already more powerful than we are, and have already robbed us of most of our land—to go on dispossessing and deceiving us. Why then do we act against our interests?

Ignorance and laziness are certainly part of the answer. Because Palestinian leaders were concerned mainly about themselves, and because so many Arab and Palestinian intellectuals (especially those who speak loftily of pragmatism, the New World Order, and "the peace process") have capitulated morally and intellectually, we find ourselves in the middle of peace negotiations that never raise the obvious and fundamental questions. Has Israel changed or is there still a basic conflict of interests between Arabs and Israelis? What does it mean to make peace with a state that is still the only country in the world with no internationally declared boundaries? What does it mean to make peace with a state that declared itself the state of "the Jewish people wherever they are" and that is not the state of

its citizens and inhabitants? And, as Shahak has so tirelessly shown, what does it mean to make peace with a state governed by profoundly ideological laws of a fundamentally religious cast, laws that make no secret of the fact that non-Jews are in every respect inferior to Jews?

I cannot do better here than to recommend Shahak's recent book *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* published by Pluto Press, London in 1994. Shahak's book has not been translated into Arabic. It should be immediately, although I am also sorry to report that it has not received adequate attention in Britain or the United States. Shahak shows that Israel's laws officially discriminate against non-Jews in three fundamental areas: residency rights, the right to work, and the right to equality before the law. Given such laws it becomes impossible to speak of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, who constitute a block including 850,000 Israeli citizens (with inferior rights) resident in Israel, two million people under occupation, and almost four million refugees. Since Israeli laws have been extended to annexed East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and most of the West Bank it is puzzling to remark that neither in the Oslo and Cairo accords, nor in the Jordan-Israeli agreements is there any mention of dismantling these laws, which fundamentally contradict the possibility of real peace.

The other problem with Arab peace strategy is that leaders and intellectuals have succumbed to the honeyed visions of a prosperous peace proclaimed by Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin without precise attention to the realities of their regime in Israel. It is now widely believed that Rabin's popularity is at its lowest ebb. On December 20, 1994, in an article in *Ha'aretz*, the pro-Labor commentator Yoel Markus analyzed Rabin's failure as prime minister. Rabin speaks too much; he goes around the world celebrating too many times; he is (like Yasir Arafat) incapable of delegating authority and is now prime minister, defense minister, and head of the Labor Party, usurping the functions of all his ministers; lastly,



he does not really have the situation under control. Most Israelis are now aware that the Labor-Meretz line about freezing the settlements was a total lie, and that historically it was always the Labor Party that took a more aggressive settlement line than Likud. Rabin's ideological propensities are well known—he is no less the hard-line ideological Zionist than he was forty years ago—but he has ignored the growing power of the right-wing religious groups in Israel, whose influence has increased since the Oslo accords.

The idea that Arab peace policy is tied to the sinking fortunes of an aging hawk like Rabin suggests the same ignorance and laziness that have historically created problems for the Arabs with the United States. But what is especially problematic is how this ignorance and laziness among Palestinians also includes a willingness to forget our own history. The U.S. and Israeli line has it that all parties to the Palestinian-Zionist struggle must not dwell on the past since, as some liberal Israelis have put it, it has been a struggle between right and right. This of course is the biggest distortion of all, and has been a central pillar of belief in the tactics of Peace Now and the so-called moderate Laborites. I fail to see how we are supposed to equate the “right” of a largely European people to come to Palestine, pretend that it was empty of inhabitants, conquer it by force, and drive out 70 percent of its inhabitants, with the right of the native people of Palestine to resist these actions and try to remain on their land. It is a grotesque notion to suggest parity in such a situation and then also to ask the victims to forget about their past and plan to live together as inferior citizens with their conquerors. The proposition is especially galling since it comes from a movement that claims quite openly never to have forgotten its own history of persecution, and indeed allows itself every crime against the Palestinian people because it says it is living under the shadow of past persecutions.

Now whereas I can understand Israeli officials taking this line, I cannot at all understand why Palestinian officials should follow the same suicidal logic. We have been asked and have accepted to

change the Palestinian National Covenant, a document that I personally dislike and have many objections to. But why has nothing been said about modifying Israeli laws and practices that discriminate totally against us? Why has the idea of making those changes simply dropped from our vocabulary as a people? Eleven years ago the Palestinian writer Sami Hadawi produced a detailed study of Arab losses in Palestine up to and including 1948; these, he said, totalled about fifty billion English pounds in 1984 (the year he published his study) terms. It is obviously out of the question to seek restitution for this entire amount, but—as I have said frequently—why is no mention ever made by our leader that there were real losses, and that there would have to be some form of compensation for the immense disaster that has befallen us as a people, most of it the responsibility of Israel? The irony is that there is an immediate precedent for our case in the Israeli position against Germany, which (thanks to the efforts of Nahum Goldmann) produced U.S. \$40 billion in German reparations paid to Israel.

As Shahak correctly says, until we know what it is that we are dealing with we can never make the changes that are required in order for a true peace to come about. But there is a deeper question for us to confront as Arabs. Most of us probably feel that years of military and political struggle against Israel have proved a failure, as indeed in some sense they have. Given the world situation today, we therefore have no real choice as a people but to accept the consequences of defeat, which includes accepting humiliating terms imposed on us by Israel. Even though I myself do not accept this particular set of propositions, let us assume for a moment that it is true. The deeper question is therefore: how should the defeated behave? Does defeat also include self-obliteration? Does it mean losing faith in the justice of your cause, or in the truths of your own history? And does it mean continuing to trust in the ideas of an elite that has brought about the very situation in which we find ourselves today? There are some preliminary answers to these questions to be found in public opinion polls recently taken in sev-

eral Arab countries about “normalization” with Israel. In every instance public opinion has in fact expressed no enthusiasm for normalization with Israel. On a mass level this suggests that the sense of defeat is not quite as widespread and prostrate as official policy and the logic of capitulationist intellectuals would have us believe.

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 26, 1995

*Al-Hayat*, January 29, 1995

## Memory and Forgetfulness in the United States

(February 1995)

Yasir Arafat is quoted in *Al-Hayat* of Friday, February 10 as appealing to the United States for aid in getting the peace process back on track. Perhaps he means this as a joke, but just in case he is serious it might be of help here to suggest why U.S. support at this time is a desperate fantasy in the minds of those who have run out of ideas and strength of purpose. I would myself doubt that at this point Clinton remembers who Yasir Arafat is. Ever since the Republicans took over both houses of Congress Clinton has dropped the last vestiges of the semi-liberal platform on which he was elected in 1992, and now has moved as far to the right as it is possible for a Democrat to go. This means in effect that he is acquiescing in the Republican program to obliterate the remaining traces of liberal social programs—most of them affecting the poor, the homeless, the jobless, and the African-American and other Third World immigrant minorities—in return for what exactly no one really knows. Mainly, I think he wants to appear as if he is in charge. The notion that Clinton might heroically defy the Israeli lobby and put pressure on his friend Rabin is as preposterous as it is pathetic. All one has to do is to listen to him talking about “ter-

rorism," which is the only thing he ever says about the Middle East. He has yet to acknowledge the existence of an Israeli military occupation.

No one should underestimate the extent of a deeply conservative, fervently Christian fundamentalist and socially reactionary political mentality now sweeping all before it in the United States. Clinton seems to realize that if he has any chance for success in 1996 it is to run as a candidate appealing to this new ascendancy. He has already proposed tax cuts and changes in social programs that rival those being put forward by Newt Gingrich and his disciples. Foreign aid will almost certainly be cut, as will even the remotest suggestion that the United States should play the role of "leader" in conflicts abroad that do not affect voters directly. In the meantime, having recklessly supported Boris Yeltsin's fascism at home and imperialism abroad, the United States stands silent as the massacres in Chechnya go on. For almost three years it has allowed Britain, Germany, and Russia to encourage a policy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. And when it comes to the Middle East it has cravenly parroted the Israeli position on everything of substance.

As for those countries, like Cuba and Iran, considered to be a threat to the United States, the best that American policy makers can come up with is a blanket embargo, which is the functional equivalent of believing that the country must not exist at all. The sadism of such a policy is difficult to believe. Arabs who think that Cuba is a remote little place of no concern to them should ponder the American attitude toward Iraq and Lebanon. As Eric Rouleau shows in a compelling article that appeared in the January-February 1995 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the embargo against Iraq has brought about a human disaster of unimaginable proportions. An astronomical rate of infant mortality, massive shortages of food and medicine and the overall destruction of the economy, have reduced Iraq to pre-industrial status, even though in all significant respects it has complied with the UN provisions concerning sanctions. The sheer cruelty of the United States and British position is hard to be-

lieve, but it goes on anyway, with thousands of innocents suffering on behalf of a tyrant who seems stronger than ever. Lebanon's case is not as bloody, although equally irrational. Americans are forbidden to travel there, travel agents are not allowed to sell tickets to Lebanon, and Lebanese planes are not allowed to land in the United States. All this because the United States wishes to punish Lebanon for what happened to a relatively few American citizens during the civil war. The lifting of the boycott is now used as leverage against Lebanon and Syria in the so-called peace process. And because these countries are weak and eminently forgettable the United States can go on deliberately consigning them to oblivion. The other Arabs seem oblivious to these cruelties against their brethren.

The prevalent theory seems to be that the wealthy and the powerful should be supported both at home and abroad. As for the less fortunate, they must sink and finally disappear in the Darwinian contest on which "our" free-market, free-enterprise, unregulated society is supposed to be based. Welfare for the poor, the handicapped, the socially disadvantaged is now the most reviled program in the United States. The rich get richer not only by denying welfare for the poor and disabled and refusing to support any kind of health-care system, but by producing more prisons. The United States has one of the highest ratios of prisoners per thousand of population of any country on earth. Many of the individuals incarcerated in the prisons end up returning, thereby constantly increasing the size of the prison population. Even there "free" market economics have taken over. Many states have privatized their prison system, turning them over to companies whose main aims in life are to get more business and to keep costs down. As for medical costs, they too are purposely allowed to rise as individual practitioners wish. There are now about fifty million Americans with no health insurance of any sort. I know from my own experience that pharmaceuticals, for example, have never cost more, mainly because regulating the gigantic corporations that produce the drugs is

considered to be interference in the free-market economy. As an example of what these corporations can get away with there is the case of a pill once used to enrich cattle feed; it cost something like \$15 per kilo. Then it was revealed that the drug had some positive effect in retarding the spread of cancer of the colon. The same drug is now sold at \$17 per pill. If one is not covered by insurance these prices are ruinous.

The idea seems to be that the less government does the better. With all these problems affecting the vast majority of Americans one is hard pressed to find a reason as to why so many of them vote for such ideas, and why, in other words, they vote *against* their direct interests. There are two main reasons for this. One is that politicians have learned that simple, attractive clichés like “Let’s cut taxes and cut government” when repeated often enough can convince people of their truth. Through concerted dumbing-down, public discourse has sunk to a level comprehensible to a four-year-old, even though of course most Americans are in fact educated through high school. The second reason is that such simple clichés could not work were it not for the fact that there has been a systematic assault via television on memory; most people cannot remember what they know from their own lives (for example, that they have no insurance) and by a narcotic effect can be made to imagine that everything is fine, were it not for the government.

Television and even radio play the central role here. On average the amount of foreign coverage delivered by the news is no more than a few minutes per day. Even National Public Radio, which used to be something like the BBC, has nearly given up reminding its listeners that there is a real world out there and has resorted to endless stories about the idyllic farm, about baseball, or about a movie star. Recently almost every TV station in the country has been broadcasting live coverage for eight or nine hours a day of the O. J. Simpson trial from Los Angeles, as if nothing else in the world mattered. It is difficult, not to say impossible to avoid the O.J. trial, as it is called, with the result that most of the population is, I now

believe, restricted in memory and awareness of anything but O.J. The other TV pastime is what is called talk shows, programs in which people are brought to a studio to discuss for hours on end their personal (often unusual sexual) problems. For literally whole mornings and afternoons you can watch a "host" lead a group of women who have started to sleep with their daughters' boyfriends through Byzantine discussions of what that means; or you can watch several groups of three people—two men and a woman—who live together and discuss the joys of a *ménage à trois*.

Against such a daily background of trivia, offensive political demagoguery, and public indifference it is hard to believe that Yasir Arafat actually expects official America to take any notice of his difficulties in Gaza, and to make the Israelis behave better toward him and (perhaps) his people. There is now a major vacuum in the public discourse of the United States. Even though many people are anesthetized by the programmatic vacancy produced by bankrupt politicians in alliance with an ineffective public media, it is still possible to get attention through a serious program of information on university campuses, in the churches, in the women's community, and so on.

No, Yasir Arafat, there is no help or succor to be had from Clinton or the Israeli lobby, and even if you prostrate yourself still further they will continue to believe that Palestinians are an inferior people bent on terrorism, and who deserve the protracted punishment of military occupation and apartheid. Neither Rabin nor Peres nor Clinton have anything to give your people except more misery. As your last act before you resign (as you should) look to the real resources of your people—their belief in justice and freedom—and rely on them instead of on foreign adventurers and commission agents.

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, February 23, 1995



## Justifications of Power in a Terminal Phase

*(April 1995)*

No one in the United States today says very much about the New World Order, once the proud centerpiece of the Bush administration's foreign policy. For their part, Bill Clinton and his people speak generally about spreading democracy abroad and about freeing as well as expanding markets: but this scarcely constitutes a foreign-policy vision, especially since in regions like the Middle East United States foreign policy remains exactly the same in its broad outlines as it has been at least since the 1967 War. With the "peace process" faring poorly therefore, a quite peculiar resurgence of familiar old refrains dressed up in a slightly more up-to-date language has floated across the public space. And as we listen to their accents and once again deconstruct their prevarications and their hypocrisy, we will see that taken together they represent the end, or rather the terminal phase of a policy of obdurate wilfulness, an unchanging contempt for lesser peoples, a wholesale endorsement of illegal practices justified only by power (despite the repetition of unthinking, pious clichés about respect for law, love of peace, and so on).

On the other hand it would be dishonest to pretend that in its main objectives U.S. policy has been unsuccessful: on the contrary, so far as the immediate past and present are concerned it has been

extremely successful. Israel's security, defined as maintaining that country's military superiority over the entire region and beyond, has been assured, albeit at great, indeed wildly extravagant cost to the American taxpayer. In addition, and running continuously through the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations, the United States has supported Israeli policies without significant demurral or objection. Tolerance for such openly aggressive strategies as Israel's deliberate destruction of South Lebanon in July 1993 (the aim of which was, as that well-known apostle of peace Yitzhak Rabin so candidly put it, to create a major refugee problem for the Lebanese government) or its recent three-week naval blockade of the Lebanese coast (begun again in late March) went as far as preventing the Security Council from convening a meeting. As for tacit American backing for Israeli military occupation, settlement, and land expropriation policy, as well as collective punishment of the entire Palestinian population of the Occupied Territories, to say nothing about changing positions on Jerusalem from opposing to accepting Israeli annexation and landgrabs, the record is plain for everyone to see.

U.S. policies in those parts of the Middle East where unimpeded access to oil supplies is required have remained both unchanged and successful. The United States is now the only major outside power in the area whose presence and opinions are accepted almost unconditionally, although the recent disagreements with Egypt over the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty suggest that beneath the surface there are real tensions and genuine differences. As for the peace process, there too American policy makers speak warmly, and even effusively about its achievements without any regard whatever for the actually worsened condition of Palestinians both in Gaza and the West Bank. No notice is taken of the dramatic opposition to Oslo, nor to suggestions for improving it: no, runs the mind-deadening Washington orthodoxy, the peace process must go on *as is*.

Nevertheless, as various signs of trouble emerge even more unmistakably and as opposition to the United States and its policies

crystallizes, the *language* of official spokespersons takes on a maddening obstinacy. It is this eternal recurrence of old ideas and phrases that are hopelessly inadequate to real actualities in the Arab world which symbolizes both the power and the ultimate limits of U.S. policy. The point about these ideas and trite phrases is that they get repeated because of a sense of power and rightness that can only regard itself as permanently etched in marble, as well as something totally above mere facts and human beings. Arab policy makers who hope perhaps that a robust argument with Warren Christopher or even Bill Clinton can alter either the message or the accents are mistaken in supposing that official Washington can do anything else but say the same things, defend the same interests, do what has been done for half a century. There is no possibility for change if ideologically you fervently believe, as U.S. policy makers do, that the United States must lead the world and that formulas like "support the peace process" actually mean getting real peace.

Take as a case in point what the media reported about Warren Christopher's recent Middle East trip. On March 19, datelined Gaza, *The New York Times* described Christopher as saying only that Yasir Arafat had made a "100 percent commitment to bring terrorists to justice, but at the same time [Christopher] pressed him [Arafat] to take tougher measures to arrest, prosecute, punish and disarm them." Vice-President Al Gore said essentially the same thing, adding, from the special vantage point of an exporter of democracy, that he congratulated Arafat in effect on having set up military courts without due process and with no regard for democratic rights. This from the second highest elected official of a country that has designated itself as the world's referee on matters of "freedom." For his part Arafat (who seemed especially pleased that Shimon Peres had finally referred to him as "President" and not "Chairman") repeated the same theme, and glowed with the same artificial light, vowing to do more to disarm and uproot terrorists. Christopher and Gore, and of course Arafat, were all echoing the standard Israeli line since the mid-1970s, that anyone who opposed Israeli policies was in effect a terrorist, and this, plus the

inevitable wave of violence by which the relatively weak fall back not on politics but on righteous terror, has consolidated the image of Israel and the United States as both blameless and beset by irrational, unmotivated, and totally blind "terrorism."

Terrorism, I believe and have said many times, must be condemned and rejected, but that condemnation must also include the policies that directly produced terrorism in the first place, policies calculated to humiliate, dispossess, and render desperate an entire nation. And in being honest about this goal, the official American position and the way the media report on it have failed completely. What we get instead is a flat restatement of the old notion that "we" are reasonable and peace-loving, whereas "they" are terroristic and unarguably violent.

After decades of supporting military occupation, and watching the inevitable counter-reaction by which desperate and oppressed people respond with reactive obduracy, people like Clinton, Rabin, and Christopher have no recourse except to fall back on banal denunciation and unbending brute force. There is no idea here, no attempt at understanding, no modulation of a rhetoric that may have worked twenty and even ten years ago, but since the *intifada*, the rise of Hizbollah, the tragic events in Algeria and elsewhere in the Arab world, has become demonstrably inadequate and trivial. Yet such responses as those of Christopher, Gore, and Rabin reveal power with no place to go, no vision of the future, the presence only of bad terrorists and good, reasonable, self-righteous Israelis and Americans who have turned themselves into spokesmen for "the West."

To cooperate with this policy is obviously to place oneself in exactly the same terminal straitjacket. It is tragic for Arafat and the other Arab leaders who have accepted American definitions of peace and democracy to do so, and not to take any comfort from the long history of resistance to it. Neither the Vietnamese, who actually faced and lived through an extraordinarily vicious American campaign of invasion and death, nor the Cubans, who for thirty years have been subjected to the bullying pressure of one American administration after another, capitulated, so why should we? Ronald

Reagan tacitly supported apartheid in South Africa along with Margaret Thatcher. The ANC was therefore branded a terrorist organization and imprisoned leaders like Nelson Mandela—now celebrated all over the world as a man of peace and vision—were considered to be justifiably put away. The change came not because Reagan and De Klerk suddenly became humane and reasonable but largely because Mandela's compelling and unwavering vision defeated the unchanging frozen attitudes represented by apartheid and its quite impressive array of supporters. Why our leaders and official intellectuals have accepted to play a role similar to that of Boris Yeltsin when better models to follow are in plentiful supply baffles me, as it must many Arabs.

Since the end of the Cold War a small number of ex-Marxist, ex-Khomeinite, ex-Islamic Arab intellectuals have stridently proclaimed the view that not only is the United States the sole superpower, but that our problems are of our own making, and only with the help of liberal America—so committed to democracy and freedom—can we hope to improve as a people and a culture. This view is pathetically incapable of understanding the history of the United States—its interventions abroad, its support of oppressive regimes, its forcible attempts to overthrow democratically elected regimes that it does not approve of. More seriously it shows a disastrous lack of understanding of the limits of “liberal” America. America itself is now aflame with debates about the meaning of America, from its history and values to its mission in the world; so to suggest as these rather crude Arab pro-Americanists suggest, that the country is settled comfortably in its own sense of itself is a grotesque misconception of the reality. Moreover one of the principal issues being debated is liberalism (the “L” word) itself, especially now that the Republicans are in the ascendancy and have declared war on any vestige of it. To many Americans the liberal country they once lived in no longer exists. The Republican right now in political ascendancy has openly declared war on the poor, the disadvantaged, and the handicapped.

But one of the reasons why liberal partisans in the United States

have been soundly trounced in the political arena is that historically speaking they never really provided a convincing alternative to the country's mainly rightward, and, in foreign affairs, lurchingly interventionist drift. This has been especially true of liberals on the Middle East, who bear a great resemblance to Labour Party intellectuals in England. For them all, Israel was the liberal cause, not Palestinian liberation (I speak about this at some length in the first chapter of my 1980 book—as yet untranslated into Arabic—*The Question of Palestine*). It was the liberal wing of the Democratic party here that made Israel its ward, that celebrated the 1967 victory, and that has systematically refrained from applying norms about human rights and the oppression of peoples that they routinely discussed in Vietnam, Nicaragua, and South Africa to the practices of Zionism and Israel. Martin Luther King, Teddy, Robert, and John Kennedy, plus everyone else in their camp were always prepared to salute and even adulate Israel, always unwilling to take a moral position on Palestinian self-determination.

Granted that things have changed somewhat since the *intifada*, but what I have been advancing here has remained largely unchanged, even after September 13, 1993. It was not liberals but radicals like Noam Chomsky, for instance, who took the offensive against Israeli colonialism; when liberals entered the battle they always did so entirely within carefully and disappointingly circumscribed limits. Israel's history was never discussed; Palestinians were always assumed to have some rights so long as we did nothing to prejudice Israel's greater rights; the main concern was Israel's survival and security, along with the general well-being of its citizens, who have always been talked about and discussed more than the Palestinians. As a case in point Anthony Lewis, the *New York Times's* only liberal editorialist, produced two columns while on a trip to Israel on March 17 and 20. Both express great concern about the fate of the Oslo accords, about Jewish extremists, about the complaints of Palestinians (for example, Hanan Ashrawi) concerning the abuses of the Palestinian Authority, about settlers, about Israeli closures of Gaza and the West Bank. Excellent of course:

liberal, humane, decent. Yet there is not one word about the vastly uneven situation between the two peoples, one oppressing, the other oppressed. Oslo is a wonderful thing, Lewis says again and again, as if only the original inhabitants who lost everything and have endured twenty-eight years of military occupation, must be tested since they are the ones who terrorize, constitute a problem, need to be reined in to assure Israel's peace of mind and security. There is little willingness to speak about injustice or dispossession, subjects on which Lewis had spoken very eloquently concerning South Africa, for example. Liberalism stops at the unexamined truism that Israelis are like "us," whereas the Arabs, more prone to violence and irrationality, have to be treated differently from everyone else.

I use Anthony Lewis as an example because he is influential and at the same time a true liberal. But I cannot see that he ever really goes against the official consensus represented by Warren Christopher: he writes few words about U.S. support for the settlements, or the unstinting military and economic aid given by America to Israel. There is instead a kind of gentle, almost embarrassed tone to his comments, as if he does not want to disturb anyone, least of all the Clinton administration or other liberal Jews. Nor should we expect something to turn up for ourselves as Arabs and for the region. And, to judge by the deafening silence that has settled on us as we consume more propaganda and endure more official hypocrisy than any people on earth, the development of our own view of ourselves and of our region's desired future cannot come too soon. But it will certainly never develop at all if we are still dependent on the Great White Father, despite his illusion of power and money: the point is that he has come to the end of his reign. A new era is dawning.

*Al-Hayat*, April 6, 1995

*Al-Ahram Weekly*, April 6, 1995

## Conclusion

# The Middle East “Peace Process”: Misleading Images and Brutal Actualities

*(October 1995)*

Under pressure from the Palestinian residents of Hebron not to sign an agreement that would give 450 Israeli settlers encamped in the center of town separate rights and an army to guard them, Yasir Arafat theatrically pulled out of his eleventh-hour meeting with Shimon Peres. “We are not slaves!” Arafat shouted. Moments later he was reached on the telephone by Dennis Ross, the U.S. State Department’s “coordinator” in charge of the Middle East peace process. “If you don’t sign now,” Ross was reported to have said, “you don’t get the \$100 million”—a reference to America’s yearly pledge toward Palestinian development projects in the West Bank. Arafat signed, and the protests in Hebron continued.

As a negotiating turn, this was not unusual. Without maps of their own, without the requisite detailed knowledge of the facts or figures possessed by the Israelis, without a firm commitment to principle, the Palestinian negotiators have consistently yielded to Israeli and American pressures. What Palestinians have gotten in the latest agreement, initialed in Taba, Egypt, is a series of municipal responsibilities in Bantustans dominated from the outside by Israel. What Israel has gotten is official Palestinian consent to continued occupation.

What’s astonishing is that this agreement—popularly known as



Oslo II—is now being celebrated in the West as an Israeli “withdrawal” from the Occupied Territories, as an honorable and serious move toward peace, when in fact there is neither occasion nor cause to justify such hand-clapping. Signed and saluted in the White House on September 28, almost two years to the day after the “historic handshake” that sealed Oslo I, the agreement enjoins Israel merely to redeploy its troops from the center of the main West Bank towns (excluding Hebron) to their outskirts. In this redeployment, Israel will establish sixty-two new military bases in the West Bank. As Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has put it, “The problem is not [the army’s] permanent presence but its freedom of action.” Israel will thus retain control of exits and entries to the towns, as it will control all roads on the West Bank.

Palestinians will have municipal authority over the towns and some 400 villages within the Israeli cordon, but they will have no real security responsibility, no right to resources or land outside the populated centers and no authority at all over Israeli settlers, police, and army. Israel will continue to hold fifty or sixty Palestinian villages. The settlements will be untouched and a system of roads will connect them to one another, making it possible for settlers, like whites in the old South Africa, to avoid or never even see the people of the Bantustans, and making it impossible for Palestinians to rule over any contiguous territory.

In numerical terms, the Palestinians will at first have civil control—without sovereignty—of about 5 percent of the West Bank. Israel will have exclusive control of 8 percent (the settlements, *not counting* those around illegally annexed East Jerusalem), plus effective control—security, water, land, air space and airwaves, roads, borders, etc.—of the whole.

Politically and economically this is disastrous, and I think it is absolutely legitimate to suggest that no negotiations, and no agreement, would be better than what has so far been determined. Oslo II gives the Palestinian National Authority the appurtenances of rule without the reality—a kingdom of illusions, with Israel firmly in command. Any West Bank town, under the new agreement, can be

closed at will by the Israelis, as was Jericho during the last days of August, and Gaza in September. All commercial traffic between Gaza and the West Bank autonomy zones is in Israeli hands. Thus, a truckload of tomatoes going from Gaza to the West Bank town of Nablus must stop at the border, be unloaded onto an Israeli truck, then be reloaded onto a Palestinian truck upon entering Nablus. This takes three days, with the fruit rotting in the meantime and the costs going so high as to make such transactions prohibitive. (In the West Bank it is cheaper to import tomatoes from Spain than from Gaza.)

The idea, of course, is to impress upon Palestinians, in as humiliating a way as possible, that Israel controls their economy. Likewise, their future political process. The Legislative Council of eighty-two people is to be elected next spring, although candidates have to be approved by the Israelis. "Racists" and "terrorists" will be barred. (There is no parallel proscription on the Israeli side, where, for instance, Rafael Eitan, a war criminal of the 1982 Lebanon invasion and a man who has referred to Palestinians as "cockroaches," sits in the Knesset.) Israel may veto any piece of legislation enacted by the Council, which has no jurisdiction over or representatives from East Jerusalem. Arafat, in any case, has won for himself the privilege of being called chairman/president, although the Israelis insisted that he name a vice president/chairman. He seems to have refused, insisting that anyone inferior to him must be known only as *mutahaddith*, or spokesman.

Much of what Oslo II prescribes so disadvantageously for Palestinians—and, in the long run, for Israelis as well—was set in motion by Oslo I. You wouldn't know this from conventional "expert" opinion in the West. The prevailing belief underlying most analysis—from such dubious authorities as Bernard Lewis, Judith Miller, Steven Emerson, Daniel Pipes, and others—has been that now the only serious obstacles to peace are Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. In this, the experts have followed the politicians. The British journalist Robert Fisk, writing in *The Independent* on October 30, 1994, noted how frequently President Clinton used

the words "terrorism" and "violence" while on a trip through the Middle East:

The use of that one corrosive word "terror" . . . crept through every speech the President made. He lectured King Hussein on "the face of terror and extremism"; he talked in Damascus of "terrorist infiltration" and "of murderous acts of terror," he spoke in the Knesset of "the merchants of terror," linking them in his Israeli speech with what he called "the plague of anti-Semitism."

That the "peace" under which so many Palestinians have lost hope of any real freedom might be an undesirable state, that it might drive some people to suicidal violence, is a matter almost never looked at, much less debated and admitted.

Consider the situation in the two years since Oslo I was signed. Gaza's unemployment stands at almost 60 percent. Israel continues to control about 40 percent of Gazan land. It also unilaterally controls the border with Gaza, which is now closed to all but 8,000 Gazans, who must have a pass card showing that they work in Israel. In pre-Oslo 1993, 30,000 people were allowed to cross; in 1987, 80,000. Sara Roy, who more than anyone else in America has chronicled Israel's systematic de-development of Gaza, wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor* this past April 12:

Israel will not allow any raw materials into the Gaza Strip. At present, for example, there is no cement in Gaza. Hence, \$40 million in donor aid sitting in Gazan banks cannot be spent because needed project material cannot be transported into the strip.

Israel now allows only certain foodstuffs and consumer goods to enter Gaza, including benzene, cooking gas, and sand. Of the 2,000 trucks in the Gaza Strip, only 10 have permits to enter Israel.

Arafat himself still cannot enter Gaza without a permit; nor is there any free passage between Gaza and Jericho. One thousand one hundred military laws still pertain in "autonomous" Gaza; 1,400 in the West Bank. A system of fifty-eight roadblocks prevents Palestinians from going from north to south in the West Bank, especially as the "Judaization" of Jerusalem (imagine the outcry if Jews were forced to endure "Arabization"! ) prohibits Arabs from entering the now greatly distended boundaries of the city. Four hundred Gazan students of Bir Zeit University and twelve professors were unable to go to school for about three months. Not only is East Jerusalem cut off from the West Bank and Gaza, which is closed to the outside world like an enormous prison, but Arab life in the Old City is being choked off. People there are being forced out of their houses, and residents of outlying areas like Beit Hanina, Shoufat, and Silwan watch powerless as settler housing projects rear their grossly out-of-proportion dimensions, ruining the city's natural contours, its air, and its environment. This year has seen a boom in such construction outside East Jerusalem: 1,126 units in the first quarter of 1995, as against 324 in the whole of 1994. All of this occurs with practically nothing being done to resist or prevent the deliberate transformation of an Arab city into a Jewish one.

The wonder of it—given twenty-eight years of military occupation, the deliberate wrecking of the economy and infrastructure, the active humiliation of an entire people, the enormous number of murdered Palestinians (more than 2,000 during the *intifada* alone, 18,000 to 20,000 during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon)—is not that there is terrorism but that there isn't more of it.

The Israeli novelist David Grossman, writing in *Ha'aretz* on April 4, chastised the Jewish left for its shallowness of understanding and "almost complete paralysis" since Oslo I:

Does our very silence constitute a dereliction of historical proportions which will have bitter consequences for Israel for generations to come? . . . I would suggest that we not despise the anxieties of the Palestinians, with whom I have

talked. Perhaps they are able to feel on their skins, long before we can, what is actually happening on the ground: it may be that the "entity" that Rabin is willing to "grant" them will in fact be a weird hybrid between autonomy and confederation, crisscrossed by "Israeli" roads and fences, and spotted with numerous settlements at strategic points, in a way which will perpetuate the settlements. An as-if state.

Now with Oslo II, this "as if" status has been certified. Yet every leader responsible for its creation—whether Israeli, Palestinian, or American—as well as their intellectual adjuncts, insists publicly that a series of fractured cantons is really a governable "entity," and that subservience is self-determination. The dishonesty of it all is breathtaking.

Israel's settlement policy, for instance, is not discussed; like the question of Jerusalem, it has been placed behind a screen pending final status negotiations, supposed to begin in May of 1996. Yet it is intimately tied to the fate of the "autonomous" areas, as Hebron illustrates. There, the presence of 450 settlers occupying Arab buildings in the center of town has resulted in mass punishment—curfews (one lasting three months), killings, housing demolitions, imprisonments—of the town's 100,000 Palestinian residents. Elsewhere the situation may be less dramatic, but the pattern of land seizure through expropriation, defoliation, uprooting of trees, and refusal of permits to build or enhance existing Palestinian structures will continue to shape Palestinian life.

If one includes the area around East Jerusalem, Israel has stolen and asserted a presence upon roughly 75 percent of the land of the occupied territories. The settler population now stands at about 320,000. There were ninety-six recorded confiscations and assaults on Palestinian land between October 1993 and January 1995, and there have been more, unrecorded, since. On April 28, 1995, *The New York Times* reported the confiscation of 135 acres of land (later temporarily "frozen") in the East Jerusalem sections of Beit Safafa

and Beit Hanina but characteristically failed to report what the Arab press and the *Monitor* reported: that those 135 acres were part of a bigger projected land grab of almost 450 acres. According to the Washington-based *Report on Israeli Settlements*, the authoritative non-Israeli source on these matters, Rabin has continued building and adding to settlements *as a matter of policy*.

His government's "exceptions committee," headed by Nach Kinnari, a senior official in the Defense Ministry, "has permitted housing construction in every settlement," according to the Report's Geoffrey Aronson, who states further:

The massive construction occurring under the auspices of the Rabin government is being undertaken by private contractors, working on the basis of proposals put out for bid by the Ministry of Housing. Most of the residential construction in greater Jerusalem and in settlements along the Green Line is being executed in this manner. In Ma'ale Adumim, for example, "the Ministry of Housing is pushing the city's development with all its ability," according to a report in the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot*.

The construction proceeds on the basis of a decision in principle made by the minister of housing or by the prime minister himself. The exceptions committee later approves formal plans along with the settlements' planning committee. The government then allocates "state land" for construction. . . . [and] assists with the development of infrastructure.

In a settlement just outside Jenin, one of the towns covered by Oslo II, Israel recently approved an expansion project for five new factories, with land provided free to investors, who also got substantial tax breaks. Will this industrial zone ultimately revert to Palestine? Will it be annexed by Israel, its managers simultaneously taking advantage of cheap Palestinian labor? Will Palestinians demand reparations for this and all the land illegally appropriated by the Is-

raeli occupiers? Reparations, a fairly common element in other international peace agreements, have never been raised as an issue for Palestine.

The Clinton Administration, meanwhile, has said or done nothing to oppose these policies, even though U.S. taxpayers are still providing about \$5 billion a year to Israel, no strings attached, plus \$10 billion in loan guarantees. U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk, former AIPAC lobbyist, former head of the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy, was asked during his confirmation hearings this year whether there was any U.S. policy vis-à-vis Israeli settlement activity. He said only that he thought the settlements "complicated" the negotiations, though "terrorism has a much more complicating impact." A few moments later, when asked whether the Rabin government had added to the settlements or permitted new ones since 1993, he said "No," an outright falsehood.

At Congressional hearings in 1993, Secretary of State Warren Christopher refused even to characterize the territories as occupied. A year later his department's deputy press secretary, Christine Shelley, when asked by reporters if there was a "clear statement of policy on settlements," replied:

It certainly comes up from time to time in the context of, you know, testimony and other things. We do—the briefers also from time to time get those questions as well. As to—you know, nothing has changed on that in terms of our position and, you know, I think it's—you know, I can refer you to, you know, to probably to previous statements by officials on that. But I don't have anything—you know, I mean, you know, our—I think—I don't have—you know, I—we—usually we try to have, you know, a little bit of something on that. I'm not sure that it's going to be, you know, specifically what you're looking for. You know, generally speaking, our position that on settlements that it's the Palestinians and Israelis have agreed that the final status ne-

gotiations will cover these issues and, you know, that's—  
that's also our view.

There is a causal relationship between this sort of talk and Israel's emboldened land expropriation. Indeed, silence and the wanton murder of language evident in the phrase "peace process" are central to the Israeli (and American) project. As Peres said in January of this year, "We will build, but without declaring it in public. . . . The Labour Party always knew how to do things quietly . . . but today, everybody announces everything they do in public." Thus, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics estimated in 1993 a net increase of 10,900 in the settler population; in October 1994 the settler's council claimed a larger figure (23,600 more than the C.B.S.'s) for the total settler population in the territories, excluding Jerusalem. Israel's Peace Now reported that there was an increase of 70 percent in government and private investment in settlements in the year following the famous handshake.

In Washington, no one paid attention. Indeed, in the wake of Oslo II, an Arab journalist in the capital told me it is virtually impossible to get any direct answer on U.S. policy positions regarding the occupied territories.

Where Washington has been busiest is in the enfeeblement and marginalization of the United Nations, historically a forum for Palestinian protest, from these proceedings. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Madeleine Albright has importuned member states to rescind, modify or otherwise ignore resolutions that might prejudice or in any way affect bilateral negotiations between Israel and Yasir Arafat. All of these resolutions either urged consideration of Palestinian claims for self-determination or denounced unlawful Israeli occupation practices (most of them in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention or of U.N. principles forbidding the annexation of war gains). Although these were paper resolutions, for Palestinians as a people they represented the only international guarantee that their claims would not be ignored.

Remember that over half the dispossessed Palestinian popula-



tion—about 3.5 million people—does not reside in the West Bank or Gaza, and according to the peace process, these people have little hope of repatriation or compensation for what they have lost or suffered. Many are stateless refugees eking out a below-subsistence existence in camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, without the right to work or leave. (That they have no place to go is now being painfully illustrated: 35,000 Palestinians just expelled from Libya were barred from Gaza by Israel and wander homeless, rebuffed by Lebanon, as well.) It is argued that Oslo left the fate of these people to final status negotiations, but the damage has already been done. After laboriously constructing the unity of Palestinians everywhere, bringing together the Diaspora and the 800,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as the residents of the occupied territories, the PLO by a stroke of the pen split the three components apart, accepting the Israeli designation of Palestinians as only the encaged residents of the territories. No other liberation movement in the twentieth century got so little—roughly 5 percent of its territory. And no other leaders of a liberation movement accepted what in effect is permanent subordination of their people.

Although it now seems that many Palestinians have been demoralized by what faces them in reality, I believe the Palestinian people will continue to want their rights to be equal with those of their neighbors, the Israeli Jewish people. The emergence of Hamas and Islamic Jihad are part of the continuing protest and should be understood as that. Their suicide missions, bomb throwing, and provocative slogans are acts of defiance principally, refusals to accept the crippling conditions of Israeli occupation and Palestinian collaboration. No matter how much secular people like myself lament their methods and their vision (such as it is), there is no doubting the truth that for many Palestinians these people express a furious protest against the humiliations, demeanments, and denials imposed on all Palestinians as a people. It is ironic that Hamas, having been encouraged by Israel in the 1980s as a tool for breaking the PLO and the *intifada*, should now be elevated to the rank of superdevil.

Of course, the best response to terrorism is justice, not more repression. The deep tragedy of Palestine is that a whole people's history and aspirations have been under such comprehensive assault—not only by Israel (with its patron and collaborator the United States) but also by the Arab governments and, since Oslo, by the PLO under Arafat.

It is necessary here to try to describe the complicated mix of emotions and actualities that govern Palestinian life in the occupied territories today. True, Arafat's entry into Gaza on July 1, 1994, gave people there the sense that they are no longer as confined as they once were. They can go to the beaches, they do not have to be indoors after sundown, and they enjoy some rapport with a Palestinian (not an Egyptian or Israeli) police force. In every other respect life has become worse. There is a cynical Israeli policy of letting Arafat become as much a petty dictator as is consistent with their interests. Thus, the tolerance for his inflated police force and intelligence services, totaling about 19,000 (Oslo I and a subsequent Cairo agreement limited him to 9,000).

Arafat's political arm is his party, Fatah, which now plays the role of enforcer, armed by him throughout the territories. He himself governs unilaterally, in the absence of real laws or constitution. At the urging of Israel and the United States, he has instituted military courts that can arrest, detain, and sentence people without due process. (When Warren Christopher and Al Gore visited the autonomy zones in March they commended Arafat's decision to establish these courts.) Raji Sourani, the brilliant Gaza lawyer who has spent his whole life defending Palestinians against Israeli measures of this kind, protested Arafat's fiat, and was arrested and detained for a short period without trial in February. He was recently stripped of the chairmanship of his own human rights group, with the connivance of Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (P.A.).

Having effectively dismembered the PLO—the only organization that Palestinians throughout the Diaspora have had to represent their national aspirations—Arafat now surrounds himself

with a formidable network of hangers-on, sycophants, commission agents, spies, and informers. All of his appointments to his Cabinet of eighteen ministers (seventeen of them men) are beholden to him for their budgets, and indeed for their political existence. In some ministries, whose work and authority exist mainly on paper, he continues to appoint deputies (plus about 750 "director-generals" without any known jobs to perform). The total number of people employed directly by Arafat for the P.A. is estimated at 48,000; this includes the 19,000 police plus about 29,000 members of the civil administration. Whatever money Arafat gets from donors (about \$10 million a month), local taxes and taxes collected for him by the Israelis (a total of nearly \$30 million a month) is all he has to spend. Little is left over for improving sewage, health services, or employment.

With all the Palestinian competence in economics and engineering available, Arafat instead consistently engages the services of shady figures like the Moroccan Gabriel Banon and the Lebanese Pierre Rizk, former Phalangist contact for the Mossad in Lebanon, or one Khalid Slam (*a k a* Mohammed Rashid), a Kurd of uncertain background notoriously skilled at arranging quick deals. These are his fixers and advisers, along with a new group of American business consultants, who supposedly function as his economic counselors.

There is, moreover, no system of financial accountability. According to David Hirst, writing in *The Guardian* for April 15, Arafat's attorney general is "a man whom Fatah once sentenced to death for stealing funds destined for the *intifada*." Arafat does what he pleases, spends as he likes, disposes how he feels his interests might be served. Above all, as Julian Ozanne wrote in *The Financial Times*, his pact with Israel "keeps the Palestinian economy largely within Israel's broad macroeconomic trade and taxation policy, recognizing the dependence of the territories on their neighboring economic giant for the foreseeable future." All petroleum and petroleum products used by Palestinians come exclusively

from the Israeli petroleum authority. Local Palestinians pay an excise tax, the net amount of which is held in Arafat's name in an Israel bank account. Only he can get to it, and only he can spend it. At a donors' meeting in Paris this past April, an I.M.F. observer told me that the group voted \$18.5 million to the Palestinian people: \$18 million was paid directly to Arafat; \$500,000 was put in the public treasury. How it shall be disbursed is at Arafat's discretion alone.

A group of wealthy Palestinian businessmen (most of whom made their fortunes in the Persian Gulf) have claimed to be fed up with Arafat's methods and have devised a series of projects for electricity, telecommunications, and the like. These are financed through what they call "public" stock offerings, though the actual public is far too poor to invest in such schemes. These men (who additionally invest in, and profit from, real estate) nevertheless also deal directly with Arafat. They meet with him secretly and are not beholden to anything like a national planning or regulatory authority. They build the way they want, responsible only to themselves.

Given such activity, Arafat is lucky that the international media have largely spared him their investigations. This comes after dozens of books and articles before Oslo on the PLO's finances, its support of terrorism, etc. At home, meanwhile, the Palestinian press is not free. Very little that is critical of Arafat appears there. On May 5, *al-Hayat* reported that the offices of *al-Ummah*, an opposition paper in Jerusalem, were deliberately burned; the paper's owner blamed Palestinian police. The opinions of opponents are severely curtailed. Hanan Ashrawi, by now internationally known, cannot be read or seen or read about in the semi-official Palestinian daily *al-Quds* because she is considered too independent.

Arafat and his Palestinian Authority have become a sort of Vichy government for Palestinians. Those of us who fought for Palestine before Oslo fought for a cause that we believed would spur the emergence of a just order. Never has this ideal been fur-

ther from realization than today. Arafat is corrupt. Hamas and Islamic Jihad are no alternative. And most Palestinian intellectuals have been too anxious to bolster their own case, following Arafat and his lieutenants in the abandonment of their principles and history just to be recognized by the West, to be invited to the Brookings Institution, and to appear on U.S. television.

The Israelis have clung to their power and their old policies, the Arabs have capitulated and fawned on their victors without a trace of guts or decency. In the long run Israel is not acting wisely. As the Israeli commentator Haim Baram wrote on March 18, 1994 in *Kol Ha'ir*:

The concept of a Golda Meir-style territorial compromise is still characteristic of Rabin. His desire to keep the settlements firmly rooted in the territories constitutes an impenetrable roadblock to peace and a prescription for political and military disaster. His desire to bring Rafael Eitan and his friends into the coalition stems directly from this as well. Rabin armed the settlers and for years allowed the Kahanists to go on their rampages in spite of warning from the *Shabak* (General Security Services). Rabin should retire from the political arena.

The claim of the doves, that they are just using Rabin's name to implement the policies of Peres, is proving itself to be worthless for the long term. Peace can only be made openly, by demonstrating both leadership and wisdom. Rabin is simply not able to rise to the occasion. He is a small-minded person, a hawk from the Tabenken school of thought in the Labor movement, who fell into a situation bigger than himself. Everything else is worthless public relations.

In the end there will be reactions to it that it would not have foreseen, any more than the *intifada* was foreseen before it happened.

I do not pretend to have any quick solutions for the situation now referred to as "the peace process," but I do know that for the vast majority of Palestinian refugees, day laborers, peasants, and town and camp dwellers, those who cannot make a quick deal and those whose voices are never heard, for them the process has made matters far worse. Above all, they may have lost hope. And that is also true of the Palestinian political consciousness in general.

All of us know that because of its aggressive behavior, its continued policies of occupation, settlement and domination, Israel is not embarked on a course of peace with us, but of protracted hostility in which as countries, cultures, and peoples the Arabs are supposed to submit to Israel's power. Neither the United States administration, which essentially cooperates in this plan, nor the media, which with the exception of a few reports here and there, drones on about a paradigm of "peace-making" that exists only in their own irrelevant commentaries, has offered very much in the way of real peace. Forbidden to recall their history of dispossession and suffering, the Palestinians today are an orphaned people, a fact gradually being understood not only by themselves but also by the many Egyptians, Jordanians, Syrians, and Lebanese who have gradually awakened to the perfidy and indifference of their leaders. For the first time that I can remember, though, the governments no longer bother to conceal what they really are about. In early April 1995, for instance, *Al-Hayat* revealed that in 1976 Hafez al-Assad sought and received permission from Mr. Rabin, then Israeli Prime Minister, to send his troops into Lebanon; the go-between was King Hussein. All this at a time when there was supposed to be no communication between such implacable enemies. Well, the Syrian troops are still in Lebanon and, since the Syrian mission for entry into Lebanon at the time was the weakening of the Palestinians, we also know that the Palestinians as a people and leadership have indeed become weaker.

At a time when people are suffering and shabby leaders are reaping Nobel Prizes that only enable more exploitation, it is cru-

cial to bear witness to the truth. As Palestinians we must ask whether our century of struggle should conclude not with a state and not with a democracy but with an awful caricature of both, extracted by a country that alone in the world has no officially declared borders and manipulated by a man whose methods and patrons resemble those of every other Arab tyrant.

This policy cannot be an excuse for continuing to misreport and misrepresent the realities. Were it just a matter of the mass media's laziness or ignorance that would be bad enough. But elite, knowledgeable, authoritative groups like the Council on Foreign Relations and its house organ *Foreign Affairs* connive in perpetuating the fiction that the Middle East has finally accepted the American paradigm. Consider that the journal ran three articles on "The Palestinian Future" in its July/August 1994 issue; two of them were by Israelis (neither one known for his pacific views), one by a former United States National Security Council official. Earlier (November/December 1993) it had published two pieces on "after-shocks of the peace plan"; both were by Americans one of whom (the author of the essay on Islamic militants) was a specialist on medieval Iran. Then again two issues partially devoted to "Is Islam a Threat?" and "The Islamic Cauldron" (Spring 1993 and May/June 1995), both contained not one article by a Muslim but were mostly written by poorly informed journalists, publicists, special pleaders.

Besides there is now an ample supply of alternative sources on what is happening on the ground, all of it in English, and better, more representative, more rounded in its coverage and the range of its detail. In Israel the Alternative Information Center publishes a monthly as well as a weekly bulletin: both provide excellent analysis and reporting. Israel Shahak still produces the most compelling and rigorous reports and translations (with his own trenchant commentaries) from the Hebrew press: they are easily available from the Middle East Data Center in Woodbridge, Virginia. *Middle East Mirror* does a daily fax report drawn from Arab and Israeli newspapers, magazines, broadcasts. *Middle East International* is, I think, the best fortnightly magazine on the Middle East. In addition the

French, British, and London-based Arab press is full of material, none of it used by the United States media to alter the misleading images attached to the peace process, and its basically retrograde designs.

The peace process has attempted first to isolate, then to pacify individual Arab states so that Israel, which has obviously figured out that it cannot forever depend on United States aid on such a lavish scale, can become the regional economic and military power, the Arabs providing what little is left of their squandered wealth, and their unlimited manpower. I have been particularly disheartened by the role played in all this by liberal Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, those who have lamented the Holocaust and the massacres in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Rwanda. Silence is not a response, and neither is some fairly tepid endorsement of a Palestinian state, with Israeli settlements and army more or less still there, still in charge. I believe that Israel has no future unless its people are a real part of the Middle East, not its soldiers nor its puppetmasters. I think we have to look beyond exclusivism and separatist nationalism and see that all over the area there are in fact smaller contests for democracy and rights: there is a women's movement in every Arab country, there is a human rights movement, and most important, there is a secular actuality that willingly engages religious intolerance and extremism of every kind.\* Israelis and their American supporters have a stake in those struggles, not in the distortion of hopes and rightful aspirations that has been called the peace process. And indeed, there is a secular versus religious struggle inside Israel, as well as a danger in Israel, the Occupied Territories and elsewhere, that this might become an overt civil war.

This peace process must be demystified and spoken about truthfully and plainly. Palestine/Israel is no ordinary bit of geography: it is more saturated in religious, historical, and cultural significance than any place on earth. It is also now the place where two peoples,

\*I have discussed this at length in *The Politics of Dispossession* (New York and London: Pantheon, Chatto and Windus, 1994; Vintage, 1995), pp. 372-411.



whether they like it or not, live inextricably linked lives, tied together by history, war, daily contact, and suffering. To speak in grandiose geopolitical terms, or to speak mindlessly about “separating” them is nothing less than to provide prescriptions for more violence and degradation. There is simply no substitute for seeing these two communities as equal to each other in rights and expectations, then proceeding from there to do justice to their living actualities. But whatever one does there is no alternative in my opinion to recognizing that the United States-supported peace process is a process with no real and lasting peace: it has actively harmed Palestinians and Israelis who deserve better. And, in its present form, I am convinced, it will not stand the test of time: it must be completely rethought and put on a more promising course. The so called Oslo II Agreement provides no such rethinking: it allows Israel to rule the Occupied Territories from the intact settlements and bypassing roads. I urge fellow Palestinians, Arabs, Israelis, Europeans, and Americans not to flinch from the unpalatable truth and to demand a reckoning from the unscrupulous leaders and their minions who have ignored or dismissed the facts and tampered with the lives of far too many decent people.

A shorter version of this concluding essay appeared in *The Nation*, October 16, 1995

## Appendix

Interview with Edward Said

by Abdullah al-Sinnawi, *Al-Arabi*, Cairo

(January 30, 1995)

ABDULLAH AL-SINNAWI: Professor Said, I don't mean to be provocative, except that the commentary by Yasir Arafat that was published a few weeks ago by *Al-Musawwar* magazine about your latest Arabic book, *Gaza-Jericho: An American Peace*, published in the UK and United States as *Peace and its Discontents* makes one wonder whether there exists a personal dimension to the issue. Let me first read it to you:

This is too absurd a book for me to respond to. Who made the *intifada* in Gaza? He, in America, did not make the *intifada*! . . . I, of course, read the book for entertainment, and there are others like him who are jumping on the bandwagon of patriotism.

The PLO made the *intifada* through its people and its children—2,000 martyrs, 117,000 wounded, 138,000 detainees, 7,000 disabled, 8,000 miscarriages among women—while he, in America does not feel the suffering of his people, does not understand the size of the greatest uprising in the modern age, which is considered to be the completion of the Palestinian revolution.

EDWARD SAID: First of all, I don't understand what the accusation of my living in America is supposed to mean. I do indeed live in America and say so in the first paragraph of my book: much of the work that I have done in support of my people's cause was produced from where I have lived as a Palestinian in exile, a condition that, Arafat must know, is not exclusively mine but one which includes the largest part of the Palestinian population. Arafat, who criticizes his opponents for their geographic distance from the arena of the *intifada*, forgets or pretends to forget that the palaces of Tunis that he frequented, the private planes, the ostentatious limousines, and the luxurious rooms of governance, are a great deal more distant from the *intifada* and its people—both spatially and temporally.

As for my not having made the *intifada*, I never claimed to be its maker. But there is a big difference between my not having made the *intifada* and my not feeling for the suffering of my people. My sense of belonging to the Palestinian people, my pride in their heroism, and my pain at their sufferings and defeats are not things people can take away from me: they are certainly more lasting and deeper than crude and opportunistic political considerations and the ephemeral desires of leaders. I am a Palestinian who was born in Jerusalem and was forced as a result of the 1948 Catastrophe to live in exile, in the same way as many hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were, Arafat (perhaps) among them. It is from this perspective that I do not understand what Arafat means when he describes me as one of those who jump on the bandwagon of patriotism. Does he mean that my living in exile takes away my right to Palestinian nationality? Or, does he mean that I have lost my eligibility to belong to the Palestinian people due to my opposition to his policies, which would mean that had I supported him—as I had at a certain period of my life—then he would have bestowed upon me the honor of nationality and patriotism? This demagogic tactic of his does not deserve more of a response.

Arafat's real problem does not so much lie in his not being the maker of the *intifada* (he was not!), as in his appointing himself the sole spokesperson for its martyrs and heroes. Arafat, who speaks now of the *intifada*'s heroism, did not consult with the *intifada*'s heroes during his secret negotiations in Oslo, nor did he even mention them in his humiliating speech at the White House. This indicates that he can erase or conjure up the *intifada* as it suits his plan.

If Arafat is indeed, as he claims, the living embodiment of the *intifada*, indeed, of Palestine itself, why has he still not received the ratification of the agreements that he signed with Israel—whose main goal is ensuring Israeli security—from any legitimate and existing Palestinian institution? Why has Arafat been unable to hold a meeting with a quorum of the PLO's executive committee or, more important, why has he been unable to convene the PNC until now? Or, why have he and those who have negotiated in the name of the *intifada* been unable to demand from the Israelis compensation for the losses and the destruction that the *intifada*'s heroic people have endured at Israel's hands—those losses which Arafat now recites so glibly? We know the *intifada*'s sacrifices. That he abandoned his own people's rights does not demonstrate respect for that people's sacrifices, nor for the suffering and pains that accompanied them.

As for his claim about my book's absurdity, I leave it to the reader to judge his and my ability to understand texts and interpret them, while wondering simultaneously about how someone who commands the most basic level of these skills could sign tens of documents that erase with the stroke of a pen many of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to independence. It seems to me that part of the problem is that Arafat's flawed linguistic and political understanding do not permit him to perceive the difference between limited autonomy, which is what he got, and national liberation, which he gave up—and which the Palestinian National Charter stipulates

as his task to fulfill, along with its congruent stipulation that the Palestinian leadership as a whole is obligated to struggle to achieve this goal.

AL-SINNAWI: But, Professor Said, there are those who claim that there is mainly a “personal animus” in the criticism that you have leveled against the Oslo agreement.

SAID: I have not meant to indulge in any purely personal criticism. Perhaps there are “personal dimensions” on Arafat’s part. When I read the full text of the Gaza–Jericho Agreement in *The New York Times* I felt that Israel deceived the PLO and the entire Palestinian people. That was until I saw Arafat on television attempting to portray this deception or defeat as an important accomplishment, a victory that merited praise!

I heard Arafat and his aides speak to the American media about things that bear no relation to the original text of the agreement. I began to wonder whether Arafat indeed did not understand what he had signed, or whether such declarations were attempts to improve a picture that is bad by any national Palestinian standard. Moreover, his behavior seemed amazing, especially when he spoke and portrayed himself “on a victorious path to the independent state” while all the evidence pointed in exactly the opposite direction.

I would like to say that there is a real disagreement between my and Arafat’s reading of Palestinian history. I believe in specific rights and in set goals which deserve to be struggled for and which no individual can give away. Arafat thinks that he can change these goals and give away these rights. Arafat may have thought that he had a good “bargain.” I think, however, that he tries to uphold his “bargain” with miscomprehension and with the creation of counterfeit facts—such as the claim made by Abu Mazen that “this is the first time that the Palestinians rule themselves.” Shafiq al-Hout took it upon himself to respond to him. It was then that I felt that the falsification of Palestinian history was no longer limited to the Israelis, and that we had become a

party to this counterfeit operation. This is why I decided to speak out, to criticize, and to uncover the facts that they want to bury. I decided to challenge the “conspiracy of silence.” This is exactly where I stand. For Arafat to take this as a personal issue, for him to imagine himself to be the embodiment of the Palestinian struggle is something that I reject, along with my rejection of the conflation of Arafat’s person with the Palestinian cause.

AL-SINNAWI: How do you explain Arafat’s signing of the Oslo agreement in the way it is formulated and with all the errors and infractions that it contains? Is it incompetence or complicity?

SAID: You know and the whole world knows that the Palestinian people have talented human resources. Arafat and his aides never used these resources during the Oslo negotiations. I should add that Arafat never really worked at understanding the Israelis—their political thinking, specific objectives, and methods of negotiating. This is a situation of “ceasing to understand.” This is not a problem of competence or incompetence only. There are other and graver dimensions to this issue.

AL-SINNAWI: Complicity, for example?

SAID: Possibly. Let me give you some examples: is it acceptable to formulate and sign an agreement with Israel without seeking any expert legal opinions? What would explain such conduct except indifference to the fate of the Palestinian people to the point of complicity? Let me give you another example: Arafat and his principal aides in the Oslo agreement, Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) and Abu Ala’ (Ahmad Quray), do not speak or really understand English, which is the language in which the Oslo document is written. Nor did they seek advice about the language. If you want to sign an agreement with Israel, then you must know that the other party to this agreement will take what you sign seriously, and that you cannot retreat from it except by making more concessions. There is a big difference between the PLO leadership signing an agreement with the Lebanese gov-

ernment, as it had done in Cairo in 1969, and its signing an agreement with Israel in 1993–94. The Lebanese government had no power to enforce the agreement, whereas as regards Israel the PLO cannot slip out of its obligation if only because Israel has the power to compel compliance. Israel's circumstances and situation are different from those of 1969 Lebanon. I really do not know the explanation for this kind of performance—lack of competence or complicity, or perhaps both.

The strangest aspect of this whole tragedy is that Arafat did not seek the support of the people and hold a referendum on the treaty. But he did not want this. Instead, he began closing down Palestinian institutions and stopped paying the PLO's financial commitments and salaries to PLO offices abroad, which means that he is no longer interested in them, or that there is no longer a need for them. It seems to me that Arafat has another plan in mind: to personally mastermind the "whole deal," thereby rendering the Palestinian cause an expression of his own personal will. If you take all this into consideration, then the issue of incompetence is perhaps one of the least important criteria. The defeat itself and the politics that it engendered are much more serious, since it is these policies which give rise to that particular kind of incompetence.

AL-SINNAWI: With the mixture of incompetence and political complicity, what is the scenario that you expect the PLO leadership to follow in the face of increasing criticisms leveled by the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories against the Oslo agreement, along with the expansion of popular rejection to what this agreement includes in unending concessions until now?

SAID: The PLO leadership will continue on the same path and in the same manner. With the increase of essentially unorganized and uncoordinated opposition among large sectors of people, the PLO leadership will further retreat into itself, relying more and more for its very existence on the police and the security agencies. Furthermore, I expect that as more of the errors and

shortcomings of the Oslo agreement become clearer, the PLO leadership will begin to conclude new “bargains” with Israel about the matter of elections, not so much for the purpose of increasing popular participation, or of seeking a better representation of the Palestinian people, albeit in a limited and marginal way, within the limited and marginal Palestine Authority itself, but rather to confirm itself in its position and confirm its very continuity. It is more likely that this leadership will approve something like a three-day Israeli withdrawal from population centers in order to carry out the elections, after which the occupation forces will return to their previous positions again—a limited withdrawal for a limited time. This scenario is in fact in direct violation of the Oslo provisions. In this new and streamlined scenario, the redeployment of Israeli forces is not mentioned at all and neither is the PLO leadership’s commitment to what it and the Israelis signed. The language of the “new bargain” will overshadow those provisions which were originally weak anyway. I also expect funding to enter in the heart of the new and expected bargain; for Arafat considers funding—especially as time passes and problems increase—his main weapon to prop up the security forces and to put the project of his dictatorial rule into effect.

Had you asked me if this leadership were able to put forth a new vision for the future, aside from words without content, I would have responded at once and unequivocally “No.” This leadership, to take one example, speaks of a “state” without making the effort to investigate and try to set up the attributes of such a state, the most important among which would be the rule of law. Aside from Israeli occupier’s law, there is no law that this authority can ask the police to execute. In order for there to be state authority, there must first exist laws and a constitution—I do not think that there is the slimmest possibility now of satisfactorily formulating either one or the other.

I should add that Arafat’s background, and that of the Pales-



tinian leadership that works alongside him, do not bode well for their having any interest in democracy or civil freedoms. Consequently, I expect that in this very small piece of Palestinian land that is referred to as the self-rule areas, a system of dictatorial rule will prevail—in which citizens' rights, especially in the realm of civil freedoms, will be absent. I do not think that the Israelis will be annoyed at this situation, as long as this authority remains true to its present nature: an instrument to maintain the occupation and assure Israel's security.

AL-SINNAWI: What then is your assessment of where the error in the Palestinian leadership's "manner of negotiating" lies, which made it possible for the Israelis, and particularly Rabin, to demand renegotiating anew the Oslo agreement? This was so, despite all the criticisms which the Palestinians—from different locations—had leveled against this agreement, including those who signed it themselves and who were to describe it as "absurd and weak," and justified signing it on the basis of their expectations to be able to modify it in the future and overcome its many shortcomings. This argument seems to be a hollow one now. Still, where exactly does the error lie in this type of thinking?

SAID: Most of Arafat's considerations were reduced in the final analysis to betting on Rabin as a changed man, that he had altered his vision, his values, and had finally become "a man of peace."

The truth of the matter, in the way that I and others see it, is that Israel did the exact opposite, by demanding more and more Palestinian concessions without showing any magnanimity or giving anything in return to the Palestinians. What happened was instead a show of stinginess and a policy of calculated humiliation. I think that Arafat's thinking was as follows: if I were to concede more, and if I became more flexible, then the Israelis in turn would become more flexible. Arafat thought of negotiations along the lines of Israeli propaganda, whereas the Israelis thought of them in a different manner: Arafat's flexibility is an

expression of weakness, which conveys the sense that he would be ready to make other concessions. Furthermore, you should not forget Rabin's claim of Israeli popular and right-wing pressure on him to justify his demands—he seems even now to want to withdraw the only statement that he gave to the Palestinians when he recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization as the representative of the Palestinian people.

AL-SINNAWI: Are we then dealing with a situation in which what the Oslo agreement included is being eroded?

SAID: There are indications to that effect, or to put it more correctly, the truth of Oslo has now been revealed. First and foremost, there has been the policy of expanding the settlements and the network of highways which the Occupation authority has already begun to put into practice, and which has no relationship whatsoever to independence, or to any of Arafat's claims about the goal of establishing a state. The Israeli plan aims at transforming Occupied Territories into cantons crisscrossed by a network of highways, not to mention the economic plan, which is based on complete Palestinian subservience to the Israeli economy. It would be a mistake for anyone to think that the Oslo agreement can lead to anything but subservience, especially when this was declared at the beginning without there being any "secrets" or "hidden information" about it.

AL-SINNAWI: What exactly do you mean when you use the following expression in your critical writings on the Oslo agreement: "The Palestinian leadership's betrayal of national aspirations"?

SAID: Palestinian national aspirations, as I understand them, are the right to self-determination, political freedom, and the inalienable right to an independent state. When I was a member of the Palestine National Council from 1977 to 1991, I voted more than once for these goals. Please note that there is a gigantic and inherent difference between "limited self-rule" and "independence." You must also note that the Oslo accords do not

include any references, not one sentence, about the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The leadership's main error was that it accepted the Madrid formula of an interim phase without specifying the ultimate goals—in the sense that it accepted an interim-phase project without laying down the foundations or the general context for a final resolution, which is what ultimately led to the practical cancellation of Palestinian aspirations. This is what I mean by the betrayal of national aspirations.

AL-SINNAWI: But you—and allow me to ask this question—agreed at the PNC conference in Algiers to the decision of recognizing the state of Israel, which I think was the logical introduction to what was to take place in Oslo. Don't you see a contradiction here?

SAID: How?

AL-SINNAWI: When you decide without a popular will and without negotiations to recognize Israel, you must expect that once negotiations begin, with the existing balance of powers, that you would have to make other, more dangerous, concessions.

SAID (*contemplative*): . . . Perhaps. I must at first clarify that at the psychological level, I was never able to let go of the bitterness resulting from the loss of the PLO's old goal, that is the establishment of secular democracy in Palestine. From this angle, perhaps I should have abstained from voting on the decisions of the 1988 PNC in Algiers. But despite my voting for that decision—which at the time *did* have popular support: it *was* voted on by over 400 representatives of the Palestinian people, who were never consulted about Oslo—I publicly declared my opposition to several subsequent developments. For example, I declared my opposition to what Arafat did in December 1988, when he parroted the statements in Geneva that the United States had demanded he pronounce as its condition for opening what turned out to be a fruitless dialogue with the PLO.

I even declared my stronger opposition when he had declared

in March 1989, in Paris, that the Palestinian National Charter had become outdated, or “caduc,” which was the word he used then. I’m not particularly fond of the Charter (an extremely flawed document) but I dispute Arafat’s right to dispose of it as he wishes. What I am saying now applies to him in the sense that it is easy for us to rethink the past and proceed to deconstruct and reconstruct history according to our psychological whims, especially if this history went in the wrong direction. Anyway, I respect myself and history to the extent that I can be aware of the naïveté of something of the sort.

Since the mid-1970s, I began to be gradually convinced of the difficulty of a war of liberation in the Palestinian case, and in the practical impossibility of the Palestinian people’s leadership, or the leadership of the Arab World itself, to carry the burdens of a war of liberation. I also was, and perhaps still am, convinced that the nature of Israeli existence in Palestine imposes a different set of conditions from the conditions that existed in the Algerian liberation struggle, for example, or that in South Africa. I go so far as to be convinced by Rosa Luxemburg’s statement that one cannot impose one’s own political solution on another people against their will. As a Palestinian who has suffered loss and deprivations, I cannot morally accept regaining my rights at the expense of another people’s deprivation.

I state all this in order to explain the motivations which made me reach the conclusion that political negotiations for the establishment of an independent state constitute the best possible way to realize national liberation for the Palestinian people, especially so when this goal had received a wide, quasi-consensus, as well as international recognition. I was also convinced that the Palestinian people and their leadership are not in possession on their own of the necessary conditions to launch a long-term war of liberation similar to the Vietnamese or the Algerians.

It seemed to me by the mid-1980s that historic reconciliation along the lines of the one we undertook in Algiers would itself

be a courageous humanitarian initiative that the Palestinians had to undertake to open the way for realizing the goal of establishing an independent Palestinian state. What I did not imagine then, however, was that the Palestinian leadership would be as defeatist as it became subsequently, and be as impotent as it later was in the face of the struggle to achieve the goal that was agreed upon in Algiers.

The Gaza–Jericho Agreement sets us at least twenty steps back from what the Palestinians had accepted in Algiers. When I voted in Algiers in support of the two-state plan, I did not imagine the possibility of what ended up taking place actually happening. In light of what developed subsequently, however, I now accept people's criticisms of what occurred in 1988. I cannot but admit that I might have been wrong in the way I voted then, and that what I saw as the correct thing to do then was not actually so.

AL-SINNAWI: My persistent question now is: if the national self-rule authority is not destined to become a state, what then is the fate or the future of this authority?

SAID: If you were to scrutinize the Oslo text, you'd find that it is the right of the Israeli forces to enter the self-rule areas if they thought or felt that their interests were being threatened. They have done and continue to do so. This right guarantees for Israel, in the practical realm, the imposition of the direct authority of the Occupation at any time it deems necessary, and to exercise its "right to kill" when it decides to do so. I have seen the former head of Israeli military intelligence, General Shlomo Gazit, on television during a debate in front of a Jewish audience, responding to the question, "How do you agree to grant the Palestinians self-rule, even though it may be limited?" by saying, "We have the right to go back to the self-rule areas if we feel that our interests were threatened."

I think that this type of self-rule is in effect a kind of collaboration between the Israeli forces and the Palestinian police force,

which strengthens the Occupation authority and does not lead to a state. More clearly put, what I am saying is that the Palestinian Authority is slowly being turned into an instrument of the Occupation, and this will be its ultimate fate.

AL-SINNAWI: Given such circumstances, do you expect a civil war?

SAID: Yes. Although all Palestinians are against the eruption of such a war, events are proceeding in that direction. Arafat is now nicknamed “the Military Governor of Gaza,” which means that he has replaced the Israeli military governor—his role now is to execute Israeli decisions. His forces killed seventeen Palestinian civilians last November (1994): this may have been the opening salvo in a simmering civil conflict between Palestinians.

AL-SINNAWI: Isn't it possible that there might be an opportunity to escape this sad fate?

SAID: I hope so. It is not inevitable that some sort of popular civil protest will take place. However, it is my duty to face myself and others with the truth. From the Israeli perspective, self-rule is an extension of the Occupation by other means.

AL-SINNAWI: Do you not think that there exists an “opportunity,” in which Arafat believes in trying to improve living conditions in Gaza—a situation which may temper the effect of all the concessions and the bargains?

SAID: These are all comic and stupid illusions that have no basis. Gaza does have potential and it should have the right to look forward to improving its living conditions, and it is possible at the end that it could become half-independent. As you know, Israel does not want Gaza, but at the same time it will not permit it to have complete independence. As for the talk of a “new Singapore” or that it will become a banking center in the area, or a tourist center, these are—as I said already—illusions that interest only those who repeat them. They have no foundation at all. I should add that there is no solution to the economic problem in the short run. Conditions may improve slightly but not in the way that they have been advertised.

AL-SINNAWI: I would like to ask you now, Professor Said, as you are a Jerusalemite, whether you think that there is still an opportunity, or a capacity on the part of Palestinian negotiators, to do anything about the issue of Jerusalem, or whether the holy city has indeed been lost.

SAID: The Israeli plan for Jerusalem and in Jerusalem is well known and old, and there is, unfortunately, no official Palestinian plan for, or a consensus on Jerusalem. I have tried to ask, more than once, friends, family, and acquaintances of mine who live in Jerusalem if there were “public projects” or “national projects” such as the construction of new buildings, and the answers that I always receive are “There are none.”

Even the idea of having a Palestinian public sector or the idea of organized group action to confront Israeli plans are not on the table, nor are such projects known or crystallized in Palestinian discourse. There is a chronic situation of neglect in the case of Jerusalem. This city represents a symbolic and spiritual tragedy. Jerusalem’s new geography, which is the direct issue of the struggle over it, is absent in Palestinian discourse. In fact, I can even say that there is no Palestinian language that can explain to the world in a way that it can understand, what Jerusalem means to us. I remember that Faysal Husseini spoke once in the United States about the “problem of Jerusalem.” Everything he said about it confirmed that it was the city of all monotheistic religions and that it is the capital of religious reconciliation among people. One of those present commented, “I see you are being optimistic, but I don’t know on what basis.”

AL-SINNAWI: So what is the correct stance, then?

SAID: There is nothing that can be done short of an all-out mobilization effort of Palestinians on the issue of Jerusalem—at the very least, we ought to ask Palestinian workers not to work in the Israeli settlement expansion project in Jerusalem or the surrounding areas. The whole matter needs will, planning, mobilization, and a new language. I would like to stress on the

margins of this discussion that what is most dangerous about the Oslo accords, or their most dangerous outcome, is the defeat of the Palestinian will. I do not simply oppose a particular text or even the agreement itself; what I oppose is the defeat of the Palestinian will which has taken place. It is enough for me to tell you that the last time I saw Arafat—when he was convalescing in 1992 at one of King Hussein's palaces in Amman after his plane crashed in the Libyan desert—he was surrounded by twenty aides, busy following the results of the Israeli elections to the extent that I felt that he was staking his entire future on Rabin's electoral win. I wondered then: what does it mean for us whether Rabin wins the elections or not? Then, I realized that this kind of wagering on the other, this holding on to the illusion that there are peaceful elements in the Rabin government, especially in Meretz, is what led the Palestinian leadership to where it is now, which is the loss of will, or, in other words, the defeat of the will.

AL-SINNAWI: Professor Said, you have just brought up an issue which I would like to discuss further. You have just said that staking one's future on Meretz is an illusion, which means that Meretz is part and parcel of the official Zionist organization. My question is: what is your present assessment of the Palestinian-Israeli dialogues in which you yourself had participated since 1969 in the lecture halls of Harvard University? Don't you think this journey needs to be reviewed?

SAID: No and yes. What I want to say to you is that I and many others used to see these meetings as a kind of confrontation, in which Israelis felt obligated to deal with the history, the people, and the inherited events which their state and its official propaganda had erased from existence, or had purposefully distorted. This is why meeting Israelis or appearing with them publicly was part of the struggle of words and ideas against the horrors of military occupation and of deprivation. However, I had distinguished early enough, perhaps since the first Harvard meet-



ing, between official dialogue, which unfortunately was all that the PLO leadership wanted and sought to achieve, and a dialogue with the “real opposition” within Israel that was against Zionist policies. This is why I ceased participating in these meetings in 1986. Perhaps, I should register here my full indictment of the PLO’s neglect in not establishing a dialogue with non-Zionist Jews like my good friend, the Jewish thinker, Noam Chomsky, whose political principles have prevented him from making any bargains with Israeli institutions or with American Jewish organizations. I stopped playing the game of dialogue whose ultimate objective was becoming more intimate with the Israeli government. This is why I described the role of Meretz or that of the elements of the Labor left as (Yossi Sarid has explicitly said) one of pressuring Palestinians into making more concessions in the name of “flexibility,” which some believed would enable the Israeli government to meet this flexibility with a flexibility of its own. This never happened.

AL-SINNAWI: In addition, Professor Said, you participated in laying the groundwork for a Palestinian-American dialogue in 1979 when Cyrus Vance was the U.S. Secretary of State. Do you think, given your direct experience in such dialogues, that the PLO would have been able to obtain from him more than it did in Oslo?

SAID: Clearly yes, in that in 1979 he provided a better opening than Israel did in 1993. The 1993 agreement—as I have already said many times—was not inevitable or necessary. Vance’s plan was certainly much better, although I must clarify, as it is my right and perhaps my duty to say, that I was a messenger and not party to these negotiations, nor was I anybody’s representative to the Americans. Vance’s assistant, Hodding Carter, was an old schoolfriend from the 1950s with whom I used to speak about Palestinian demands. He was the one who arranged for me and Vance to meet. When I did meet Vance, I told him that the way the Palestinian cause was being dealt with at Camp David was

going to lead to more problems and complications. He responded by saying, "I don't want to hold discussions with you." He then placed his hand on my knee and added, "You know that I want to listen to you more, but what I want now is something different. I want to open a dialogue with Arafat because the conditions set by my predecessor," he meant Henry Kissinger whose name he never uttered once, "are impossible." I phoned Arafat that same night, and Vance called me two or three times to ascertain that his message had been delivered. When I met Vance another time, I found out from him that he had more than one proposal; I also found out later that Arafat had rejected all of them. Why? I do not know. I was never supportive of a "secret agreement" between the PLO and Israel. I always viewed my role as one of explaining and conveying the Palestinian perspective to the entire world. I remember that I said then, "What I fear is not negotiations, rather their outcomes." That was because the PLO was already showing signs of its later policy—talking revolution and doing the exact opposite.

AL-SINNAWI: There is a hypothesis that Arafat accepted the Oslo terms because he feared that the Occupied Territories were slipping away from his political plans due to the *intifada*.

SAID: I think so. The *intifada* created a different Palestinian perspective and established in reality concrete organizations, popular committees, and NGOs parallel to those of the Occupation. Through its political creativity it created a Palestinian society that for a time was more or less independent.

I think Arafat rushed to conclude this agreement because he was scared of two things: first the independence of the Occupied Territories under a new leadership made up of those who became politically and publicly prominent during the Washington negotiations, like Haidar Abdel Shafi and Hanan Ashrawi, and this fear was actually discussed; second, his feeling, along with that of the rest of the leadership, of isolation in Tunis after the disastrous mistakes they made during the Gulf crisis and at the

end of the Cold War. As a result, he realized that he had no other alternative but to conclude a secret agreement with Rabin, no matter what kind of concessions it would have to include.

AL-SINNAWI: There are those who think that a solution to this Palestinian crisis may lie in a resurrection of the PLO's role as an institution, as it represents Palestinian identity and the entire Palestinian people, including Hamas and Al-Jihad in it on the one hand, and definitively separating the leadership of the self-rule authority in Gaza from that of the PLO's executive committee in Tunis on the other. What do you think of such a solution, which has been adopted in different formats by prominent Palestinian and Arab personalities such as Dr. Ahmad Sidqi Dajani and Dr. Clovis Maksoud?

SAID: I wish something like this would take place, but unfortunately it is a very difficult matter. I think there is now a sense of paralysis. The leadership will not accept voluntarily the separation between the two. There is also a dilemma that many are suffering from, which is summarized in what I said earlier about the defeat of the Palestinian will in the Oslo agreement. The tragedy of this agreement is that it has broken the unity of the Palestinian people, the refugees, the people living on the Occupied Territories, and the 1948 Palestinians. The crisis now is that there is no longer one umbrella, one central plan, or one main current in our political lives that would express the aspirations of the Palestinian people and their hopes for independence.

AL-SINNAWI: Where then would you place Hamas, which represents a large current of opinion with much popularity and a resisting presence?

SAID: Hamas is indeed a resistance movement against the Occupation and a movement of Palestinian protest. However, if you were to ask me as a Palestinian whether Hamas represents a real alternative at the level of the Palestinian national movement, I would immediately and unequivocally say no. The reason for my answer is that Hamas does not possess a Palestinian vision or a reading of Palestinian history outside of generalities.

I have met and spoken to some of their representatives in Amman and in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza. I admire their courage, their strength of will, and their willingness to fight, although I am myself against indiscriminate terror and suicide missions. However, the question of representing the Palestinian people or of building a democratic current that would organize all of the segments of our people is beyond Hamas's capabilities.

AL-SINNAWI: Professor Said, I know that our discussion has gotten much longer than I had anticipated, but there is one more question. Don't you think that there is a contradiction between your description of the intellectual, in a lecture you recently gave in Beirut in Arabic, as not having a sense of belonging [being unaffiliated], when, in fact, you yourself demonstrate a high degree of commitment and belonging to the cause of your people?

SAID (*laughing*): . . . The error is in the translation. Let us use another expression to describe the intellectual as an outsider or as marginalized, in the sense that he/she is a committed person but nevertheless stands outside the realm of power or official institutions, in the wider sense of the words *power* and *institution*. The intellectual must maintain a margin of independence and must be an instrument of resurrecting "lost memory."

I always speak of two models: the first intellectual model is that which Gramsci mentions in his *Prison Notebooks*, wherein he considers anyone with a mind as an intellectual. Gramsci's intellectual is of two kinds: the traditional intellectual, such as the teacher or the priest, and the organic intellectual who is affiliated with a class in the ascendant which is attempting to become hegemonic over society—examples of such an intellectual would be someone like a media/propaganda person or a party theoretician. My second model is that of Julien Benda in his book *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, in which he states that the intellectual is a rare person, like Jesus, Socrates, Nietzsche, Voltaire; he is one who speaks of truth and justice without concern for his personal interests or his fate. I think that the most

important role for the contemporary intellectual is to combine Gramsci and Benda, defend freedom of expression because the intellectual's role exists in language, and the problem of language is the principal problem, that is, which language to use. The language that is imposed upon us all is the language of the community and of the homeland. Such a language is filled with pressures such as consensus, nationalism, power, gibberish, and a whole host of empty slogans. The intellectual must extract from the language an idiom capable of articulating both the principles that Benda spoke of as well as the broad moral interests that define Gramsci's organic intellectual as affiliated not with a privileged, but a grassroots movement.

Moreover, the role of the intellectual is that of testifying: he/she testifies against the misuses of history or against the injustices that befall the oppressed. I should add that he/she must be a rebel against power and against prevailing ideas. The intellectual must raise doubts about the illusions of the status quo, all that is tyrannical in society, especially for the sake of the deprived and the oppressed.

There is of course a trap for the intellectual in the professional world, and that is his/her own propensity to acquire power and to be interested in it within his or her domain.

AL-SINNAWI: Does the intellectual cease to be an intellectual if he/she were to join power or participate in it in any way?

SAID: My view is that the individual ceases to be an intellectual in the ways I've described although anyone can still call themselves an intellectual. Let me give you the example of André Malraux, France's great literary figure, who stopped being a true intellectual at the moment he agreed to become the Minister of Culture under Charles de Gaulle. If the role includes Malraux, then everything is permitted the intellectual. The role of the intellectual is to say the truth to power, to address the central authority in every society without hypocrisy, and to choose the method, the style, the critique best suited for those purposes. This is so

because the intellectual produces a kind of performance that continues for years, whose main goal is (and here it seems to me Benda is crucial) to give utterance not to mere fashion and passing fads but to real ideas and values, which cannot be articulated from inside a position of power, such as Malraux's.

*Translated by Joseph Massad*



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"The Symbols and Realities of Power": *Al-Ahram Weekly*, June 9, 1994. *Al-Hayat*, June 14, 1994.

"Winners and Losers": *Al-Ahram Weekly*, June 30, 1994. *Al-Hayat*, July 18, 1994.

"The American 'Peace Process'": *Al-Ahram Weekly*, August 4, 1994. *Al-Hayat*, August 11, 1994.

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"The Middle East 'Peace Process': Misleading Images and Brutal Actualities": *The Nation*, October 16, 1995.

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