

# THE INTIFADA AND THE PEACE PROCESS

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The Palestinian uprising, or intifada, now in its third year, has had a profound influence on the affairs of the region. Perhaps its most direct consequences have been within the Palestinian community itself, where a virtual social revolution has been in progress, with popular committees, the breakdown of traditional patterns of authority, greater freedom for women, sharp reduction in drug use, and moves towards a much more democratic and independent society.

The intifada has impeded the gradual integration of the territories within Israel and has posed new problems of population control. Low-level terror and repression no longer suffice. Relying on its material and diplomatic support from the United States, Israel has turned to more extreme forms of violence and the imposition of totalitarian controls over every aspect of life. The assumption is that articulate opinion in the United States will accept these measures, and that the screws can be tightened until the population submits. As yet, the latter expectation has not been fulfilled.

The territories are losing some of their attraction as a controlled export market and source of cheap labor, though their water resources remain essential to Israel. The costs of the repression are mounting. Army morale and training have declined, quite seriously according to some military experts. The Israeli economy has been tottering. The decline in Cold War tensions and in opportunities for arms sales to Third World dictators is regarded as catastrophic for an economy based heavily on weapons exports. Furthermore, the European Community does not share the easy American tolerance for Israeli atrocities. The European Parliament has voted to freeze scientific cooperation with Israel "because of human rights violations in the territories," the EEC has rejected Israel's request for cooperation in the field of energy, and some political leaders have called for further sanctions.<sup>1</sup>

If the United States perceives the costs to be too high, it will modify its long-term policy of support for the Israeli occupation and the repression required to subdue the inhabitants (rhetorical flourishes aside); Israel, which

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1. Edwin Eitan, "For the First Time: European sanctions against Israel," *Yedioth Ahronot*, 19 January 1990; Gabi Baron and Van Eckstein, "European Common Market suspends funding of research in Israel," *Yedioth Ahronot*, 23 January 1990; David Makovsky, "European Parliament votes to punish Israel," *The Jerusalem Post*, 21 January 1990; Gidon Alon, "European Common Market deferred Israel's request to strengthen cooperation in the domain of energy," *Ha'aretz*, 24 January 1990; Shada Islam, "European Community: Angered by Israel," *Middle East International*, 2 February 1990; Edwin Eitan, JTA, "European Parliament calls for sanctions against Israel," *Northern California Jewish Bulletin*, 26 January 1990; "European Community defers discussions about cooperation with Israel," *Al-Hamishmar*, 11 February 1990.

has chosen a course that leaves it dependent on US power, would hardly be able to ignore this development.

Israel hopes to gain renewed strength from the flow of Soviet Jews to the country. The United States has adopted the position of the Israeli government and much of the American Jewish community that Soviet Jews should be forced to go to Israel, a policy reminiscent of the treatment of Holocaust survivors in the early post-World War II period. The Senate issued a unanimous appeal to Gorbachev to arrange direct flights to Israel, thus eliminating the way stations that allowed them other choices, and their entry to the United States is now effectively barred, though a "well-founded fear of persecution" qualifies them for refugee status more than before.<sup>2</sup> The United States will doubtless agree to finance this operation with a condition that its aid not be used for settlement in the occupied territories—a face-saving gesture to obscure the fact that other funds will be freed thereby for settlement there by Russian immigrants or others. When the press reports that the Israeli government is "cooperating in the effort" to settle the occupied territories, "with large cash subsidies for new settlers, low-interest mortgages and essentially free land," the correct translation is that the American taxpayer is "cooperating in the effort."<sup>3</sup>

Inside Israel, opinion is becoming more polarized. There is growing support for a political settlement (meaning some variety of two-state arrangement), though it has little political representation or organized form. Diplomat Abba Eban and others regarded in the United States as leading doves still advocate traditional Labor Party rejectionism, so-called "territorial compromise:" Israel will take the regions and resources it desires but not areas of heavy Arab population concentration, which are to be placed under Jordanian administration or in an "autonomous entity" under Israeli control. But many are coming to believe that a political solution would be in Israel's interests, or are unwilling to bear the moral burden of the occupation. If the intifada persists, Peace Now, the largest peace group, may finally call for a political settlement, as many of its members do, and as the PLO has done for years, sometimes ambiguously, sometimes rather clearly.

At the same time, anti-Arab racism and chauvinism are also increasing. It is manifested primarily toward Arabs under occupation, but Israel itself cannot remain immune. While never subjected to the harsh treatment of the people of the territories, Israel's Arab citizens have always been deprived of basic rights, such as access to land and development funds, by legal and administrative arrangements. These may become harsher. New "anti-terrorist" legislation may deny Israeli Arabs access to outside funds that partially compensate for the restriction of resources to Jewish citizens. Recent additions to the Basic Law (effectively, the Constitution) require that political activity conform to the doctrine that Israel is the state of the Jewish people in Israel and the

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2. Robert Pear, "Moscow Rejects US Plea to allow Flights to Israel," *The New York Times*, 20 February 1990, A1.

3. Joel Brinkley, "West Bank's 'Garden Views' and 'Special Loans' Are Luring Jewish Settlers," *The New York Times*, 4 March 1990, 3.

diaspora, not the state of its citizens. The High Court has interpreted the law as banning any political party or legislation calling for equal rights for Arab citizens. One Justice stated flatly that "it is necessary to prevent a Jew or Arab who calls for equality of rights for Arabs from sitting in the Knesset or being elected to it," the press reports, and three others (out of five) were in essential agreement.<sup>4</sup> There has been protest in Israel, but only silence here in the United States.

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For the present, the United States is temporizing, seeking to deflect attention from the forceful repression of the intifada until the prospects for this enterprise become clearer. The method is to concentrate on diplomatic gestures of little substance, trusting the media to follow suit and to avoid the harsh reality. The purpose is served by the United States-PLO dialogue and skirmishing about technicalities of Israel's plan to establish long-term control over the region.

There is little reason to question the analysis of Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin of the Labor Party, who expressed his satisfaction with the United States-PLO dialogue, a "successful operation" involving only "low-level discussions" that avoid any serious issue. The Americans, Rabin went on, are "now satisfied, and do not seek any [political] solution, and they will grant us a year, at least a year" to resolve the situation in Israel's own way, that is, by force. "The inhabitants of the territories are subject to harsh military and economic pressure . . . In the end, they will be broken," and will accept Israel's terms, Rabin assured a Peace Now delegation.<sup>5</sup>

Adopting a similar stand, a high-level US official urged Israel to end its public objections to the dialogue, which "only add significance" to it, increasing its importance beyond the intended narrow bounds. The Bush administration proposals in March 1989, offering "suggestions" to Israel and the PLO, underscored the point. Israel was urged to limit the measures instituted to suppress the intifada; and the PLO, to terminate the "violent demonstrations" and the distribution of "inflammatory leaflets." The proposal, then, is that

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4. "The demands for full equality between Jews and Arabs is unacceptable, Justice Levin says," *Yedioth Ahronot*, 15 December 1989; Asher Felix Landau, "Progressive list for peace," *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 December 1989; Allan Shapiro, "A nation's self-inflicted wounds," *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 December 1989.

5. Nahum Barnea, "Happy in their lot," *Yedioth Ahronot*, 24 February 1989.

the PLO cooperate with Israel in establishing a somewhat harsher version of the former status quo.<sup>6</sup>

Rabin's analysis is reinforced by the course of the dialogue, since its first session, when the United States presented its position (leaked to the Egyptian and Israeli press): First, there can be no international conference; Second, the PLO must call off the "riots" in the occupied territories, "which we view as terrorist acts against Israel."<sup>7</sup> In short, the PLO should ensure that the former status quo be restored. The ban on an international conference follows from the recognition that outside parties would exert pressure for a political settlement.

Rabin's analysis is reinforced further by a look at the small subset of diplomatic efforts that qualify as "the peace process" in American political parlance. The current centerpiece is the Baker plan, which, as Secretary of State James Baker has explained, is designed to advance Israel's Shamir plan. "Our goal all along has been to try to assist in the implementation of the Shamir initiative," Mr. Baker observed. "There is no other proposal or initiative that we are working with."<sup>8</sup>

Progress in this effort is hampered by several factors. The most serious is that Prime Minister Shamir and his Likud Party are ambivalent. Another is that the PLO has not accepted the Baker-Shamir plan with the clarity that the United States demands. A minor problem, noted in passing in *The New York Times*, is that "with the exception of the United States, not one nation has endorsed the plan."<sup>9</sup> There may, however, be some progress on that score. Under the headline "Soviets Trying to Become Team Player in Mideast," Alan Cowell writes that "the Soviet Union has moved away from a policy of confrontation with the United States and now indicates that it prefers partnership with Washington in the diplomacy of the region." This "shift away from confrontation" brings the Soviet Union "closer to the mainstream of Mideast diplomacy," that is, closer to joining the United States off the spectrum of world opinion.<sup>10</sup> This will make it a "team player" in the "mainstream," because "the team," by definition, is the United States and "the mainstream" is the position it occupies. Similarly, the term "peace process" stands for policies conducted or approved by Washington, and "rejectionism" stands for the rejection of the rights of Jews, not Palestinians, because the United States rejects Palestinian national rights. Such conventions, familiar in other areas as well ("containment," "deterrence," "democracy," etc.), serve to restrict discussion to tactical questions within the framework of US policy, and are thus essential features of political discourse.

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6. Yoel Esteron and Ilan Kfir, "High American official: we will not cancel dialogue with the PLO. Enough complaining," *Hadasbot*, 14 February 1990; Thomas Friedman, "P.L.O. and Israel To Get Bush Ideas On Mideast Peace," *The New York Times*, 12 March 1989, A1.

7. For details, see my *Necessary Illusions* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 312.

8. Thomas Friedman, "Shamir Faulted on Mideast Remarks," *New York Times*, 19 October 1989, A3.

9. Joel Brinkley, "Shamir Peace Plan: Some Israelis Say It Is Dying," *The New York Times*, 8 September 1989, A6.

10. Allan Cowell, "Soviets Trying to Become Team Player in Mideast," *The New York Times*, 12 December 1989, A10.

Israeli political scientist Ze'ev Tzachor, writing from Washington (presumably, with Israel Embassy contacts), describes the Shamir plan as "a media ploy" devised by "friends of Israel in the United States," along with experts in public relations and media representatives, "to construct a good case to present on Israel's behalf," with "a full-scale media campaign to convince the world that Israel is a progressive state that desires peace."<sup>11</sup> A further goal, surely, was to divert attention from the increasing repression required to ensure that "they will be broken."

Since the Baker-Shamir plan is the only proposal on the table according to the US government and the media, it merits a careful look.<sup>12</sup> It is actually the Baker-Shamir-Peres-Rabin plan, representing the consensus of Likud and Labor. The text has three parts: "Basic Premises," mode of implementation, and details on the proposed elections. The Basic Premises include three substantive points:

First, there can be no "additional Palestinian state in the Gaza district and in the area between Israel and Jordan." The phrase "additional Palestinian state" reflects the consensus view that there already is a Palestinian state, namely, Jordan. Hence the issue of national self-determination for the Palestinians does not arise, whatever Palestinians, Jordan, Europe, and others who are out of the "mainstream" may mistakenly believe.

Second, "Israel will not conduct negotiations with the PLO," that is, with the preferred political representatives of the Palestinians. Note that this extreme form of rejectionism, on a par with a (hypothetical) rejection of the right of the Zionist organizations to join the debate over partition in 1947, has been adopted across the political spectrum in the United States, and by Israel's Peace Now organization until late 1988.

Third, "There will be no change in the status of Judea, Samaria and Gaza other than in accordance with the basic guidelines of the Government," which exclude a "second Palestinian state."

The Basic Premises, then, are forthright. They incorporate the "Four No's" of the official Labor Party program: No return to the 1967 borders, No removal of settlements, No negotiations with the PLO, No Palestinian state. There remain technical differences between Labor and Likud on the exact form of their rejectionism, but the denial of Palestinian self-determination on the part of both major political groupings is expressed with great clarity in the Basic Premises of their common program, endorsed across the spectrum of articulate opinion in the United States.

Given the Basic Premises, it comes as no surprise that the process outlined is to lead to "arrangements for peace and borders between Israel and Jordan,"

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11. Ze'ev Tzachor, "The elections in the territories as a media ploy," *Hotam, Al Hamishbar Supplement*, 28 July 1989.

12. Israeli Government Election Plan, Jerusalem, 14 May 1989, official text distributed by the Embassy of Israel in Washington, reprinted in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol XIX, No. 1 (Autumn 1989): 145-148; not to be confused with an earlier proposal called "The Shamir Plan," *The Jerusalem Post* 14 April 1989. On these matters, see Norman Finkelstein, *Middle East Report (MERIP)*, No. 158, (May-June 1989); Noam Chomsky, "The Art of Evasion: Diplomacy in the Middle East," *Z magazine* January 1990.

and a "peace treaty between Israel and Jordan." There are to be "free and democratic elections . . . in an atmosphere devoid of violence, threats and terror"—elections conducted under Israeli military occupation, with the PLO excluded and much of the internal Palestinian leadership in Israeli prison camps, under miserable conditions of detention and often without even a farcical trial. We need not comment on what the reaction would be if such a proposal were advanced by some official enemy.

The character of these "free and democratic elections" was clarified by leading representatives of the two parties. Defense Minister Rabin, speaking for Labor, explained that "a candidate who announces that he is a member of the PLO will go directly to prison."<sup>13</sup> Likud Minister of Justice Dan Meridor announced, "If members of the PLO will be elected—the political process that the government has initiated will be terminated."<sup>14</sup> Shamir's close associate Yossi Ben Aharon, Director General of the Prime Minister's office, added that if a Palestinian representative "receives from the PLO instructions about political affairs, then the process is finished, but if he will receive instructions from the PLO about taxes in Nablus or about municipal rates in general," there is no problem. These words make it clear, reporter No'omi Levitski observes, "that the hysterical opposition to the PLO is not based on them being 'murderers and terrorists,' but on the fact that the PLO will not agree to negotiate only about the house rates in Ramallah."<sup>15</sup> Confirming her conclusion, Prime Minister Shamir informed the Knesset that he is ready to speak with Satan, but not the PLO, "not because of the terroristic character of this organization, but because it desires to establish a Palestinian state."<sup>16</sup> Labor leaders Peres and Rabin have expressed similar views.

Meridor went on to point out that the "real battle" is for American public opinion. The "role of the Americans is to tell the Arabs of the territories to accept [Israel's] election plan because there is no alternative"—while, of course, continuing to provide diplomatic support and a massive subsidy.

There has been much discussion of this plan, but it has been restricted to the precise modalities of implementation, specifically, to the question of just which Palestinians will be acceptable to the United States and Israel. The rejectionist framework is not a topic for consideration, and it is doubtful that the basic terms of the "peace process" have even been reported in the mainstream. This is in accord with the general doctrine already noted: discussion is to be restricted to tactical questions within the framework of US policy, taken as given.

The background for these attempts to deflect a political settlement can be sketched only briefly here.<sup>17</sup> Israel's policy has been dominated by the thesis

13. Rabin interview with Dan Shilon, *Ha'aretz*, 19 April 1989.

14. Oren Cohen, *Hadasbot*, 16 May 1989.

15. No'omi Levitski, "Stranglehold over Shamir's office," *Hadasbot*, 17 November 1989.

16. Dan Margalit, *Ha'aretz*, 28 November 1989.

17. For details, see Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War* (New York: Pantheon, 1982); *Fateful Triangle* (Boston: South End Press, 1983); *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*; essay in Z. Lockman & Joel Beinin, eds., *Intifada* (Boston: South End Press, 1990). There is ample literature with a range of

expressed by Labor dove Haim Herzog (now President), who explained in an internal discussion in 1972 that

I am certainly not prepared to accept [Palestinians] as participants in any way in a land that has been consecrated to our people for thousands of years. To the Jews of this land there cannot be any partner.

Israel's first peace offer, transmitted secretly via the United States after a divided (11-10) cabinet decision of June 19, 1967, called for a settlement at the international borders with Syria and Egypt, with no mention of Jordan and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remaining within Israel. This proposal, which Eban described as "the most dramatic initiative that the government of Israel ever took before or since," was cancelled a year later, when Israel proposed a settlement in terms of the Allon plan ("territorial compromise"). There appear to be no subsequent Israeli initiatives, and Israel has forcefully rejected other proposals apart from the Camp David arrangements, which the government interpreted as granting it effective control over the occupied territories. In his detailed review of the internal records, Yossi Beilin of the Labor Party concludes that by 1971, Israel could have had a peace settlement in terms of the prevailing international consensus, offering nothing to the Palestinians.<sup>18</sup>

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The United States officially supported a settlement on the international (pre-June 1967) border with minor modifications, with territorial and security guarantees and general peace arrangements as proposed in UN 242 (the Rogers plan of December 1969). Essentially the same proposal was endorsed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in February 1971. Israel recognized Sadat's proposal as a genuine peace offer, but rejected it, with the support of the United States, which preferred "stalemate," as Henry Kissinger reports in his memoirs, with an explanation that reveals the most startling ignorance and

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different views, e.g., Seth Tillman, *The United States in the Middle East* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1982); Steven Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Cheryl Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest* (Champaign-Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

18. Yossi Beilin, *Mebiro shel Ihud* (Revivim, 1985).

geopolitical fantasies.<sup>19</sup> From that time, the United States and Israel have been diplomatically rather isolated. In January 1976, the United States was forced to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for a two-state diplomatic settlement with territorial and security guarantees, following UN 242's call for "appropriate arrangements . . . to guarantee . . . the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all states in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries." The resolution, which represented a broad international consensus, was proposed by Jordan, Syria and Egypt and supported by the PLO, in fact, "prepared" by the PLO according to Israeli UN Ambassador Herzog.

In subsequent years there were numerous proposals of a similar nature by the Arab states and the PLO, all rejected by Israel and dismissed by the United States, and either not reported at all or expunged from the record in the media. They do not constitute part of the "peace process."<sup>20</sup>

With the intifada, US-Israeli rejectionism became more difficult to sustain, particularly as PLO offers became increasingly explicit throughout 1988. By the end of the year, the United States was becoming an international laughing-stock because of its demand that Arafat not only publicly adopt the positions advocated by the Western world, but that he "repeat after me" the exact "magic words" formulated for him by the State Department. The wise decision was made to resort to the familiar diplomatic maneuver called "the Trollope ploy" by the Kennedy intellectuals: to declare that the adversary had succumbed and accepted our demands.

The game was played in December 1988 with brilliant success. The media parroted the State Department claim that at a news conference in Geneva, Arafat had finally uttered the words dictated for him by his mentors in Washington, accepting the US position on the three crucial doctrines: that UN 242 holds without qualifications (that is, without regard to UN resolutions that accord the Palestinians the right of self-determination); that Israel has an abstract "right to exist" (meaning that the Palestinians not only recognize its existence but also accord it a higher moral legitimacy than any existing state, agreeing that whatever has happened to them is not only a fact of the international order, but is also just and fair); and that there is no right of resistance to colonial and racist regimes or military occupation, a doctrine upheld by South Africa, Israel, the US government, and articulate opinion in the American mainstream, in opposition to the rest of the international community. The UN General Assembly vote on the matter was 153-2, with no abstentions.

At the famous press conference, Arafat accepted none of the American government's terms, simply reiterating earlier positions. But the propaganda triumph was nevertheless complete, as often in the past, and the standard version since is that the PLO has accepted the American dictates and must live up to its "solemn pledges" on pain of severe retribution.<sup>21</sup> At that point,

19. For discussion, see *Towards a New Cold War*, 184-185.

20. On the media record, see *Necessary Illusions*, 287ff.

21. *Ibid.*, for details.



we turn to the “dialogue” and the current “peace process,” as already discussed, and the increased repression that they mask.

The sources of US policy cannot be explored here, but no change is likely unless either a cost-benefit analysis dictates that the United States abandon its consistent rejectionism, or public opinion here, which has long favored the international consensus on a two-state diplomatic settlement, becomes a factor influencing policy.