

TRUTH against TRUTH

A Completely Different Look at the
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

- ★ The Arabs believed that the Jews had been implanted in Palestine by Western Imperialism, in order to subjugate the Arab world.
The Zionists, on the other hand, were convinced that the Arab resistance to the Zionist enterprise was simply the consequence of the murderous nature of the Arabs and of Islam.
- ★ The Israeli public must recognize that besides all the positive aspects of the Zionist enterprise, a terrible injustice has been inflicted on the Palestinian people.
- ★ This requires a readiness to hear and understand the other side's position in this historical conflict, in order to bridge the two national experiences and unify them in a joint narrative.

The Tyranny of Myths

- 1 The violent confrontation that broke out in October, 2000 and was called the "al-Aqsa Intifada", is but another stage of the historical conflict that began with the creation of the Zionist movement at the end of the 19th century.
- 2 A fifth generation of Israelis and Palestinians has already been born into this conflict. The entire mental and material world of this generation has been shaped by this confrontation, which dominates all spheres of their lives.
- 3 In the course of this long conflict, as in every war, an enormous mass of myths, historical falsifications, propaganda slogans and prejudices has accumulated on both sides.
- 4 The behavior of each of the two sides to the conflict is shaped by their historical narrative, the way they view the history of the conflict over the last 120 years. The Zionist historical version and the Palestinian historical version contradict each other entirely, both in the general picture and almost every detail.
- 5 From the beginning of the conflict up to the present day, the Zionist/Israeli leadership has acted in total disregard of the Palestinian narrative. Even when it wished to reach a solution, such efforts were doomed to failure because of ignorance of the national aspirations, traumas, fears and hopes of the Palestinian people. Something similar happened on the other side, even if there is no symmetry between the two sides.
- 6 The settlement of such a prolonged historical conflict is possible only when each side is able to understand the mental-political world of the other and is ready to speak as equal to equal, "eye to eye". Contemptuous, power-oriented, overbearing, insensitive and ignorant attitudes prevent an agreed solution.
- 7 "Leftist" Israeli governments that, at times, aroused much hope were afflicted with such attitudes as much as "rightist" ones, causing a wide gap between their initial promise and their disastrous performance. (For example, Ehud Barak's term in office.)

- 8** A large part of the **old peace movement** (also known as "the Zionist left" or "the sane camp"), such as Peace Now, is also beset by some of these attitudes, and so collapses in times of crisis.
- 9** Therefore, the first task of a new Israeli peace camp is to free itself from false and from **one-sided views**.
- 10** This does not mean that the Israeli narrative should automatically be rejected and the Palestinian narrative unquestioningly accepted, or the other way round. But it does require a readiness to hear and understand the other side's position in this historical conflict, in order to bridge the **two national experiences** and unify them in a **joint narrative**.
- 11** Any other way will lead to a perpetuation of the conflict, with periods of **ostensible tranquility** and conciliation frequently interrupted by violent hostilities between the two nations and between Israel and the Arab world. Given the pace of development of weapons of mass destruction, further rounds of hostility could lead to the annihilation of both sides to the conflict.
- 12** The core of the conflict is the confrontation between the Israeli-Jewish nation and the Palestinian-Arab nation. It is essentially a **national conflict**, even if it has religious, social and other aspects.
- 13** The Zionist Movement was, essentially, a Jewish reaction to the emergence of the **national movements** in Europe, all of which were more or less anti-Semitic. Having been rejected by the European nations, some of the Jews decided to establish themselves as a **separate nation** and, following the new European model, to set up a national State of their own, where they could be masters of their own fate.
- 14** Traditional and religious motives drew the Zionist Movement to Palestine (Eretz Israel in Hebrew) and the decision was made to establish the Jewish State in this land. The maxim was: "**A land without a people for a people without a land**". This maxim was not only conceived in ignorance, but also reflected the general arrogance towards non-European peoples that prevailed in Europe at that time.

- | 5 Palestine was not an empty land - not at the end of the 19th century nor at any other period. At that time, there were half a million people living in Palestine, 90% of them Arabs. This population objected, of course, to the incursion of foreign settlers into their land.
- | 6 The Arab National Movement emerged almost simultaneously with the Zionist Movement, initially to fight the Ottoman Empire and later the colonial regimes built on its ruins at the end of World War I. A separate Arab-Palestinian national movement developed in the country after the British created a separate State called "Palestine", and in the course of the struggle against Zionist infiltration.
- | 7 Since the end of World War I, there has been an ongoing struggle between two national movements, the Jewish-Zionist and the Palestinian-Arab, both of which aspire to accomplish their goals - which are entirely incompatible - within the same territory. This situation remains unchanged to this day.
- | 8 As persecution of the Jews in Europe intensified, and as the countries of the world closed their gates
- to the Jews attempting to flee the inferno, so the Zionist Movement gained strength. Nazi anti-Semitism turned the Zionist utopia into a realizable modern enterprise by causing a mass-immigration of trained manpower, intellectuals, technology and capital to Palestine. The Holocaust, which took the lives of about six million Jews, gave tremendous



"The War of the Traumas": the Holocaust

moral and political force to the Zionist claim, leading to the establishment of the State of Israel.

19 The **Palestinian nation**, witnessing the growth of the Jewish population in their land, could not comprehend why they should be expected to pay the price for crimes committed against the Jews by Europeans. They violently objected to further Jewish immigration and to the acquisition of land by the Jews.

20 The struggle between the two nations in the country appeared in the emotional sphere as the "**war of the traumas**". The Israeli-Hebrew nation carried with them the old trauma of the persecution of the Jews in Europe - massacres, mass expulsions, the Inquisition, pogroms and the Holocaust. They lived with the consciousness of being an eternal victim. The clash with the Arab-Palestinian nation appeared to them as just a continuation of anti-Semitic persecution.

21 The Arab-Palestinian nation carried with them the memories of the long-lasting **colonial oppression**, with its insults and humiliations, especially on the

background of the historical memories from the glorious days of the Caliphs. They, too, lived with the consciousness of being victims, and the Naqba (catastrophe) of 1948 appeared to them as the continuation of the oppression and humiliation by Western colonialists.

22 The complete blindness of each of the two nations to the national existence of the other inevitably led to false and distorted perceptions, that took root deep in their collective consciousness. These perceptions continue to affect their attitudes towards each other to the **present day**.

23 The Arabs believed that the Jews had been implanted in Palestine by Western Imperialism, in order to subjugate the Arab world and control its natural resources. This conviction was supported by the fact that the Zionist movement, from the outset, strove for an alliance with at least one Western power, in order to overcome Arab resistance (Germany in the days of Herzl, Britain from the Uganda plan and the Balfour Declaration until the end of the Mandate, the Soviet Union in 1948, France from the 1950s until the 1967 war, the

United States from then on.) This resulted in practical cooperation and a community of interests between the Zionist enterprise and imperialist and colonialist powers, directed against the Arab national movement.

24 The Zionists, on the other hand, were convinced that the Arab resistance to the Zionist enterprise - which was intended to save the Jews from the flames of Europe - was simply the consequence of the murderous nature of the Arabs and of Islam. In their eyes, Arab fighters were "gangs", and the uprisings of the time were "riots".

25 Actually, the most extreme Zionist leader, Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, was almost alone in having recognized by the 1920s that the Arab resistance to the Zionist settlement was an inevitable, natural, and, from its own point of view, just reaction of a "native" people defending their country against foreign invaders. Jabotinsky also recognized that the Arabs in the country were a distinct national entity and derided the attempts to bribe the leaders of other Arab countries in order to put an end to the Palestinian Arab resistance. However, Jabotinsky's solution was to erect an "iron wall" against the

Arabs and to crush their resistance by force.

26 These completely contradictory perceptions of the facts permeate every single aspect of the conflict. For example, the Jews interpreted their struggle for "Jewish Labor" as a progressive social effort to transform a people of intellectuals, merchants, middlemen and speculators into one of workers and farmers. The Arabs, on the other hand, saw it as a racist effort by the Zionists to dispossess them, to exclude them from the labor market and to create, on their land, an Arab-free, separatist Jewish economy.

27 The Zionists were proud of their "Redemption of the Land". They had purchased it at full price with money collected from Jews around the world. "Olim" (new immigrants, literally pilgrims) many of whom had been intellectuals and merchants in their former lives now earned their living by hard manual labor. They believed that they had achieved all this by peaceful means and without dispossessing a single Arab. For the Arabs this was a cruel narrative of dispossession and expulsion: The Jews acquired lands from Arab absentee landowners living in the

cities of Palestine and abroad, and then forcibly evicted the peasants who had been farming this land for generations. To help them in this effort, the Zionists engaged the Turkish and, later, the British police. The Arab masses looked on in despair as their land was taken from them.

- 28 Against the Zionist claim of having successfully "Made the Desert Bloom", the Arabs cited the testimonies of European travelers who had, for several centuries, described Palestine as a comparatively populous and flourishing land, the equal of any of its regional neighbors.



The Catastrophe: Palestinian refugees, 1948

Independence and Disaster

29 The contrast between the two national versions reached a peak in the war of 1948, which was called "the War of Independence" or even "the War of Liberation" by the Jews, and "El Naqba", the catastrophe, by the Arabs.

30 As the conflict intensified in the region, and with the resounding impact of the Holocaust, the United Nations decided to divide the country into two States, Jewish and Arab. Jerusalem and its environs were to remain a separate entity, under international jurisdiction. The Jews were allotted 55% of the land, including the unpopulated Negev desert.

31 Most of the Zionist Movement accepted the partition resolution, convinced that the crucial issue was to establish a firm foundation for Jewish sovereignty. In closed meetings, David Ben-Gurion never concealed his intention to expand, at the first opportunity, the territory given to the Jews. That is why Israel's Declaration of Independence did not define the state's borders and Israel has not defined its borders to this day.

32

The **Arab world** did not accept the partition plan and regarded it as a vile attempt by the United Nations, which at the time was essentially a club of Western and Communist nations, to divide a country that did not belong to it. Handing over more than half of the country to the Jewish minority, which comprised a mere third of the population, made it all the more unforgivable in their eyes.

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The war initiated by the Arabs after the partition plan was, inevitably, an **"ethnic" war**; a war in which each side seeks to conquer as much land as possible and evict the population of the other side. Such a campaign (which later came to be known as "ethnic cleansing") always involves expulsions and atrocities.

34

The war of 1948 was a direct continuation of the Zionist-Arab conflict, and each side sought to fulfill its historical aims. The Jews wanted to establish a **homogenous national State** that would be as large as possible. The Arabs wanted to eradicate the Zionist Jewish entity that had been established in Palestine.

35

Both sides practiced **ethnic cleansing** as an integral part of the fighting. Almost no Arabs remained in the territories captured by the Jews and no Jews at all remained in territories captured by the Arabs. However, as the territories captured by the Jews were very large while the Arabs managed to conquer only small areas (such as the Etzion Bloc, the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem), the result was one-sided. (The ideas of "population exchange" and "transfer" were raised in Zionist organizations as early as the 1930's. Effectively this meant the expulsion of the Arab population from the country. On the other side, many among the Arabs

What happened in 1948 was an "ethnic" war, a war in which each side seeks to conquer as much land as possible and evict the population of the other side.

believed that the Zionists should go back to wherever they came from.)

36 The myth of "the few against the many" was created on the Jewish side to describe the stand of the Jewish community of 650,000 against the entire Arab world of over a hundred million. The Jewish community lost 1% of its people in the war. The Arab side saw an entirely different picture: A fragmented Arab population with no national leadership to speak of, with no unified command over its meager forces, poorly equipped with mostly obsolete weapons, facing an extremely well organized Jewish community that was highly trained in the use of the weapons that were flowing to it (especially from the Soviet bloc.) The neighboring Arab countries betrayed the Palestinians and, when they finally did send their armies into Palestine, they mainly operated in competition with each other, with no coordination and no common plan. From the social and military points of view, the fighting capabilities of the Israeli side were far superior to those of the Arab states, which had hardly emerged from the colonial era.

37 According to the United Nations plan, the Jewish State was supposed to receive 55% of Palestine, in which the Arabs would constitute almost half of the population. During the war, the Jewish State expanded its territory and ended up with 78% of the area of Palestine, which was left almost empty of Arabs. The Arab populations of Nazareth and some villages in the Galilee remained almost by chance; the villages in the Triangle were given to Israel as part of a deal by King Abdullah and their Arab inhabitants could not, therefore, be driven out.

38 In the war, some 750,000 Palestinians were uprooted. Some of them found themselves in the battle zone and fled, as civilians do in every war. Some were driven away by acts of terror, such as the Deir-Yassin massacre. Others were systematically expelled in the course of the ethnic cleansing.

39 No less important than the expulsion itself is the fact that the refugees were not allowed to return to their homes when the fighting was over, as is usual after a conventional war. Quite the contrary, the new State of Israel saw the removal of the Arabs very much as a blessing and proceeded to

completely erase some 450 Arab villages. New Jewish villages were built on the ruins, often adopting a Hebrew version of the former name. The abandoned neighborhoods in the towns were filled with masses of new immigrants. In Israeli textbooks, all mention of the former inhabitants was eliminated.

"A Jewish State"

40 The signing of the armistice agreements at the beginning of 1949 did not put an end to the historical conflict. On the contrary, it raised it to a new and more intense level.

41 The new State of Israel dedicated its early years to the consolidation of its character as a homogenous "Jewish State". Huge areas of land were expropriated from the "absentees" (the refugees who were not allowed back), from those officially designated as "present absentees" (Arabs who had stayed in Israel but were not accorded Israeli citizenship) and even from the Arab citizens of Israel, most of whose lands were taken over. On these lands, a dense network of Jewish communities was created. Jewish immigrants were invited and

even induced to come en masse. This great effort increased the State's population several times over in just a few years.

42 At the same time, the State pursued a vigorous policy of obliterating the Palestinian national entity. With Israeli assistance, the monarch of Trans-Jordan, Abdullah, assumed control over the West Bank and since then there has been, in effect, an Israeli military guarantee for the existence of what became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

43 The main rationale for the alliance between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom, which has already existed for three generations, is to prevent the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, which was - and still is - considered by the Israeli leadership a potential obstacle to the realization of the Zionist objective.

44 A historic change occurred at the end of the 1950's on the Palestinian side when Yasser Arafat and his associates founded the Palestinian Liberation Movement (Fatah), not only for conducting the fight against Israel but also for freeing the Palestinian

cause from the hegemony of the Arab governments. It was no accident that this movement emerged after the failure of the great Pan-Arab wave, whose most renowned representative was Gamal Abd-el-Nasser. Up to this point many Palestinians had hoped to be absorbed into a united pan-Arab nation. When this hope faded away, the separate national Palestinian identity reasserted itself.

45 In the early 1960s, Gamal Abd-el-Nasser set up the Palestinian Liberation Organization (**PLO**), mainly in order to forestall independent Palestinian actions that might involve him in an undesired war with Israel. The organization was intended to impose Egyptian control on the Palestinians. However, after the Arab debacle in the June 1967 war, Fatah under Yasser Arafat took control over the PLO, which has been the sole representative of the Palestinian people ever since.

"The Six Day War"

46 Like everything else that happened in the last 120 years, the **June 1967 war** is seen in a very different light by the two sides. According to the Israeli myth,

it was a desperate war of defense, which miraculously left a lot of land in Israel's hands. According to the Palestinian myth, Israel drew the leaders of Egypt, Syria and Jordan into a war Israel was interested in, which was aimed right from the beginning at capturing what was left of Palestine.

47 Many Israelis believe that the "Six Day War" is the **root of all evil** and it was only then that the peace-loving and progressive Israel turned into a conqueror and an occupier. This conviction allows them to maintain the absolute purity of Zionism and the State of Israel up to that point in history, and preserve their old myths. There is no truth to this legend.

48 The war of 1967 was yet another phase of the old struggle between the two national movements. It did not change the essence; it only changed the circumstances. The essential objectives of the Zionist Movement - a **Jewish State, expansion, and settlement** - were furthered by the addition of yet more territory. The particular circumstances of this war made complete ethnic cleansing impossible, but several hundred thousand Palestinians were expelled, nevertheless.



Israeli soldiers at the Western Wall, June 1967: War of defense or an Israeli trap?

49

The 1947 partition plan allotted to Israel 55% of Palestine, then an additional 23% was captured in the 1948 war and now the remaining 22%, across the "Green Line" (the pre-1967 armistice line) was also captured. In 1967 Israel inadvertently united under its rule all the parts of the Palestinian people that remained in the country (including some of the refugees).

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As soon as the war ended, the movement to settle the occupied territories began. Almost all the Israeli political factions participated in this movement - from the messianic-nationalistic "Gush Emunim" to the "leftist" United Kibbutz Movement. The first settlers were supported by most politicians, left and right, from Yigal Alon (the Jewish settlement in Hebron) to Shimon Peres (the Kedumim settlement).

51

The fact that all governments of Israel cultivated and advanced the settlements, albeit to different extents, proves that the urge to implant new settlements was particular to no specific ideological camp and extended to the entire Zionist Movement. The impression that only a small minority has been driving the settlement activity forward is an illusion.

Only an intense effort of all parts of the government, including all ministries, from 1967 onwards, could have produced the legislative, strategic and budgetary infrastructure required for such a long-lasting and expensive endeavor.

52

The legislative infrastructure operates on the misleading assumption that the Occupation Authority is the owner of "government-owned lands", although these are the essential land reserves of the Palestinian population. It goes without saying that the settlement activity contravenes international law.

53

The dispute between the proponents of "Greater Israel" and those of "Territorial Compromise" is essentially a dispute about the way to achieve the shared basic Zionist aspiration: a homogenous Jewish State in as large a territory as possible, but without a "ticking demographic bomb". The proponents of "compromise" emphasize the demographic issue and want to prevent the inclusion of the Palestinian population in the Israeli state. The "Greater Israel" adherents place the emphasis on the geographic issue and believe - privately or publicly - that it is possible to expel the non-Jewish

population from the country (code name: "Transfer").

54 The **General Staff** of the Israeli army played an important role in the planning and building of the settlements. It created the map of the settlements (identified with Ariel Sharon): blocs of settlements and bypass roads along lateral and longitudinal axes, chopping the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into pieces and imprisoning the Palestinians in isolated enclaves, each of which is surrounded by settlements and the occupation forces.

55 The Palestinians employed several methods of resistance, mainly raids across the Jordanian and Lebanese borders and attacks inside Israel and throughout the world. These acts are considered "terror" by Israelis, while the Palestinians see them as the **legitimate resistance** of an occupied people. While the Israelis considered the PLO leadership, headed by Yasser Arafat, as a terrorist headquarters, it gradually came to be internationally recognized as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people.

56 At the end of 1987, when the Palestinians realized

that these actions were not putting an end to the settlement momentum, which was gradually pulling the land out from under their feet, they launched the **Intifada** - a spontaneous grassroots uprising of all sectors of the population. In this ("first") Intifada, 1500 Palestinians were killed, among them hundreds of children; several times the number of Israeli losses, but it put the "Palestinian problem" back on the Israeli and international agenda.

The Peace Process

57 The **October 1973 war**, which commenced with the surprise initial successes of the Egyptian and Syrian forces and ended with their

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defeat, convinced Yasser Arafat and his close associates that the realization of Palestinian national aspirations by military means was impossible. He decided to create a political option that would lead to an agreement with Israel and enable the Palestinians, through negotiations, to establish an independent state in at least a part of the country.

- 58** To prepare the ground for this, Arafat initiated contact with Israeli personalities who could influence public opinion and government policy. His emissaries (Said Hamami and Issam Sartawi) met with Israeli



Photo: Yaakov Sa'ar, GPO

Historic handshake: Mutual recognition

peace pioneers, who at the end of 1975 established the "Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace".

- 59** These contacts, which gradually became more extensive, as well as the growing Israeli fatigue with the Intifada, the official Jordanian disengagement from the West Bank, the changing international situation (the collapse of the Communist Bloc, the Gulf War) led to the Madrid Conference and, later, to the Oslo Agreement.

The Oslo Agreement

- 60** The Oslo Agreement had positive and negative features.
- 61** On the positive side, the agreement brought Israel to its first official recognition of the Palestinian people and its national leadership, and brought the Palestinian national movement to its recognition of the existence of Israel. In this respect, the agreement - and the exchange of letters that preceded it - were of paramount historical significance.

- 62** In effect, the agreement gave the Palestinian national movement a territorial base on Palestinian soil, the structure of a "state in the making" and armed forces - facts that would play an important role in the ongoing Palestinian struggle. For the Israelis, the agreement opened the gates to the Arab world and put an end to Palestinian attacks - as long as the agreement was effective.
- 63** The most substantive flaw in the agreement was that the final aim was not spelled out, allowing the two sides to continue to aim for entirely different objectives. The Palestinians saw the interim agreement as a highway to the end of the occupation and to the establishment of a Palestinian State in all the occupied territories (which altogether constitute 22% of the area of the former Palestine between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan). On the other hand, successive Israeli governments regarded it as a way to maintain the occupation in large sections of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with the Palestinian "self-government" filling the role of an auxiliary security agency protecting Israel and the settlements.
- 64** Since the final aim was not defined, the Oslo agreement did not mark the beginning of the process to end the conflict but, rather, a new phase of the conflict.
- 65** Because the expectations of both sides were so divergent and each remained entirely bound to its own national "narrative", every section of the agreement was interpreted differently. Ultimately, many parts of the agreement were left unimplemented, mainly by Israel (for example: the third withdrawal, the four safe passages between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.)
- 66** Throughout the period of the "Oslo Process", Israel continued its vigorous expansion of the settlements, primarily by creating new settlements under various guises, expanding existing ones, building an elaborate network of "bypass" roads, expropriating land, demolishing houses, uprooting plantations etc. The Palestinians, for their part, used the time to build up their strength, both within the framework of the agreement and outside it. In fact, the historical confrontation continued unabated under the guise of negotiations and the "Peace Process", which

became a substitute for actual peace.

67

In contradiction with his image, which was cultivated extensively after his assassination, Yitzhak Rabin continued furthering expansion "on the ground", while simultaneously engaging in the political process for the achievement of peace according to Israeli perceptions. As a disciple of the Zionist "narrative" and its mythology, he suffered from cognitive dissonance when his sincere desire for peace clashed with his conceptual world. This became apparent when he refrained from removing the Jewish settlement in Hebron after the Goldstein massacre of praying Muslims. It appears that he began to internalize some parts of the Palestinian narrative only towards the end of his life.

68

The case of Shimon Peres is much more damning. He created for himself the international image of a peacemaker and even adjusted his language to reflect this image ("the New Middle East") while remaining essentially a traditional Zionist hawk. This became clear in his short and bloody period as Prime Minister after the assassination of Rabin in 1995 and, again, in his joining the Sharon

government in 2001 and accepting the role of spokesman and apologist for Sharon.

69

The clearest expression of the Israeli dilemma was provided by Ehud Barak, who came to power thoroughly convinced of his ability to cut the Gordian knot of the historical conflict in one dramatic stroke, in the fashion of Alexander the Great. Barak approached the issue in total ignorance of the Palestinian narrative, showing utter contempt for its significance. He drew up his proposals in complete disregard of the Palestinian side and presented them as an ultimatum. He was shocked and enraged when the Palestinians rejected them.

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In his own eyes and in the eyes of the entire Israeli public, Barak "turned every stone" and made the Palestinians "more generous offers than any previous Prime Minister". In exchange, he demanded that the Palestinians sign a declaration that these offers constitute the "end to the conflict". The Palestinians considered this absurd, since Barak was asking them to give up their basic national aspirations, such as the Right of Return and sovereignty over East Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount. Moreover,

the annexation of territories that were presented by Barak as negligible percentages (such as the "Settlement Blocs") amounted, according to Palestinian calculations, to an actual annexation of 20% of the West Bank to Israel.

71 In the Palestinian view, they had already made their decisive concession by agreeing to establish their State beyond the Green Line, in a mere 22% of their historical homeland. Therefore, they would only accept **minor border changes** in the context of territorial swaps. The traditional Israeli position is that the territories acquired by it in the course of the 1948 war were beyond dispute, and the required compromise concerns only the remaining 22%.

72 Thus, as with most terms and concepts, the word "**concession**" has different meanings for the two sides. The Palestinians believe that they already "conceded" 78% of their land when they agreed in Oslo to accept a mere 22% of it. The Israelis believe that they are "conceding" when they agree to "give" the Palestinians parts of that 22%.

73 Things came to a head at the **Camp David** Summit



Photo: Barak Ochayon, GPO

Camp David, 2000: Ignorance and arrogance

As a result of Camp David, the dividing line between the Zionist "right" and "left" almost disappeared. The slogan "We have no partner" was adopted by all.

in the summer of 2000, which was imposed on Arafat against his will and without any time for preparations. Barak's demands, presented at the summit as Clinton's, were that the Palestinians agree to end the conflict by relinquishing the Right of Return and any return of refugees to Israel; accept complicated arrangements for East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount without obtaining sovereignty over them; agree to the annexation by Israel of large settlement blocs on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; accept an Israeli military presence in other large areas (such as the Jordan valley); agree to Israeli control over the borders between the Palestinian State and the rest of the world. There was no possibility that any Palestinian leader could sign such an

agreement and convince his people to accept it, and thus the summit ended without results. Soon after, the careers of Clinton and Barak also came to an end, while Arafat was received by the Palestinians as a hero who had withstood the pressure of Clinton and Barak and not surrendered.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada

74 The breakdown of the summit, the elimination of any hope for an agreement between the two sides and the unconditional pro-Israeli stance of the United States inevitably led to another round of violent confrontations, which became known as "the al-Aqsa Intifada". For the Palestinians, it is a justified national uprising against a protracted occupation with no end in sight, that has allowed the continued pulling out of their land from under their feet. For the Israelis, it is an outburst of murderous terrorism. The perpetrators of these attacks appear to the Palestinians as national heroes and to the Israelis as vicious criminals who must be liquidated.

75 The official media in Israel frequently dropped the term "settlers" and, by command from above,

started to refer to them as "residents", so that any attack on them looked like a crime against civilians. The Palestinians see the settlers as the spearhead of a dangerous enemy, who is dispossessing them of their land and who must be resisted and attacked

76 In the course of the al-Aqsa Intifada, a large part of the Israeli **"Peace Camp"** collapsed, demonstrating the shallow-rootedness of many of its convictions. Since it never undertook a real revision of the Zionist narrative and never internalized the fact that there exists a Palestinian narrative, too, the Palestinian behavior appeared quite inexplicable, especially after Barak had "turned every stone and made more generous offers than any previous Prime Minister." The only remaining explanation was that the Palestinians had deceived the Israeli Peace Camp, that they had never really intended to make peace and that their true purpose is to throw the Jews into the sea, as the Zionist right has always claimed. The conclusion: "We have no partner".

77 As a result, the dividing line between the Zionist **"right"** and **"left"** almost disappeared. The leaders of the Labor Party joined the Sharon Government

and became his most effective apologists (e.g. Shimon Peres) and even the formal leftist opposition became ineffective. This proved again that the original Zionist narrative is the decisive factor unifying all parts of the political system in Israel, making the differences between them lose their significance in times of crisis

78 The al-Aqsa Intifada (also called the "second Intifada") raised the intensity of the conflict to a new level. In its first three years, about 2600 Palestinians and 800 Israelis were killed. The Israeli military operations turned the lives of the Palestinian into hell, cut towns and villages off from each other, destroyed their economy and brought many to the verge of hunger. The extra-judicial execution of Palestinian militants (**"targeted liquidations"**), often killing civilian bystanders, became routine. Incursions into Palestinian towns and villages, in order to kill or arrest suspects, also became daily occurrences. Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian liberation struggle, effectively imprisoned in his Ramallah compound (the **"Mukata'ah"**) under constant threat to his life, has become the supreme symbol of the resistance to the occupation.

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Contrary to the expectations of the Israeli military and political leadership, the extreme military and economic pressure **did not break** the Palestinian population. Even in the most extreme circumstances, they managed to maintain some semblance of normal life and found means to fight back. The most effective and appalling weapon was the suicide bombing, which brought the bloody confrontation into the center of Israeli cities. The Intifada also caused other damage to Israel, paralyzing tourism and stopping foreign investment, deepening the depression, causing the national economy to contract and social services to collapse, thereby widening the social gap and increasing domestic tensions in Israel

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As a response to the attacks, and especially the suicide bombings, which had a severe impact on public morale, the leaders of the "Zionist Left" demanded a physical barrier between Israel and the Palestinian territories. At first, the "Zionist Right" opposed this "**Separation Fence**", fearing that it would create a political border in close proximity to the Green Line. But Ariel Sharon soon realized that he could exploit the idea of the fence for his own purposes. He started to build the barrier along

a path that was in accord with his aims, cutting deep into the Palestinian territories, joining the large settlement blocs to Israel and confining the Palestinians in isolated enclaves, under effective Israeli control.

81

By the end of the third year of the al-Aqsa Intifada, definite signs of war fatigue, as well as opposition to the growing brutality of the occupation, could be detected among the Israeli public. Such indications were the **refusal movement** among youngsters called up for army service, the revolt of 27 Air-Force pilots, the refusal of the elite General Staff commando unit to take part in "illegal and immoral" operations, the joint statement made by four former Security Service chiefs against the continuation of the occupation, the publication of the peace principles of Sari Nusseibeh and Ami Ayalon, the Geneva Initiative of Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, the ongoing struggle against the Separation Wall, the change of positions and style of politicians and commentators.

82

Following the American invasion of Iraq at the beginning of 2003, the United States became more

sensitive to the negative consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Owing to the domestic pressures exerted in the US by the powerful Jewish and Fundamentalist Christian lobbies, which have a lot of influence in George W. Bush's White House, the ability of the American administration to work for a solution is very limited. In spite of this, a "Quartet" consisting of the USA, the European Union, Russia and the UN succeeded in presenting a so-called "Road Map to Peace".

83

The Road Map of 2003 is afflicted with the same basic fault as the Oslo Declaration of Principles of 1993. Although, unlike Oslo, it does define an aim ("Two States for Two Peoples"), it does not spell out where the borders of the future Palestinian State are going to be, thus emptying the "map" of its principal content. Ariel Sharon was able to accept the Road Map (with 14 reservations that emptied it of its main content) since he was quite ready to confer the designation of "Palestinian State" on the Palestinian enclaves that he wants to set up in 10% of the country.

84

The Oslo experience, and, of course, the new

experiment of the Road Map, confirm conclusively that a document that sets out **interim stages** is valueless, unless it clearly spells out from the outset the details of the final peace agreement. In the absence of such a definition, there is no possibility at all that the interim stages will be realized. When each side is striving for a different final aim, the confrontation is bound to flare up again at every interim stage.

85

Well knowing that there is no chance at all for the actual realization of the Road Map. Sharon announced at the end of 2003 his plan for "**Unilateral Steps**". This is a code-name for the annexation of about half of the West Bank to Israel and the confining of the Palestinians in isolated enclaves, connected only by roads, tunnels and bridges that can be cut off at any time. The plan is constructed in such a way that none of the Palestinian population will be added to Israel, and no land reserves remain for the Palestinian enclaves. Since the plan does not require any negotiation with the Palestinians, but claims to bring "peace and security" to the Israeli citizens, it is able to exploit the growing Israeli longing for a solution without disturbing any

Israeli's prejudices and hatred against the Palestinians.

86 The general attack of the Sharon government and the Army leadership on the population in the occupied territories (extension of the settlements, establishment of new settlements called "outposts", building the "separation fence" and settler-only "bypass roads", incursions of the army into Palestinian towns and "targeted liquidations", demolition of homes and uprooting of plantations), on the one hand, and the lethal Palestinian attacks inside Israel on the other hand, put the **Palestinian citizens of Israel** in an intolerable position.

87 The natural inclination of the Arab citizens of Israel to help their brethren on the other side of the Green Line conflicts with their desire to be accepted as equal citizens of Israel. At the same time, the fear and hatred of the Jewish population in Israel against all "Arabs" is growing and threatens the foundations of equality and civil rights. These processes came to a head in the events of **October 2000**, immediately after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, when the Israeli police opened lethal fire on Arab citizens.

88 These processes, together with the re-emergence of the "**demographic problem**" on the Israeli agenda, cast new doubt on the "Jewish democratic state" doctrine. The internal contradiction between these two attributes, which has not been resolved since the founding of the State of Israel, neither in theory nor in practice, is more conspicuous than ever. The exact meaning of the term "Jewish State" has never been spelled out, nor the status of the Arab-Palestinian minority in a state officially defined as "Jewish". The demand to turn Israel into a "State of all its citizens" and/or to give defined national rights to the Arab-Palestinian minority is being heard more and more, and not only from Arab citizens.

89 As a result of all these processes, the conflict is becoming less and less an Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, and more and more a **Jewish-Arab** one. The support extended by the vast majority of the Jewish Diaspora to Israel, irrespective of its actions, and the adherence of the Arab and Muslim masses to the Palestinian cause, irrespective of the attitude of their leaders, have consolidated this phenomenon. The assassination of Hamas leaders Sheik Ahmed Yassin in March 2003 and of Abd-al-



The "Separation Wall": Sharon realized that he could exploit it for the annexation of settlement blocs

Aziz al-Rantissi three weeks later fanned the flames even more.

A New Peace Camp

90 The new Peace Movement must be based on the understanding that the conflict is a clash between the Zionist-Israeli movement, whose "genetic code" directs it to take over the entire country and to drive out the non-Jewish population, and the Palestinian national movement, whose "genetic code" directs it to halt this drive and set up a Palestinian State in the entire country. This can be seen as the clash between "an irresistible force" and an "immovable object".

91 The task of the Israeli peace movement is to stop the historical clash, overcome the Zionist-Israeli "genetic code" and to cooperate with the Palestinian peace forces, in order to enable a peace through historic **compromise** that will lead to reconciliation between the two peoples. The Palestinian peace forces have a similar task.

92 For this, diplomatic formulations of a future peace

agreement are insufficient. The Israeli peace movement must be inspired by a new spirit that will touch the hearts of **the other people**, create faith in the possibility of peace and win the hearts of the Israeli sectors that are held captive by the old myths and prejudices. The peace movement must address the hearts and the minds of the entire Israeli public.

93 The **small and consistent** Israeli peace movements that held on and continued the struggle, when



Peace demonstration: To understand the other

Photo: Rachel Avnery

most of the peace camp collapsed in the wake of the Camp David debacle and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, must play a decisive role in this process.

94 These movements can be likened to a **small wheel** with an autonomous drive which turns a bigger wheel, which in turn activates an even bigger wheel, and so on, until the whole machinery springs into action. All the past achievements of the Israeli peace forces were attained that way, such as Israeli recognition of the existence of the Palestinian people, the wide public acceptance of the idea of a Palestinian State, the readiness to start negotiations with the PLO, to compromise on Jerusalem, and so on.

95 The new peace camp must lead public opinion towards a brave reassessment of the national "narrative" and rid it of falsities. It must sincerely strive to unite the historical versions of both peoples into a **single "narrative"**, free from historical deceptions and acceptable to both sides.

96 While doing this, it must also help the Israeli public

to recognize that besides all the great and positive aspects of the Zionist enterprise, a terrible injustice has been inflicted on the Palestinian people. This injustice, most extreme during the "Naqba", obliges us to **assume responsibility** and correct as much of it as possible.

97 A peace agreement is valueless unless both sides are able to accept it in spirit and in practice, in as much as it satisfies the basic **national aspirations** and does not offend national dignity and honor.

98 In the existing situation, there is no solution but the one based on the principle of **"Two States for Two**

The radical Israeli peace movements can be likened to a **small wheel** with an **autonomous drive** which turns a **bigger wheel**, which in turn activates an **even bigger wheel**, and so on.

Peoples", meaning the peaceful coexistence in two independent states, Israel and Palestine.

99

The idea voiced sometimes that it is possible and desirable to replace the two-state with a **one-state** solution in all the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan, either as a bi-national or non-national state, is unrealistic. The vast majority of Israelis will not agree to the dismantling of the State of Israel, much as the vast majority of Palestinians will not give up the establishment of a national state of their own. This illusion is also dangerous, since it undermines the struggle for the Two-state Solution, which can be realized in the foreseeable future, in favor of an idea that has no chance of realization in the coming decades. This illusion can also be misused as a pretext for the existence and extension of the settlements. If a joint state were set up, it would become a battlefield, with one side fighting to preserve its majority by the expulsion of the other side.

100

The new peace camp must formulate a **peace plan** based on the following principles:



The Dome for Palestine, the Western Wall for Israel

a. The occupation will come to an end. An independent and viable Palestinian State will be established alongside Israel.

b. The Green Line will be the border between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. Limited exchanges of territory will be possible only by mutual agreement, arrived at in free negotiations, and on the basis of 1:1.

c. All Israeli settlers will be evacuated from the territory of the State of Palestine, and the settlements turned over to returning refugees.

d. The border between the two states will be open to the movement of people and goods, subject to arrangements made by mutual agreement.

e. Jerusalem will be the capital of both States. West Jerusalem will be the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem the capital of Palestine. The State of Palestine will have complete sovereignty over East Jerusalem, including the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount). The State of Israel will have complete sovereignty over West Jerusalem, including the

Western Wall and the Jewish Quarter. The two states will reach agreement on the unity of the city at the municipal level.

f. Israel will recognize, in principle, the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees as an inalienable human right, and assume moral responsibility for its part in the creation of the problem. A Committee of Truth and Reconciliation will establish the historic facts in an objective way. The solution of the problem will be achieved by agreement based on just, fair and practical considerations and will include return to the territory of the State of Palestine, return of a limited and agreed number to the

The occupation will come to an end. The Green Line will be the border between Israel and Palestine. The settlers will be evacuated. A just, fair and practical solution of the refugee problem.

The Peace Agreement and its honest implementation will lead to the end of the historic conflict between the two peoples, based on equality, mutual respect and maximum cooperation.

territory of Israel, payment of compensation and settlement in other countries.

g. The **water resources** will be controlled jointly and allocated by agreement, equally and fairly.

h. A **security pact** between the two States will ensure the security of both and take into consideration the specific security needs of both Israel and Palestine. The agreement will be endorsed by the international community and reinforced by international guarantees.

i. Israel and Palestine will cooperate with other States in the region for the establishment of a **regional community**, modeled on the European Union.

j. The entire region will be made

free from **weapons of mass destruction**.

101

The signing of the peace agreement and its honest implementation in good faith will lead to the **end of the historic conflict** and the reconciliation between the two peoples, based on equality, mutual respect and the striving for maximum cooperation.

Please help us to finance this campaign by sending a check to Gush Shalom, P.O. Box 3322, Tel Aviv 61033, Israel

GUSH SHALOM is the hard core of the Israeli peace movement. It is known for its unwavering stand in times of crisis, such as the al-Aqsa intifada. For years, GUSH SHALOM has played a leading role in determining the moral and political agenda of the Israeli peace movement.

The primary aim of GUSH SHALOM is to win over Israeli public opinion for these principles:

★ an end to the occupation.

- ★ acceptance of the natural right of the Palestinian people to an independent and sovereign state.
- ★ the pre-1967 Green Line as the border of peace between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine.
- ★ Jerusalem as the capital of the two states, East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. A city open for all, not cut into pieces by walls and roadblocks.
- ★ just and agreed solution to the refugee problem, that will include repatriation to the State of Palestine, return of an agreed number to Israeli territory, payment of compensation and settling in other countries.
- ★ evacuation of all the settlements in Palestinian territory.

any fleeting popularity, the Gush can act as a vanguard – advocating ideas years, and sometimes decades, before they are generally accepted.

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Gush Shalom is engaged in a wide range of activities – from political campaigns, through direct actions and demonstrations to petitions, manifestos and numerous publications.

Few examples: “Release All Palestinian Prisoners” – (Campaign 1993); “Jerusalem – Capital of Two States” – (Petition signed by 850 leading intellectuals and artists, Israel Prize laureates, peace activists and Palestinian leaders, 1995); “Boycott the Products of the Settlements” - (Ongoing campaign since 1997); “Marking the Green Line on the ground” - (Campaign – 1997); Publication of the first complete draft of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement - (2001); Campaign against War Crimes - (2002); Creation of a Human Shield for the protection of Yasser Arafat from Assassination by Sharon (2003); “The Wall must Fall” (Ongoing campaign, 2003 on).

CAUTION!

This is a subversive text. It undermines the very foundations on which the National Consensus is based.

These 101 points demolish the myths, conventional lies and historical falsehoods, on which most of the arguments of both Israeli and Palestinian propaganda rest. The truths of both sides are intertwined into one historical narrative that does justice to both. Without this common basis, peace is impossible.

By Uri Avnery

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