

# SURVEY OF ARAB AFFAIRS

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## THE FUTURE OF THE "PEACE PROCESS"

Raphael Israeli

The Israeli government's peace plan of May 1989 has been distorted by the media and the politicians. It is true that it included a program of elections for the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. However, these elections are only one item out of four in the plan. Another equally important item is the need to reach agreement with the other Arab states and it is this item that the Israeli government is now emphasizing much more strongly.

When Prime Minister Shamir said he was interested in meeting with Assad and asked Mubarak to arrange a meeting, he was seeking to show the world that the real problem is not the Palestinians; they are only one part of the problem. The Palestinians are not a menace to Israel but rather perhaps a nuisance. The intifada is very unpleasant but it is not a menace. The real

menace is Syria and Iraq and the new weapons acquired by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Israeli interests necessitate that it not play the international game which is currently emphasizing the Palestinians. Everyone in Europe and America are now speaking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as if that is the whole problem, forgetting about all the other pieces. The Shamir government is making every effort to shift the focus back to where it belongs, to the question of Israel versus the Arab states. In that equation, Israel is the underdog which has to defend itself, while in the Israeli-Palestinian formulation, of course, the Palestinians are the underdogs and gain sympathy for being so. By trying to shift the emphasis, as we should have done long ago, we are seeking to counter this formula current in the world that the sole problem in

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; Zvi R. Marom, Executive Editor; Raphael Israeli and Hillel Frisch, Contributing Editors. 21 Arlozorov St., Jerusalem 92181, Israel, Tel. 02-639281, Fax 972-2-639286. © All rights reserved. ISSN: 0334-4096.

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attaining peace in the Middle East is the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

It is no coincidence that there is a divergence of views between us and the Arab world about where to put the emphasis in the search for peace. If the Palestinian problem is resolved first, Israel will be that much weaker if there is a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and any new Arab coalition would be much more likely to destroy Israel. Any resolution of the Palestinian problem to their satisfaction would necessarily be at the expense of Israeli strength. This is the reason why Israel says the reverse. It says, "if the Arabs are really serious about peace, let us settle peacefully with Iraq, Syria, and all the other Arab states who say they are in a state of war." In that context, to make peace with the Palestinians would do no harm to Israel because the other Arab states will already be at peace with it. That is exactly what the Arabs refuse to do.

We should also remember that the proposed elections are only stage one because they are a means, not a goal unto themselves. Phase two, according to Israel and supported by the Americans, is to be autonomy or some kind of self-rule. Yet the Palestinians, supported by the Egyptians, are very definite that elections should lead to a Palestinian state. If we cannot agree on phase two, then why begin phase one? We will just involve ourselves in another phase of troubles which will bring no fruitful result to any of the parties. Therefore, I do not believe the current "peace process" will lead anywhere. We should look for some other way to reach a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians.

After the Abul Abbas-PLO group attempted its attack on Israel from the sea, people said that since the PLO has not desisted from terrorism, America should cut off the dialogue. This presupposed that the PLO had stopped its terrorism before or had even accepted the premise of renouncing terrorism. In my opinion, the PLO back in 1988 had never accepted any of the three American conditions posed to

it.

The Americans posed three conditions for a dialogue: first, recognizing the right of Israel to exist; second, acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338; and third, renouncing terrorism. If one analyzes the text of the November 15th PLO political communique in Algiers, along with Arafat's speeches and press conference in Geneva, he did everything he could to avoid these topics and not face them. It would have taken him less than 10 seconds to say those three things. Instead, Arafat spoke for about 2 hours in Algiers, another 70 minutes in Geneva, and another half hour at the press conference in order not to say any of those things.

If one analyzes the text of their resolutions in Algiers, one finds all the answers. Recognition of Israel? The PLO in Algiers mentioned Israel only in a negative context. They said Israel is based on usurpation of land, Israel bombs and kills. All they did in their communique was to systematically delegitimize the State of Israel. If they wanted their own people, let alone the world, to believe that they were going to recognize Israel, that was certainly not the way to do it.

Secondly, they did not accept UN Resolutions 242 and 338. There is no such text which says that. What they did say was that they call upon the parties to resolve the problem of self-determination of the Palestinians based on 242 and 338, and everyone understood the difference. In fact, the word "Palestine," let alone "self-determination for the Palestinians," is not even mentioned in 242 or 338.

Thirdly, they acted in a most sophisticated way regarding the question of terrorism. In fact, Arafat first redefined terrorism. He said the Israelis are terrorists -- they kill, they arrest, they blow up houses -- that is state terrorism. We, the Palestinians, are engaged in a movement of national liberation and anything we do, including bombing a civilian bus with all its occupants, is part of the national struggle. After that kind of definition, it was no big deal to say he is against

terrorism. Of course we know what kind of terrorism he is against. Just recently Abu Iyad repeated this formulation, noting that he and the Americans had different interpretations of what terrorism is.

No one should have been surprised when Abul Abbas organized the attack on Israel's beaches or that Arafat and the rest of the PLO refused to refute him. Even in the past when they committed terrorist acts, they would sometimes refute them in public but would continue to do them. They think that stating that something does not exist makes it not exist. This gap between statement and fact is one of the known cultural traits of our adversaries. Abul Abbas is the darling of Arafat and is under his wing. Arafat brought him into the executive committee of the PLO and I doubt that he is prepared to give him up, especially since Abbas did nothing wrong from the PLO point of view. He simply carried out the actions that the others were always talking about.

The Algiers conference attached conditions to recognition of Israel. They agreed to UN Resolution 181, that is, the partition plan of 1947 -- a cut-down Israel. The second condition was the Arab right of return, all the Palestinians should go back to their place of origin, that is, a diluted Israel. If it is to be a diluted and cut-down Israel, it would soon enough become another Arab state and it is not such a big deal to recognize it. So the right of Israel to exist means nothing when those two conditions are attached.

What we should be asking for is not that the Palestinians recognize the State of Israel, but rather the right of the Jewish people for self-determination. This is exactly what they are asking for themselves. They say they are the Palestinian Arab people and therefore have the right to self-determination. What they negate in the Palestinian Covenant is not the right of Israel to exist. The word "Israel" is not even mentioned. In Article 6 they say that the Jews are only a faith, they are not a nation, and therefore they do

not deserve a state. Only the Palestinians do. Israel and the Americans should insist that the Palestinians change that item in their Covenant to speak about the right of the Jewish people to self-determination, which would be the equivalent to symmetrical acceptance of the self-determination of the Palestinian people.

We should also insist that they give up the "armed struggle" as a means to achieve their political goals because that is the language used in their Covenant. They do not use the word "terrorism," they say "armed struggle" and have been doing that since the 1960s with remarkable continuity and sense of purpose. For them, every civilian is a potential soldier and so they say.

Thirdly, if the PLO wants to be recognized as the movement of national liberation of the Palestinians, they cannot at the same time describe the equivalent movement of the Jewish people -- Zionism -- as racism. It is Zionism that they have vowed to destroy in their Covenant and it is Zionism that they continue to condemn, even at their 1988 Algiers Conference where they supposedly became more "moderate."

Fourthly, if they claim the right over all Palestine, we have an equal right over all of it too, including what is now called Jordan and the territories. If they take three-fourths of the land and call it "Jordan," it nevertheless remains part of Palestine -- historically, geographically, and demographically. Insisting upon its new name does not make it less Palestinian, exactly as Israel's possession of the rest of the territory does not make it less Palestinian (or Eretz Israel, in Israeli parlance). Thus, the solution lies in partitioning all of it between Israelis in the West and Palestinians in the East, so that two mutually recognizing countries can emerge: Israel and Palestine. If they want to keep the monarchy, it would be the Hashemite Kingdom of Palestine; if not, it would simply be Palestine.

Only if these conditions are accepted could the PLO or any political organization

of Palestinians become a worthy partner for a dialogue, and not the conditions that the Americans had accepted.

There still remains a constitutional problem. The Palestinian Covenant, which was adopted in 1964 and amended in 1968, is considered by the Palestinians as their basic constitutional document. According to Article 33, a special session of the Palestine National Council can change any item of the constitution by a two-thirds majority. Yet that was not done. They were unable or unwilling to change their constitution. As every first year law student knows, there is a world of difference between a resolution adopted by a body and a statement made by a politician. If Prime Minister Shamir should declare tomorrow, in the Knesset, that he is hereby abrogating the Law of Return, no one would accept it as fact. A politician cannot abrogate a law via a declaration. The same must be considered true for Arafat who never tires of repeating that the PLO is a democratic body. If it is, then he certainly does not have the right to cancel a law or a constitutional document unless a resolution is adopted. He had many chances to do that in Algiers but he did not. When asked in Paris, he responded by saying that the Covenant was "caduque" (Fr. -- archaic, inoperative), but his statement has no legal basis. It is one person's statement, while others say something completely different. So perhaps Arafat has changed on a rhetorical level and said things he did not say before, but in terms of substance there is very little departure from the original aims of the PLO.

There has been much discussion about this in the press by people who purport to know what Arafat really has in mind, but we can judge a person only by what he does. When we judge Arafat's actions, we must conclude that the basic goals of the PLO have not dramatically changed.

Of course America has interests in the Middle East other than Israel. It supports a group of so-called moderate states -- Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia -- whom it does not want to see isolated in the region. Add to that its concern over the

Islamic fundamentalist wave, with its latest victory in Algeria, and one can understand the broader concerns of America which make them want to achieve a settlement. Now only Israel can deliver a settlement by making concessions, so the Americans are naturally trying to prevail upon Israel to make those concessions.

I am not sure the Americans have a clear conception of what will be the outcome of this peace process. Currently they speak of achieving an interim solution, but I believe a "let's see" attitude is a very bad one in general. When one wants to solve major problems like this, one should at least know where one wants to go and then try to work out some interim agreements in order to get there. But now they are seeking interim agreements without knowing where it is going. In reaction to this, the PLO, and rightly so from their point of view, are very impatient. They say, if there is going to be a settlement, we want to know what the end will be. We want to see at least the light at the end of the tunnel even if we do not get there immediately. That is the reason why they are pressing to make sure that the end result will be the Palestinian state that they are asking for.

Suppose the peace process goes on, what is the peace process? To get to the Cairo conference and to arrange elections? Then there will be elected representatives who, with Arab support, will demand a Palestinian state. The Israelis, perhaps with American support, will say "no Palestinian state." Then the hard-line Arab states will say, "see, just as we told you, this peace process leads nowhere. Leave the Americans and go to war." Therefore, we should address the root of the problem now if we want to avert war at the end of the process.

In sum, neither the nature of the PLO has changed nor is the so-called "peace process" likely to lead anywhere. Despite this, however, there is clearly room for an imaginative new program which can both respond to the basic needs of the Palestinians and also preserve and safeguard the basic security needs of Israel.