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ENLIGHTENMENT ON OSLO: WORDS OR SWORDS?

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Reexamining the Basic Premises / The Reality of the PLO's Oslo Violations / The World — Fertile Soil for Antagonism / Risks for Peace in the 1990s / Enlightenment: A Missing Element

Enlightenment (as opposed to propaganda or plain information): The purposeful, energetic presentation of the [Israeli] case before one's own public as well as before governments, parliaments, opinion-makers, media, academia, and the public at large in relevant countries — as if they were juries in courts of justice out to pass judgment on major, nay, vital issues.

Reexamining the Basic Premises

The tragic, confidence-shattering events of Sukkot eve at the end of September 1996, when a well-planned and synchronized PLO armed uprising erupted "spontaneously" at those points in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza where Palestinian soldiers faced Israelis at close quarters, will surely bring a thorough reexamination of previously accepted premises and a reassessment of Israel's current security situation. To undertake such a thorough reexamination it is necessary to understand the legitimate fears of the opposition to the Oslo agreements as they have been implemented to date.

One of the axiomatic premises that deserves reexamination is that the Oslo agreements and subsequent negotiations would, per force, induce a change in Arab mood from a confrontational, intifada/war state of mind to an attitude of peaceful coexistence. This gradual change of mood should have been a function of two factors: material, i.e., the objective improvement of living conditions, and moral, the pro-peace atmosphere to be created by Arafat and his lieutenants, i.e., their promotion of peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Israelis, as specified in the Declaration of Principles (D.O.P.).

Since Palestinian Arab enmity has never subsided (on the contrary, it has spread to some Israeli Arab circles), the question is: What went wrong?

Obviously, the objective improvement of living conditions has lagged badly behind expectations, for two main reasons. First, the facts of life could not possibly catch up to the hopelessly over-optimistic expectations created by the vision of an instantly blooming "new Middle East." Secondly, Palestinian Arab insistence on maintaining the

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option of violence robbed the Arabs of Israeli jobs as well as investments, trade, public services, and stability in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

To compensate for the disappointment stemming from lack of material improvement, the Arafat leadership should have insisted on furthering pro-peace indoctrination, whose by-product would have been a significant and timely reduction of violence. However, the PLO leadership chose the way of strident verbal confrontation, a path counterproductive to coexistence, and of toleration of acts of terror, all in order to keep alive the option of violence.

One wonders if anybody would have even contemplated reverting to the use of arms were Israel to insist from the outset, sternly and unambiguously, on the meticulous, literal execution by Arafat of all D.O.P. clauses beginning with the formal deletion of the harmful articles of the Palestinian Covenant (which has not been done to this day); through the pursuance of a policy of coexistence (including the curbing of the Muslim clergy's as well as their own rhetoric); to the sequestration of firearms, scrupulous adherence to the agreed number of policemen (now multiplied by more than three), the Israeli screening of policemen, the extradition of suspected criminals, and, of course, the curbing of violence right from day one. Would the PLO have reverted to the use of arms knowing for sure that the Western world, its governments and public, would by no means tolerate it, and that the result would be a total economic/diplomatic standstill and ostracism?

The Reality of the PLO's Oslo Violations

As soon as he was back in Gaza after the famous White House handshake, Arafat declined to fulfill his obligation to extradite suspected murderers to Israel. Rather, he reached an understanding with more extremist, extra- and intra-PLO formations regarding their terrorist activities against Israel, multiplied his "police" force three- or four-fold, and adopted shrill, militant, anti-Israel rhetoric calling for "jihad" (holy war), declaring that he was following the strategy of Prophet Muhammad who concluded peace with the Jewish tribe of Khureish in Saudi Arabia, only to be able, later, to catch them off guard and slaughter them to the last one.

When the Hamas arch-terrorist Yihia Ayash, the "Engineer," was assassinated, Arafat gave him a state funeral, armed escorts, and declared him a "shaheed" (martyr). The suicide bus bombers were also declared "shaheeds."

When, two and a half years later, the Israeli government served Arafat with an ultimatum to put an end to

grave acts of terror, Arafat complied and terror almost totally ceased, proving that he could do it, but too late for more than 200 Israelis killed since Oslo. He did, unfortunately, continue his inflammatory rhetoric, such as demanding that each Arab mother have twelve children, two for her and ten to be sacrificed in his war for Jerusalem.

Arafat's lieutenants heeded their master's message and most started outdoing one another in warlike rhetoric, speaking openly about the option of violence, Oslo notwithstanding. President Mubarak of Egypt joined the chorus and became, during the past two years, the shrillest, most strident, Arab critic of Israel, while of late his controlled press and deputy foreign minister have adopted the coarsest, rudest form of vilification (so characteristic of dark dictatorships) when referring to the newly elected government of Israel and its head. The unison of foaming mouths was surely not coincidental.

When faced with non-compliance of the Oslo agreements, terror and verbal onslaught, the former Israeli government had two alternatives: either to stop the whole peace process and call for a fresh start, or find a way to "muddle through," advising that time will surely be the master healer of the ugly Arab mood and seeking to proceed while disregarding the breaches of agreement.

Railroaded by world opinion, fascinated by a fata morgana of its own making, and fearful that calling off the Oslo process would play into the hands of the opposition at home (which comprised the majority of Israel's Jewish voters), the Labor government decided to press on regardless. The psychological result was negative.

Aware of the Israeli government's predicament, the Arab mood grew more aggressive, like that of a prize-fighter who senses that his antagonist is running out of breath, a feeling that generates a surge of energy.

The Israeli government found itself squeezed between a militant opposition which shouted "I told you so" and the PLO's total disregard for its obligations under Oslo. Not willing to succumb, the Israeli government felt forced to side with Arafat and become his apologist in order to alleviate public reaction. Peres went as far as telling the public that when Arafat said "jihad," he did not really mean war but rather it was an "inoffensive boy scouts' rallying cry," or something similar.

Cornered by MK Benny Begin who accused him of writing a secret letter to Arafat regarding his sharing of rights in Jerusalem, Peres denied this with vehe-

mence. The existence of the letter was later revealed, written and sent to a Norwegian minister to be delivered to Arafat.

The world's political leaders, academics, media, and public adopted with joy the Israeli government's portrayal of Arafat as a reliable partner who fulfilled all his obligations. Who could be a better judge than Israel? If the Israeli government accepted a garbled, fuzzy generality as proof that Arafat had cancelled the Palestinian Covenant's inciteful clauses, why should President Clinton and the rest of the world express doubts? If Peres insisted that Arafat fulfilled his Oslo obligations and was therefore entitled to foreign financial aid, what right did Senator Helms or Congressman Gilman have to say no? "Politically correct" now meant pro-Arafat.

Arafat and the Labor government became the world's cherished and feasted "good guys" and Nobel Peace Prize recipients, while Netanyahu and the Likud opposition, who demanded that Arafat should be forced to honor his obligations, were called "troublemakers," "bad guys," "warmongers," and were denounced by the media together with Hamas and the Islamic Jihad as the "enemies of peace."

At the time, no one considered the implications that, in the event of Netanyahu's electoral victory, it would be Israel as a country that would face almost unsurmountable political obstacles and world public animosity because of his delegitimation and branding.

The World — Fertile Soil for Antagonism

First there was anti-Semitism, which survives in a more or less virulent form to this very day. Whether Bevin, Bulganin or Baker, Dulles or De Gaulle, they were almost all infected by it although "some of their best friends were Jewish." Outspoken or subtle, anti-Semitism has almost always played a role, and not only among primitive societies, when considering an issue related to the Jews. More often than not, harmful, negative issues are assimilated faster and more completely by the gentile than flattering or positive issues regarding the Jews.

Then came the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, endorsed later by the League of Nations. Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister at the time, was one of those Christians who believe that world salvation is conditional upon Jewish redemption. When the time came to dismember the dying Ottoman Empire during and immediately after World War I, Palestine was earmarked for the Jews.¹ The catastrophe, of course, is not the fact of the Balfour Declaration but

its wording: "a Jewish national home in Palestine." What is Palestine? What is a national home? Where is the national home to be located? In the whole of Palestine? In part thereof? Which part? Will Arab immigration continue or be limited?

It is a beautifully written, typically British diplomatic document whose hazy vagueness resulted in almost seventy years of confrontation, most of it armed, between Jews and Arabs, Britons and Arabs, and Jews and Britons. The confrontations resulting from the implementation of the Balfour Declaration prevented the smooth establishment of a Jewish community in Palestine and created a host of worldwide bitterness and enmity instead of paving the way to harmonious coexistence and international empathy.

After the adoption of the UN's November 29, 1947 partition plan that was opposed by the (British-supported) Arabs, and the Israel-Arab wars that followed, each Israeli victory diminished the limited empathy or, rather, pity the world had for the Jews after the Holocaust of World War II.

The rapid decline of Israel's popularity in the world started at the highest peak of its military prowess, after the Six-Day War. Abandoned by the UN and the world, with the U.S. reneging on the guarantees given to Israel in 1957 in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai, and bowing to Egyptian-Syrian arrogance, in June 1967 the world expected to witness a second holocaust in a quarter century, the wiping out of the Jewish state. Although empathetic, it was prepared to help just about as much as it did during the first Holocaust. Yet the surprising Israel military victory led to a wave of incrimination: "How dared Israel start the war?" with total disregard of the Arab moves that led to war. The world sided with the "poor" Arab (oil rich) underdog.

Compounding the issue, Israel, happy to be alive, failed to make any serious effort to point out that the party which starts the war is the one that creates a situation which leaves the other only two choices: "surrender" or "open fire." The superbly orchestrated Arab enlightenment effort, supported by the Soviet Union, France, and the Islamic world, turned the image of the tiny, two and a half million strong Israel into a Goliath. The Arab nation, over a hundred and fifty million strong, spread over more than a fair share of the globe, vital to the world at large because of its oil riches, controlling some thirty votes in the UN, backed by a billion Muslims, important as a trading partner and located strategically for the Cold War, "humbly" assumed the role of the underdog demanding protection.

From that point in time, Zionism was compared with Nazism and no occasion was lost in the UN for Jew/Israel-bashing, which spread the gospel all over the globe and set an unfortunate tone of downright hatred. While some in the U.S. realized that Israel had become a dominant regional power, naturally supporting the West and especially the U.S., others saw in it an impediment to U.S. commerce in the Middle East and a hindrance to U.S. diplomatic efforts to stem Soviet penetration in the Middle East. (Few remember that it was Eisenhower in 1956-57 who in fact legitimized the Soviet presence in the Middle East.)

The Soviets and their "Third World" clients considered Israel to be a U.S. bridgehead in the Middle East, to be contained. The Islamic world and the Arabs regarded Israel as a double abomination: infidels who occupied holy Muslim land, treading on Islamic and Arab honor, and a bridgehead of the hated (colonialist) Western civilization.

Mercantilist Europe made sure to cash in on Israel's new image, which gave it moral dispensation for the profitable sale of nuclear and chemical-biological warfare facilities to Iraq and other Arab countries. (With less than half of the population it has today and less than a quarter of today's gross national product, Israel in 1967 could not compete with most of the Arabs as trading partners. Presently it does.)

With time, the image of a jack-booted Goliath, occupying other people's lands, kicking women in their pregnant bellies and breaking children's bones, became the accepted Israeli stereotype.

Israel did next to nothing to counter this image. Caught in enlightenment paralysis, it became the pariah of civilized humanity, the punching bag of vituperance and frustration at the UN, happy in its solitude to receive occasional moral handouts and succor from the US, which became aware of Israel's potential as an ally in the Middle East.

This incredible predicament was highlighted by the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Although Israel had been the victim of a surprise attack and almost overwhelmed, none in the world found it advisable to censure Egypt and Syria in the way they had censured strangled Israel in 1967 for starting the war. Europe went as far as to block the routing of American supplies to Israel through its airports. African countries severed relations with Israel as well.

By the time the Madrid Peace Conference was convened in November 1991 after the Gulf War, it became evident that Israel would face insurmountable obstacles to its development unless it broke through the

political siege and the enmity of world public opinion. The problem was that such a breakthrough was conditional upon Israel losing all its gains of 1967, which had become the shield that saved it from destruction in 1973. Shamir's "peace for peace" proposition at Madrid did not, surprisingly, sound out of place or out of context, in spite of the fact that "territories for peace" was the "politically correct" slogan. But Shamir lost the election in 1992.

Risks for Peace in the 1990s

The new Israeli government of Labor's Rabin and Peres did not believe that even a protracted effort could bring about a "peace for peace" agreement and did not see how the Arabs' legitimate rights in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza could be reconciled with Israeli rule, short of offering them citizenship, which would deny Israel its Jewish character.

The resulting "territories for peace" Oslo agreement contained a very high security risk for Israel, but one which Rabin-Peres were willing to take. They applied the same perspective to the peace negotiations with Syria. Rabin and Peres were ready to trade the Golan Heights in exchange for a peace agreement, even if it meant Israel's assuming almost existential risks. The Rabin-Peres team were willing to accept such risks provided they could enlist international support in the form of U.S./UN guarantees and a possible U.S. military presence on the spot as "observers."

The Israeli government's flexibility brought an immediate response all over the world, especially in the vital West and Arab world. Jeering turned into applause, expectations skyrocketed, Rabin-Peres-Arafat rode the crest of a wave of popularity heretofore unseen. The media was hypnotized. History was branded obsolete — a new Middle East was emerging.

Obviously, Israel's defense imperatives were none of the Arab or Western world's concern. Once the Israeli government led by "Mr. Security" Rabin considered the risks acceptable, why should anyone care? Once Mr. Peres declared himself satisfied with Arafat's fulfillment of his obligations, who outside Israel should say the opposite? Peace in the new Middle East was just around the corner. It was a time of euphoria and jubilation.

But then 55.5 percent of the Jewish electorate in Israel voted for Netanyahu, believing the security risks taken by the Labor government to be reckless and dangerous. (The Jewish electorate is mentioned here because the security of the Jews was the key issue.)

Netanyahu recognized that in a democratic country

a newly elected government has to honor its predecessor's international obligations; hence, he has to put up with Oslo although he fought hard against it. He made it clear that this would be made conditional upon full reciprocity, i.e., full PLO compliance with its Oslo obligations, as well as satisfactory security arrangements to prevent frictions harmful to both sides.

"World harmony" went down the drain. A vociferous Arafat, fully supported by the Israeli left, demanded that Netanyahu follow in the footsteps of Labor and fulfill all Israeli obligations to the letter, regardless of Arafat's disregard for his obligations, which was tolerated by Labor and, hence, the world.

When Netanyahu did not comply with Arafat's (and Mubarak's) ultimate demands, the PLO's Arafat used the handy pretext of the opening of a doorway to the Hasmonean Tunnel in Jerusalem to start a mini-war in flagrant breach of the Oslo accords.

The world, Arab, West and East, reacted in unison as if snakebitten. The "bad guy" Netanyahu, who "proved" to be everything Israel's Labor party said he was and worse, had to be checked or removed. Things had been so nice before he came on board. The fact that a Labor government would also have been at odds with Arafat when negotiations reached Jerusalem, or refugees, or statehood, was forgotten.

The fact that Arafat sanctioned or tolerated his army's recourse to arms after signing a "peace agreement," at the cost of 15 Israeli and more than 50 Arab lives, was (incredibly) disregarded by the world. The ugly image of Israel was back. The higher the expectations, the harder it fell.

Enlightenment: A Missing Element

From 1948 until 1967, Israel had enjoyed a certain measure of empathy or even sympathy in the Western world. Uris's *Exodus*, Michner's *The Source*, and a host of other works described the phoenix-like resurgence of the Jewish people from their painful diaspora past, culminating in the Holocaust, into the heroic present and the hopeful future. Then after the Six-Day War, Israel, the underdog David, switched to become ugly Goliath.

During the three years between Oslo and the Israeli elections of 1996, there was an explosive increase of international goodwill and economic openings, providing tangible proof of what life could be like in the country were the suffocating world political, moral, and material siege to be lifted. The window of 1993-96 confirms that international attitudes are second only to

war as a counterproductive influence on Israel's well-being and development.

The lesson to be learned is that a very great effort must be made to win the world's confidence in and understanding of the Israeli case. The stakes are so high that Israel's enlightenment effort could be compared with war. Objectives, means (material, moral and intellectual), imagination, intelligence, strategy and tactics, even "dirty tricks" (legal and non-violent) should all play their part. Alliances should be formed, for the war is global. Nothing should be left to chance, but chance, like antagonists' mistakes, should be made full use of. All available hands should be mobilized.

An enlightenment effort is not like an electoral campaign, a short-lived, one-time shot. It is much more a continuing education effort, over time, with set objectives in mind for each milestone.

Political circumstances should be anticipated and, if negative, preemptive enlightenment used. This could take the form of a worldwide preemptive enlightenment campaign against the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons to unstable dictatorships and against foreign firms supporting it; or combatting world-destabilizing Muslim fundamentalism; or highlighting the benefits to be reaped by the Arab world through democratization and stabilization. Preemption is always more cost-efficient than reaction.

For Israel, enlightenment is currently a barren field left fallow, one which has to be cultivated in order for it to survive and prosper. Such cultivation requires effort, means, and time until benefits can be reaped (which is perhaps why so many politicians never catered to it, while statesmen did). If there is an understanding of the importance of enlightenment, there can be the will to work towards it; and if there is a will, there is a way.

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Note

1. For further details, see Richard Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary, 1917-1956* (London: Cresset Press, 1959); David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989); David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989).

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until his election to the Twelfth Knesset (Tsomet) where he was one of the leaders of the fight for constitutional and electoral reform. He was also a member of the Madrid peace mission in November 1991. He has now returned to the business world. Mr. Tsiddon-Chatto is a member of the Board of Overseers of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.