

# *In Search of a Palestinian Identity*

**AFIF SAFIEH**



**PASSIA**

Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International  
Affairs, Jerusalem

**PASSIA**, the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, is an independent Palestinian non-profit institution, not affiliated with any government, political party or organization. PASSIA seeks to present the Question of Palestine in its national, regional and international contexts through academic research, dialogue and publication. PASSIA endeavors that research undertaken under its auspices be specialized and scientific and that its symposia and workshops, whether international or intra-Palestinian, be open, self-critical and conducted in a spirit of cooperation.

**Afif Safieh** was from 1990-2005 Palestinian General Delegate to the United Kingdom and to the Holy See. In October 2005 he was appointed Head of the PLO Mission in Washington, DC, USA.

The views presented in this book are personal, i.e., the researcher's, and do not necessarily represent the views of PASSIA. The publication of this book was kindly supported by the **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)**, Jerusalem.

---



Copyright © PASSIA  
PASSIA Publication - December 2005  
Tel: (02)626 4426 ▪ Fax: (02)628 2819  
E-mail: [passia@palnet.com](mailto:passia@palnet.com) ▪ Website: [www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org)  
PO Box 19545, Jerusalem

# Contents

<b>Anatomy of a Mission – London 1990-2005 .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Which Way is Forward?.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Rome and Its Belligerent Sparta .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Diplomacy in the Middle East: The Art of Delaying the Inevitable? .....</b>	<b>35</b>



# Anatomy of a Mission - London 1990-2005<sup>1</sup>

I feel privileged to have been invited to address such a distinguished audience at such a prestigious forum. Speaking today, almost a week before the end of my official duties in London, I cannot but recall that I started my assignment in London with a Chatham House lecture in September 1990 when I had to step in at the last moment to replace Hani Al-Hassan in a session chaired by the late Sir John Moberly.

Let me first give a short history of the Palestinian diplomatic representation in London.

## **The Palestinian Diplomatic Representation in London**

### Location:

From the early 1970s until 1986, the Palestinian diplomatic representation was part of the Arab League Office at 52 Green Street. In 1986, it moved to independent premises in South Kensington at 4 Clareville Grove. For austerity measures, in 1996 we moved again to a smaller but more modern office in a lesser neighborhood – Hammersmith – at 5 Galena Road.

### Appellation:

From the early 1970s until 1988, the mission was called the PLO Information Office. Then in 1988, because of our peace initiative based on our acceptance of the two-state solution, and in agreement with Her Majesty's Government, it was upgraded to PLO General Delegation. In 1993, just after the Oslo breakthrough, the Delegation, representing the PLO and the PNA at the same time, was renamed the Palestinian General Delegation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Transcript of a lecture delivered by Afif Safieh, the Palestinian General Delegate to the UK at Chatham House/The Royal Institute for International Affairs on Wednesday, 13 July 2005.

tion. We were then authorized to fly the Palestinian flag, which we did at a very moving ceremony attended by William Ehrman, the head of NENAD - the Near East/North Africa Department - on behalf of the Foreign Office and the members of the Council of Arab Ambassadors.

Representation:

The first PLO representative was the late Said Hamami, who held the post from the early 70s until he was assassinated in 1978. I never met Said but he was undeniably a very effective representative and I still feel the impact of his passage in London. Said was succeeded by Nabil Ramlawi - from 1978 to 1983 - who was then transferred to the UN in Geneva and who is now in our Foreign Ministry in charge of the unit for diplomatic training. Faisal Oweida followed in 1983 and held the post until 1990, when he was transferred to Austria. Unfortunately, he died two years ago from cancer.

I am the fourth Palestinian representative in London. I do not know if there were any assassination attempts. Anyway, if there were, they passed totally unnoticed by me. Concerning my health, yes, I suffer from diabetes, cholesterol, and high blood pressure, and I am overweight and a chain smoker. My doctor, every time she sees me, tells me, "Bravo Afif for still being with us."

Size:

In 1990, I inherited an office with 12 employees including the secretary, the receptionist, and the driver. Then, because of budgetary constraints, the number was brought down to five, to rise again gradually up to eight.

In the past 15 years, I have dealt with three Prime Ministers: Margaret Thatcher, John Major, and Tony Blair; four Secretaries of State: Douglas Hurd, Malcolm Rifkind, Robin Cook, and now Jack Straw; and ten Ministers of State: William Waldgrave, Douglas Hogg, and Sir Jeremy Hanley, during the Conservative period, then with the late Derek Fatchett, Peter Hain, Brian Wilson, Geoffrey Hoon, Ben Bradshaw, Mike O'Brian, Baroness Symons, and now with Dr. Kim Howells.

During those 15 years, I organized ten Arafat visits to London, three of which were mainly connected to meetings with Madeleine Albright. In addition, last year we arranged a visit for our Prime Minister Abu Ala'a, and this year, for President Mahmoud Abbas for the London conference on 1<sup>st</sup> March.

The upgrading was gradual. When I landed in town in September 1990, it was prohibited for me to have any ministerial level contacts. Since then I have become familiar to 10 Downing Street, to the Foreign Office, and to Westminster-Whitehall in general. Christ'l and I started being invited to the Garden Tea Party by Her Majesty the Queen; at first, we were just with the crowd, but then we were upgraded to the Diplomatic Tent, which is for junior diplomats, and then to the Royal Tent itself. We have also been invited to a Royal Banquet at Buckingham Palace for a visiting Head of State and every year to the Trooping of the Colors, the Lord Mayor's Banquet, and to Ascot, though I have to say that I am not particularly enamored with horseracing. Then, of course, there is the annual invitation to the prestigious Diplomatic Dinner by De La Rue who hope to be contracted to print one day, hopefully soon, our national currency.

*Job Description:*

What does a Palestinian representative do? Our mission has all the responsibilities, burdens, and expectations of an embassy, yet we have neither all the privileges nor the immunities or financial capabilities of a normal embassy as we are still a national liberation movement, still struggling for independence and statehood.

How do I define my job description? Wherever I am posted, I consider that there are ten layers of work that I have to handle:

1. The government
2. Parliament
3. Political parties
4. The Diplomatic Corps
5. The media
6. The NGOs
7. The Palestinian community
8. The Arab community

9. The Muslim community
10. The Jewish community

This is all in addition to the regular reports to the leadership and some consular duties. We issue neither passports nor visas, but we do authenticate documents, etc., and in moments of optimism, find ourselves performing some commercial duties related to the various companies that consult us about the potential for economic transactions.

Let me now go through the different 'layers' of work.

1. *The Government:* At the very beginning, our interaction was mainly with the Foreign Office at a sub ministerial level. Now it is with the Foreign Office at all levels, but beyond it, we have to deal with many other departments, including the Prime Minister's Office and various ministries.
2. *Parliament:* I really attached great importance to my dealings and interactions with both Houses of Parliament. I was invited three times for hearings by the Select Committee for Foreign Affairs, the first time in April 1991.

In the House of Commons, we have five institutional interlocutors and channels of communication. The first is CAABU, the Council for the Advancement of Arab British Understanding, which has a triple chairmanship now from the three major parties: John Austin, Crispin Blunt, and Colin Breed. The second is the Britain/Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group, which was presided over first by Ernie Ross then by Dr. Phyllis Starkey and now by Richard Burden. Then we have the Labor Middle East Council, the Conservative Middle East Council - which was created by Lord Gilmour and Sir Dennis Walters, and was then presided over by Nicholas Soames - and the Liberal Middle East Council, which was presided over by Lord David Steel and is currently presided over by Sir Menzies Campbell.

3. *Political Parties:* Our relations with political parties take place throughout the year and each time I have a visiting dignitary or delegation, I ensure that they meet the leader-

ship of the opposition as well. The busiest period is during the season of the annual party conferences in late September and early October. I usually have one or more fringe meetings, which are extremely important because they help shape perceptions, policies, projections, and predictions.

4. *The Diplomatic Corps:* In a lesser capital, relations within the Diplomatic Corps are more horizontal: a bridge club, a tennis players' network, frequent gastronomic trips from The Hague to Brussels, etc. Such leisurely pursuits are unthinkable in London, and because of the intensity of bilateral relations, the volume of visiting delegations, the size of the community, etc., relations are of a vertical nature. I should add here that the Council of Arab Ambassadors remains an extremely important forum and the resulting joint activities are of great value, which is why I have always drawn the attention of our British interlocutors to the exceptional importance of this council composed of former ministers and those who never wanted to be ministers.
5. *The Media:* Beside the importance of the British media and its pool of sophisticated and knowledgeable journalists, not to mention the heavy presence of international media outfits, London is also the media capital of the Arab World. It hosts all the Pan Arab dailies distributed from Morocco to Muscat, as well as many weeklies and monthlies, and then of course there are the proliferating TV satellite stations, many of which were born in London or have their second most important offices located here.
6. *The NGOs:* This is the largest 'layer' and the one to which I have devoted a huge amount of time. It includes Churches, trade unions, university campuses, think tanks, human rights institutions, solidarity groups, etc. On the lecturing circuit, this is the most demanding category. To take the Churches as an example, I have had the privilege of addressing the Annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and of the United Reform Church and of lecturing twice at Wesley Chapel of the Methodist Church, and I have been in regular contact with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Head of the Roman Catholic Church.

7. *The Palestinian Community*: It might not be as big as the one that exists in the USA, Chili, Canada, Australia, or even Germany but it is an extremely important community, concentrated mainly in the London area, and is in more intense contact with the homeland and the region than other Diaspora communities are.

For example, because London is such an important Arab media center, we probably have here more than one hundred Palestinian journalists, a number second numerically only to that associated with Palestine itself. Throughout the years, many institutions were established in London. The Association of the Palestinian Community, of which I am the patron, has a constitution, a general assembly every two years, and democratic elections, and has already had seven successive presidents. In addition, there are charities such as Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) and Interpal, as well as organizations that focus on lobbying and raising awareness such as The Return Center or Arab Media Watch.

We, the Palestinians, have become the Jews of the Israelis and today, because of our geographic dispersal, we are 'a global tribe.' With the right approach, we could turn that into a source of empowerment.

8. *The Arab Community*: There are no accurate figures because in the national census, there is not a category for 'Arabs,' only 'Muslims' and 'Others,' but a conservative estimate would be that there are over 400,000 British Arabs. Politically speaking, it is still an invisible community, the last ethnic minority to be totally unrepresented in both Houses of Parliament. This is due to a combination of factors, including the absence of any governmental encouragement and insufficient assertiveness by the community itself. The Arab Club and national associations are regular interlocutors of the Palestinian delegation.
9. *The Muslim Community*: Now close to two million strong, with five members in the House of Lords and four elected members of the House of Commons, this particular community's electoral weight is increasingly being felt. Since I ar-

rived in London, I have been in regular contact with the Union of Muslim Organizations (UMO) and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and I have lectured at the invitation of the 'City Circle,' a network of second and third generation Muslims who work in the City.

10. *The Jewish Community*: Wherever I happen to live or work, I devote a lot of time to interacting with the Jewish community and many of its institutions. I have frequently lectured at the Liberal Synagogue in St John's Wood, always kept close relations with the Jewish Socialist Group, Jews for Justice, Friends of Mapam, Friends of Peace Now, Ne-turei Karta, etc., and consider June Jacobs, Rabbi David Goldberg and many others personal friends, as does Christ'l.

Some years ago, the *Jewish Chronicle* published, unaltered, a long letter of mine in which I said, "I never compare the Palestinian Nakba/Catastrophe to the Holocaust. Each tragedy stands on its own. I never indulge in comparative martyrology. If I were a Jew or a Gypsy, Nazi barbarity would be the most horrible event in history. If I were a Native American, it would be the arrival of European settlers that resulted in almost total extermination. If I were a Black African, it would be slavery in previous centuries and Apartheid during the last century. If I were an Armenian, it would be the Ottoman/Turkish massacres. If I were a Palestinian – and I happen to be one – it would be the Nakba. Humanity should condemn all the above. I do not know of a way to measure suffering or how to quantify pain but what I do know is that we are not children of a lesser God."

### **The Broader Picture: Evolution of European Perceptions**

1948: European public perceptions of the Palestinian problem have passed through a variety of phases. European anti-Semitism was decisive in the birth then the success of Zionism in Palestine. Without the "Dreyfus Affair" there would not have been Theodore Herzl's manifesto *The Jewish State*. Without Hitler's accession to power in the early 1930s and the Nazi atrocities, Zionism would have remained a minority tendency within Jewish communities. Both Abba Eban and Nahum Gold-

man wrote in a variety of books that the “exceptional conditions” of the birth of Israel would not have been possible without “the indulgence of the international community” as a result of World War II. “Exceptional conditions” meant the atrocious conditions that allowed the majority in Palestine to become the minority and the minority a majority.

Alas, the Palestinian dispossession and dispersion, the Nakba, took place with Europe applauding. We were the victim of the victims of European history and were thus deprived of our legitimate share of sympathy, solidarity, and support.

1956: I do not think that the tri-partite aggression against Egypt in 1956 caused much of a fracture in the political establishment here in the UK. Yes, it shortened Anthony Eden's premiership, yes, the late Lord Christopher Mayhew committed political suicide when it was predicted that he had prime ministerial potential, yes, the late writer Peter Mansfield resigned from the Foreign Office, but there was no major crack in society. In France, its impact was by far more serious. Coupled with the impact of the Algerian independence movement, it helped terminate the Fourth Republic and the political careers of Gaston Deferre and Guy Mollet, brought back de Gaulle to power in 1958, and thus contributed to the reorientation of French foreign policy.

1967: If one reads the book of Livia Rokach, the daughter of the first Mayor of Tel Aviv, or the *Diaries* of Moshe Sharett, one learns that Ben Gurion adhered to two strategic doctrines. One was the periphery theory: since our environment is hostile, we have to make an alliance with the environment of our environment meaning Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia. The other doctrine could be summarized thus: we should know how to provoke the Arabs into provoking us so that we can expand beyond the narrow boundaries we had to accept in 1948-49. That model applies perfectly to the escalating crisis that led to the War of 1967. I am reminded here of the words of General Matti Peled who once said, “Believing that Israel was in danger in 1967 is an insult to the Israeli army.”

1967 was an important turning point in terms of the way that Israel was perceived, as it was then that some began to per-

ceive it as an occupier. The facilitation of mass Palestinian departures, the attempts to change the demographic statistics in Israel's favor, the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, the beginning of settlement building – all helped in tarnishing the Israeli image.

1973: The year 1973 was an important strategic moment and undeniably a demarcation line. Europe (Pompidou/Jobert - Edward Heath) displayed understanding *vis-à-vis* the Arab military initiative to reawaken a dormant diplomatic front. The oil crisis that followed revealed the depth of economic and security level interdependence between Europe and the Arab World and the risk of regional over-spills. The Euro-Arab dialogue was thus initiated and the need for an equitable solution for the Palestinian problem emphasized.

1977: The first electoral defeat by Labor in Israel liberated more segments of Western public opinion anesthetized by the soothing discourse of the Labor leadership and their *savoir-faire* in matters of public relations. The raw discourse of Likud, their vociferous and vehement statements reflected the reality of oppression. Meanwhile, the Kibbutz Movement, this 'paradise on earth,' used to seduce public opinion, was discovered to be a fading phenomenon that never represented more than three percent of society and of the Israeli economy and that was built mainly on confiscated Palestinian land.

1982: The invasion of Lebanon was an eye-opener. It was clearly an unprovoked war, which is why various analysts said back then that it was "a war out of choice, not out of necessity" and many Jewish and Israeli writers announced "the end of the purity of arms."

1987: The year 1987 witnessed the eruption of the first Palestinian *Intifada*, which was mainly non violent, and 1988, the PLO peace initiative of a two-state solution and the start of a new era in which the media begins to balance its coverage and to give more time and space to Palestinian spokespersons conveying our version of history.

## **My Term of Duty in London**

Let me first say that London, for an Arab or a Palestinian diplomat, is an emotionally difficult posting, also that I have to commend all my interlocutors for their profound decency and extreme professionalism.

1990: My landing in town in September 1990 was not a soft one as it coincided with the first Gulf crisis and Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait.

We were accused then of having bet on the wrong horse. My major concern was not to become politically marginalized. I detested Saddam, the occupation of Kuwait, the rapid deployment of foreign troops, and the preparations for war. I kept my adherence to the diplomatic option that I favored. On a David Frost Sunday program I stated, "You have seen Yasser Arafat kiss the cheeks of Saddam but you did not bother to ask what he was whispering in his ear."

1991: With the end of the Gulf war, James Baker started his shuttle diplomacy. From London, we played an important role in projecting the image of the indivisible nature of the Palestinian people and of the Palestinian national movement. In London, several publicized meetings took place between PLO officials, Palestinian personalities from the Occupied Territories, and Diaspora intellectuals such as Edward Said and Ibrahim Abu Lughod. The British Government made it possible for Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi to 'slip' through London to Tunis for consultations. My position was as follows: the PLO is, at the same time, an institution, and an idea. If ten thousand work in the institution, the nine million Palestinians are the powerful vehicle of the idea. The PLO has represented the Palestinian people for over 25 years. Now it will be the Palestinians representing the PLO. I frequently repeated then that the PLO had become "unreasonably reasonable," having accepted that at the Madrid Conference, the Palestinians were "half a delegation, representing half the people seeking half a solution."

1992: While negotiations stagnated in Washington, the Oslo process began – in London, where, on 2 December, the Steer-

ing Committee of the Multilateral Talks held its meetings. Abu Ala'a was the coordinator of the Palestinian negotiating teams but could not – the PLO was still excluded – attend himself, and while the formal official event was taking place at Lancaster House, Abu Ala'a and myself met at the Ritz Hotel with Yair Hirschfield, an assistant of Yossi Beilin, with Terry Larsen, the Norwegian, hovering on the sides.

1993: History is in the making, I kept repeating to myself, in relation to the Oslo breakthrough and the signing on the White House lawn. The specificity of the Palestinian situation: "a leadership in exile, demography dispersed, a geography occupied" could move towards normality or the semblance of normality of "an authority over a demography over a geography".

1994: My application for "family reunification" in East Jerusalem submitted by a distant relative – my mother – was rejected by the occupation authorities. I had planned to abandon politics and diplomacy and start an English weekly in Jerusalem, *The Palestinian*.

Amidst the growing disenchantment with the peace process, my message remained as follows: Israel seeks a diplomatic outcome that will reflect

1. Israeli power and intransigence,
2. The American constant alignment on the Israeli preference,
3. Russian decline
4. European abdication,
5. Arab impotence,
6. What Israel hopes will be Palestinian resignation.

My advice, meanwhile, was to refrain from confusing realism with resignation.

1995: All Palestinian factions abided by an unproclaimed cease-fire, Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist, and the Is-

raeli Government provoked the Islamic tendencies by assassinating Shiqaqi in Malta and the 'Engineer' in Gaza.<sup>2</sup>

1996: The year was marked by successful Palestinian Presidential and legislative elections, the retaliation of the Islamic tendencies in response to the Israeli assassination policy, the war waged by Peres in Lebanon, ending with the Kana massacre, the 'retaliation' of the Palestinian Israeli voters through abstention, and the election of Netanyahu whom I described as "a pyromaniac on a power keg." My lectures are often titled: "From Breakthrough to Breakdown?"

1997: This was the year of diplomatic stagnation, and instead of permanent peace, we lived through the farce of a durable... peace process.

1998: Three meetings between President Arafat and Madeleine Albright took place in London, while America became increasingly irritated with Netanyahu's rigidity, which is no doubt one of the factors that resulted in 1999 in his electoral defeat opposite Barak.

1999: Barak proved to be a monumental disappointment. A complex individual, he rapidly alienated his colleagues within Labor and antagonized his coalition partners and whilst flirting with the Syrian track, effectively froze the Palestinian one.

2000: Barak sought to jump the interim phases and move directly to final status talks. Arafat, on the other hand, let it be known that he believed this to be premature since insufficient homework had been done, while the American side restricted itself to conveying to us Israeli proposals. David Aaron Miller, in a recent candid op-ed in *The Washington Post* titled "Israel's Lawyer" wrote that had the American side presented the "Clinton Parameters" at Camp David in July rather than in December, we would have had an agreement then.

---

<sup>2</sup> Reference is made to Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shiqaqi, who was killed by most probably Mossad agents in October 1995 and the Hamas activist from Gaza, Yahya Ayyash, who was assassinated by a booby-trapped telephone in January 1996 – the Ed..

The failure of Camp David heightened tensions, as did the provocative Sharon visit to the Dome of the Rock. The Mitchell Report, some time later, admitted that the second *Intifada* started by being non-violent and that the ferocious repression by the Israeli side, causing more than a hundred fatalities in the first two weeks, pushed a few on our side to resort, unwisely, to using arms.

2001-2002: In the internal debate, I lobbied for a unilateral Palestinian ceasefire. Clinically, I believed that the Israelis should know that they could not terminate the *Intifada* and that we should know that, by the *Intifada* alone, we could not terminate the occupation and that there was a need for a diplomatic initiative.

2002: The diplomatic initiative occurred when the Beirut Arab Summit adopted the Saudi peace initiative. Alas, it was followed by a Hamas suicide bombing in Netanya. Sharon, offered a choice between reciprocating to a diplomatic overture or retaliating to a military provocation, chose the latter, and the world, suffering from self-inflicted impotence, watched the reinvasion of the already occupied territories. The Nakba is definitely not a frozen moment in history that has recurred sometime in 1948!

2003: The previous September, Tony Blair, at the Labor annual conference, was very warmly applauded when he announced that he would convene an international conference to help resolve the conflict. The conference convened – on ‘Palestinian reforms’ - turned out to be more modest than expected, yet still managed to displease Sharon who tried to sabotage the London gathering by preventing Palestinian ministers from traveling, though fortunately, modern technology and video-conferencing were able to salvage the day. Here in London I did my best to convey the message that reforms, meritocracy, transparency, and accountability were not conditions to be imposed on us by the outside world, but a Palestinian expectation, aspiration, right, and even a duty, but whilst warning that the issue of Palestinian reforms should not become the tree that hid the forest, with the forest, in this case, being an ugly spectacle of occupation and oppression.

2004: Again, during the Labor party conference at the end of September, Tony Blair received the loudest applause for his passage "Come November.... I will make it my personal priority..." Since then, I have often invoked this Blair speech to prove that Yasser Arafat was not the obstacle to peace. At the end of September, Arafat was not dead; he was not even ill. No, by "Come November," Tony Blair meant, "when we have the American presidential elections behind us."

2005: With the disappearance of the founder of the contemporary Palestinian national movement, I frequently refer to Max Weber who spoke of the phases of leadership and legitimacy thus: 1- the traditional phase, 2- the charismatic phase, 3- the institutional phase. The successful presidential elections, with the international monitoring, represent a good omen for the future. The charismatic era having ended, a managerial revolution should now be on the agenda. We all know Sharon's intentions. How the world and the Quartet will carry the peace process beyond the unilateral Israeli disengagement from Gaza remains to be seen.

## **In Conclusion**

We have an excellent working relationship with Her Majesty's Government and with the entire political establishment. In Parliament, it is the pro-Israeli lobby that is on the defensive and that is definitely more comfortable in supporting an Israel run by Labor rather than by the internationally embarrassing Likud. All opinion polls, not only in Britain but also across Europe, show that the trend is overwhelmingly in favor of ending the Israeli occupation that started in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state. It is no more a leftwing phenomenon and we also enjoy comfortable majorities among Liberal and Conservative voters. Unlike in 1973, when European governmental positions were more advanced than their public opinions, today, public opinions are now more supportive of Palestinian aspirations than governmental positions are. The future looks promising. It is no longer politically suicidal to be pro-Palestinian. It is no longer electorally rewarding to be anti-Palestinian – quite the opposite.

# Which Way is Forward?<sup>1</sup>

## I

I would like to thank Professor Eugene Rogan and St Anthony's College for organizing this series of lectures, "Palestinians on Palestine: The way forward." Let us hope that this initiative will result in obliging the speakers, myself included, to think deeply about that important topic and thus help elevate a necessary debate that is long overdue.

The title of this lecture is followed by a question mark, which with me is not unusual. A lecture I gave in 1986 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was titled "Dead Ends?" and a friend told me then that the question mark was my only concession to optimism. Lectures I gave in 1994 in California at the invitation of the World Affairs Council were titled "Palestine: A State in the Making?" Then the question mark was my only concession to pessimism. Today, it is there as a sign of humility, of recognition that there are other avenues offered to Palestinian public opinion, an admission that we are in a realm where there are hardly any certainties.

## II

I will start with Israel, since it is after all Israel that occupies Palestine and not the other way around. The first President of the State of Israel, Chaim Weizman, wrote, "I am certain the world will judge the Jewish State by how it will treat the Arabs".<sup>2</sup> Today, the 'We did not know' attitude of the Israelis is as unbelievable and as unacceptable as it was decades ago in other circumstances. Palestinian historians confirmed by Israeli revisionist colleagues have shown how the demographic upheaval was orchestrated in Mandatory Palestine, how the majority was reduced to a minority, and how the minority was pro-

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecture given at St. Anthony's College, Oxford University, on Friday, 23 January 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Weizman, Chaim. *Trial and Error*, London, 1949, p. 566.

pelled to become a majority. The events of the last three years show us that the Palestinian Nakba/Catastrophe was not a frozen moment in history that occurred some time in 1948, but is an ongoing process, deploying itself until this very day with great savagery, aiming at acquiring as much Palestinian geography as possible with as little Palestinian demography as possible. It is interesting to note that the oppressors seem to hate their victims much more than the victims hate their oppressors and that the victims have moved faster than their oppressors have beyond double negation towards mutual recognition.

The Israeli Labor Party has enjoyed internationally an undeserved good reputation. I have often told Israeli interlocutors that it was Labor that made Palestine unlivable to Palestinians. What Likud does is to make Israel also unlivable to many Jews. The ethnic cleansing of 1948, the Suez War of 1956, the initiative behind the War of 1967, the beginning of the illegal settlement building, the idea for a separation wall... it was Labor, Labor, and Labor.

When Barak faded away in 2001 and Sharon won by a landslide, most Israeli analysts put the blame on Yasser Arafat, the absence of a partner, and Palestinian untrustworthiness since the Palestinians responded to the most 'generous' offer with an armed *Intifada*, which proved that they had a hidden agenda, i.e., total liberation, not just the Two-State solution.

I personally attribute the repeated defeats of Labor to three major factors:

a) The Israeli Labor movement has been in constant decline since 1948. If one were to look at the successive compositions of the Knesset, one would notice that the Labor contingent in parliament was regularly shrinking, even in the elections that they won. They lost their dominance and centrality in 1977 with the first Menachem Begin victory, which is mainly due to socio-logical, anthropological, tribal reasons. Labor never succeeded in attracting a significant number of Oriental Jews, and Oriental Jews, by 1990, accounted for over 60 percent of Jewish Israeli society. Yes, in the 90s, a million Russian Jews and Russian non-Jews flocked into the country but few joined Labor. This

massive immigration changed the balance between the Sephardim and Ashkenazi Jews but it further plunged Labor into its historical decline. Then there was the loss of the Palestinian Israeli voters, 50 percent of whom used traditionally to vote Labor. That was due to the multiplication of Palestinian Israeli lists compounded with repeated Labor blunders such as the war on Lebanon in 1996, the Qana massacre, and the ferocious repression of October 2000 when peaceful demonstrators were showered not with water but with lethal bullets resulting in 13 fatalities. A party that does not appeal to the Oriental Jews, that does not attract the Russian vote, and that has repelled its Arab supporters, is surely heading towards its electoral Waterloo, especially if it is led by the Israeli Bonaparte, Barak, who has already succeeded in antagonizing his Labor colleagues and alienating his coalition partners.

b) The political price paid for the unequal partnership of the Likud-Labor coalition between 2001-2003 produced the lamentable results in 2003 by Amran Mitzna, a decent but underwhelmingly charismatic leader. Labor accepted the humiliating treatment of a junior partner with no say on policy and strategy yet was there to offer more domestic acceptability and international respectability. In other words, it served as a mere fig leaf for Sharon simply because Ben Eliezer and Shimon Peres were both afraid that in opposition they would move from the 'Who is who?' to become the 'Who is he?' of Israeli politics.

c) The third factor was the ephemeral passage of Ehud Barak at the helm of the Labor party. The emergence of Ehud Barak on the political scene was boisterously welcomed internationally. He was hailed as the most decorated Israeli officer, a strategic thinker, a mathematician, a gifted pianist, a *dégustateur* of classical music. Rabin had been elevated to sainthood after his martyrdom. Barak was elevated to sainthood even before his election. Analysts forgot to observe that he was too young to have played a significant role in the conventional Arab-Israeli wars and that all his decorations were earned for his responsibility in hit-team and death squad operations, which inevitably affects one's psyche and one's *modus operandi*. His complex and tortuous personality was best demonstrated just after his comfortable electoral victory when he spent all of the 45 days of

coalition building finding ways to humiliate, diminish, and dwarf his colleagues in Labor by giving them each the ministries they did not want. Commentators did not explain enough his unprincipled nature, they did not mention, for example, that when he terminated his career in the army and was preparing his entry into politics, he hesitated whether to join Labor or Likud, and only assurances that Rabin might favor him as his *dauphin désigné* swayed him to opt for Labor.

Conflicting perceptions of what really took place during the Camp David talks will continue to plague international relations for some time. Aided by President Clinton himself, media reports spoke of Barak as having been not only bold, audacious, courageous, magnanimous, and generous but also constructive, creative, imaginative, and innovative. Now English is not my first language, it is not even my second, but I have never heard so many words used in such a questionable manner. Yes, Barak went further than other Israeli leaders had ventured, but he had to! His predecessors had dealt with transitional arrangements for the interim period while, at Camp David, with inexcusable delays, final status issues were at last in discussion. He made a 'generous' offer? Bearing in mind the history of dispossession, dispersion, and domination, the mere usage of the word 'generous' is offensive or tactless to say the least. Ninety-five percent? Since the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip together account for only 22 percent of Mandatory Palestine, a 100 percent offer can hardly be described as a generous offer. But was it really 95 percent? Robert Malley, an American official who took part in Camp David believes that it was 91 percent (*The New York Times*, 9 July 2001) while Barak advocated keeping "about 15 percent of Judea and Samaria" and wanted "to ensure a wide security zone in the Jordan Valley" (*The New York Times*, 25 May 2001). The differences over what was really proposed stem from the chaotic, informal, poorly choreographed encounters in Camp David.

At Taba, a few months later, the Israeli team 'offered' territorially around five percent more, which is sufficient proof that Yasser Arafat was justified in his rejection of the Camp David deal, whatever that really was. But why did Taba fail? Mainly for two reasons. First, Barak, his coalition in tatters, had unwisely

called for anticipated elections. The prediction of opinion polls was that he was heading for a poor performance to the extent that Attorney General Rubenstein declared that the Israeli team had no legitimacy to conduct diplomacy on behalf of the State. The second reason was equally significant. Within the Barak camp, there were two schools of thought, both related to how to win the coming elections. The first school of thought advocated moderating the Israeli negotiating posture so that an agreement would be reached with the Palestinians, which would bring back into the fold the disenchanted Jewish peace camp and the Palestinian Israelis. The other group, which importantly included Barak himself, considered that both those categories would anyway vote for Barak as Prime Minister, *faute de mieux*, and thus took them for granted and favored a radicalization of the Israeli stand. For them, this strategy would allow them to recapture the central ground, the floating votes, the undecided who were tilting in favor of Sharon. Needless to say, the Barak school prevailed, the Taba talks ended inconclusively, and the rest is history.

In 1982-1983, an Israeli Commission of Inquiry had ruled that Ariel Sharon was "not fit for public office," yet today, he is not in jail, but in power, with high approval ratings, a large majority, and a coalition of extreme rightwing parties, settler networks, and Jewish fundamentalists, most of whom agree on annexation and the transferrist ideology. Sharon has different combinations of alternative coalition partners if need be, and if ever he is reduced to resignation, the obvious successor is Netanyahu, which would be the continuation of the same plus the sound bites and the one liners. The Palestinians, not only in the Occupied Territories, but also within pre-1967 Israel, are constantly referred to as "a demographic threat," a "time bomb," a "fifth column." An expert who was invited to speak recently at a Likud Herzliya Conference shamelessly advocated "enforced family planning," in other words, the collective sterilization of the Palestinian population.

What reveals best the prevailing and dominant political culture in Israel is a recent interview with Benny Morris in *Ha'aretz*. Displaying a fascinating dual and schizophrenic personality – 'Historian Benny Morris' and 'Citizen Benny Morris' - a sort of Dr.

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Morris explains, in great detail, that his research during the last decade confirms the results of his previous publications.<sup>3</sup> Working on newly declassified documents, he states that he has discovered even more massacres, in addition to 12 cases of rape, which he admits are "just the tip of the iceberg" since the Palestinian traditional society tends to hush-hush such occurrences, and that the units of the Haganah (not only the Irgun of Menachem Begin) were given "operational orders that stated explicitly that they were to uproot the villagers, expel them, and destroy the villages themselves." All this is said in a clinical fashion, with no emotion and where ethical considerations are totally absent. For him, "There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing" and "you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." It was "inevitable" if Israel was to be created.

Anyway, all this we knew already. That was the 'Historian Morris' speaking. The frightening part is when he gives way to 'Citizen Morris.' His grievance, and he has one, is the unfinished business of 1948. He says, "Ben Gurion made a serious historical mistake in 1948...he got cold feet during the war. In the end, he faltered" and "because he did not complete the transfer in 1948, he left a large and volatile demographic reserve in the West Bank and Gaza and within Israel itself." Morris continues, "Had he carried out a full expulsion - rather than a partial one - he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations."

Today, Sharon hopes to address the unfinished business left by Ben Gurion by accelerating the building of the 'Wall of Shame' snaking through the West Bank. All those who will be trapped outside the Wall and many of those who will be caged within the Wall will be actively 'encouraged' to emigrate. I fully agree with the verdict of Israeli scholar Baruch Kimmerling who said that Sharon aims at "politicide," the elimination of central national Palestinian representation and authority. It is obviously the Palestinians who have no partner for peace.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ha'aretz*, 8 January 2004.

III

The Israeli side wants a diplomatic outcome that reflects Israeli power and intransigence, total American alignment on the Israeli preference, Russian decline, European abdication, Arab impotence, and what it hopes will be Palestinian resignation.

De Gaulle, a statesman of the kind that is no longer made, because of his familiarity with the psychology of belligerents and the pathology of conflict advised in 1967 in favor of an elegantly imposed solution through what he called "*la concertation à quatre*" (the coordination of the four major powers; China was not yet in the Security Council). This idea never really took off. The Americans were not unhappy with the Israeli military victory since it compensated for the humiliations of Vietnam. The Soviets, shortsighted as they often could be, preferred the bipolar constellation and did not want to give equal status to lesser countries like Britain and France. London, meanwhile, was unenthusiastic simply because the idea was French to begin with. Since then, instead of a durable peace, we have had a permanent peace process.

The peace-making approach adopted, mainly because it suited Israel's preferred negotiating strategy, left it all to the local belligerent parties/negotiating partners to 'sort it out' amongst themselves. Today it is clear that what is democratically acceptable to the Israelis is unacceptable to the Palestinians, and *vice versa*.

What is to be done?

I have always observed a certain level of self-restraint when dealing with domestic Palestinian issues. I believe this is the proper pattern of behavior for civil servants. This code of conduct is not always respected and, at moments, one believes that civil servants should not refrain from injecting their input into the national debate.

One cannot study Palestinian strategies in isolation from the regional Arab State system, its natural political environment. These last decades, the Arab World has become a regional

grouping where no advantage is reaped by befriending it, nor any risk taken by antagonizing it. In addition, the Arab World suffers from a double crisis: the crisis of regimes and a crisis of the oppositions. Pan-Arab nationalism is still, 33 years later, orphaned by the death of Abdel Nasser. The Arab Left has not yet recovered from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet model. The Liberal school of thought never really existed as an organized trend. We are left with only the Islamic parties, which, as far as most Arab voters are concerned, do not appear to be the desirable appetizing alternative to the unrepresentative, incompetent, and corrupt governments currently in place, and thus, paradoxically, help in prolonging the durability of the latter.

The PLO, it has to be recognized, has always functioned as a multi-party system. In spite of external pressures and internal 'opportunities' there was never an attempt to crush or eliminate a party, a trend, or an opposition, at least, not by the leadership. On the contrary, Tripoli 1983 was an attempt by an insurrection backed by a regional power to eliminate the legitimate leadership. The democracy and pluralism, however, were often chaotic and the usual quest for consensus among the factions could result at crucial moments in the paralysis of decision-making. I have always believed that, like in all other societies, differences of opinion were not only healthy but simply normal, and that like any other society, we are condemned to have either unity/unanimity or a strategy. At times, I have to say, we seem to have neither unanimity nor a strategy.

Let me first of all dismiss what I consider to be an optical illusion: the one bi-national state. This is not a new strategic vision, but a recycled, reheated old dish. In the late 60s, the resurrecting Palestinian national movement formulated the proposal of a unitary democratic bi-cultural, multi-confessional, pluri-ethnic state. That was genuinely a 'generous offer' from those who believed to have become "the Jews of the Israelis" yet did not want those who chose to be their enemies to become "the Palestinians of the Palestinians." This project emerged at a moment in history when we believed - naively - that we were on our way to victory. Today, those who speak of the bi-national state do it due to the belief that the occupation

is irreversible and because they suffer from a psychology of failure and a mentality of defeat. Besides my doubts about the feasibility of this proposal, I have serious reservations about its desirability. A fanaticized Israeli Jewish community is hardly a partner one would seek with relish as co-citizens. The disparity between both societies - and the qualitative gap is widening - makes the One-State formula a mechanism for the perpetuation of the domination of one community by the other. In addition to that, I personally believe that many more refugees can exercise their right to return to their homes and hometowns, but mainly to their homeland - the nascent Palestinian State - within the framework of the Two-State solution rather than the One-State solution. Those who see this slogan as a tactical tool, a sort of scarecrow, to convince and frighten the Israeli society in favor of withdrawal must have realized that its deterrent value is limited because of a belief in Israel that the apartheid reality can be prolonged the way it was prolonged in South Africa for decades in spite of the huge numerical imbalance. The Israeli Government wants a One-State solution - a Jewish State - and a 'No-State' formula for the Palestinians.

The Two-State solution has been adopted by the Palestinian national movement since the October/Ramadan/Kippur War of 1973, which was the real demarcation line in strategic thinking in the Arab World. With self-confidence restored, a political maturity manifested itself distinguishing the desirable, the possible, and the acceptable. The huge aerial bridge provided by the American administration to the Israeli army was proof enough that the USA will never allow Israel to be defeated militarily. Since then, the absence of an Arab arms industry, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 'loosening' of relations between the Arab military actors, and the de-linking of any serious coordination between those actors and Arab oil producing countries have all served as contributing factors to the absence of a credible Arab military option.

In the absence of an Arab military option, is there a credible Palestinian military option? I think not and never thought so. During our presence in the Lebanese arena, our aim was to remain a military actor so that we could be recognized as a diplomatic factor. In the diplomatic arena, during those years we

were not a rejectionist force but the rejected party. The first *Intifada* of 1987, which operated on the Palestinian scene as the October War did for the Arab State system, allowed us both to proclaim our national existence (Independence, at the PNC in Algiers in November 1988) and to demonstrate our availability to coexistence.

The Mitchell Report admits that the first weeks of the second *Intifada* were mainly non-violent, at least from the Palestinian side. It was the brutal and ferocious nature of Israeli repression - over one hundred Palestinian fatalities in the first two weeks - that pushed a few in our ranks to use, unwisely, the few weapons at their disposal, thus allowing the Israelis to escalate the aggression. I wish we all had remembered the wisdom of the late Faisal Husseini, who said, "If you want to defy Tyson, don't invite him to the boxing ring, but to the chess board." The genius of the first *Intifada* was its non-violent nature, which neutralized most of Israel's military arsenal. This time, they showed no restraint in using their Merkava tanks, their Apache helicopters, and their F16's. Very few people, especially not pro-Israelis, are morally qualified to give us lessons in political ethics, but it is high time we all realized that suicide bombings are counter productive. At least in two moments in recent history, they had devastating effects on the national interest.

It is not true that 9/11 had an immediate effect on changing American foreign policy on Israel/Palestine. Preparing to wage war in Afghanistan, the American Administration, along with several European countries, was then keen to be perceived as pursuing an active role in the pursuit of peace. Asked to exercise self-restraint and to cause no embarrassment, Ariel Sharon was complaining publicly that Israel was being treated like the Czechoslovakia of 1939, abandoned to the territorial appetite of its neighbors. It is a public secret that Bush, still interested in winning the hearts and minds in the Arab and the Muslim World, was growing increasingly impatient with a reluctant Sharon and banged the telephone, interrupting a difficult and unpleasant conversation. Bush then designated General Zinni as his special envoy, which was good news because that presidential envoy for once was not from the American Jewish community, was a general himself, would not be impressed and intimi-

dated by the physique or the personality of Sharon, and was a former Commander of the American forces in the Gulf, hence fully aware of the burden of Israeli intransigence on American-Arab relations. In brief, he was for us the ideal envoy. Bush furthermore summoned - not invited, summoned - Sharon to Washington. That was at the end of November 2001. On the eve of both Sharon's difficult visit to Washington and of the arrival of Zinni to Palestine/Israel, two suicide bombings made the Zinni visit a failure by shrinking its purpose to the security dimension instead of the political horizon and saved Sharon's visit, making it a major success. It is then that Sharon, with the help of influential circles within the US Administration, convinced Bush that his repression of our people was part of the global war on terrorism.

The second moment when suicide bombing inflicted strategic damage on our national interest was in March 2002, when the Arab Summit in Beirut adopted the Saudi initiative with Palestinian blessings. Sharon had a choice: either respond to a collective diplomatic invitation, or retaliate to a military provocation. One could have predicted his preference in advance.

Today, clinically, Israel has to become aware that it cannot terminate the *Intifada*. Today, clinically, we have to be aware that by the *Intifada* alone, we cannot terminate the occupation. The fact that we remain undefeated, untamed, undomesticated is our victory. We should never forget the primacy of politics. In the final analysis, battles and wars are won politically, not militarily. Most national liberation movements won politically, not militarily. If the aim is the Two-State solution - and it is - then we have already won diplomatically and politically. UN Security Council Resolution 1397, the Road Map, the 'Bush vision,' all recognize a need to end the occupation that started in 1967 and for a Two-State solution. Our remaining challenge is to translate this victory geographically, territorially.

The choice for Palestinian society is not, as it is sometimes superficially presented, between resistance and non-resistance - *Intifada* or no *Intifada* - but between different means of expression of our rejection of occupation. Bearing in mind all the factors mentioned above, I hope and advocate with great conviction

tion to see a total conversion in favor of a confrontational strategy of popular non-violent resistance. This is not the option of the naive or of those who suffer or struggle with fatigue. It is an efficient and a very convincing vehicle for Palestinian empowerment. The Israeli side will try to sabotage and disrupt such an approach the way it dealt with repeated Palestinian cease-fires through incursions into the urban centers and targeted and less targeted assassinations, hence the need for Palestinian cohesion and discipline. For the different factions, it will constitute a formidable challenge. It is by far more difficult and demanding to organize, channel, and choreograph the struggle of 3.5 million people than to manage a certain number of cells of three persons each. Such a strategy will involve all strata of society. Women will play the prominent role to which they aspire. The Israeli Palestinians and the Palestinians of the Diaspora will find it easier to contribute to and complement such a struggle. The Israeli peace camp will welcome and join such an approach, propelling itself again on the ascendancy trend. The international NGO network can become a partner, physically, in our daily struggle. A popular non-violent strategy will promote the question of Palestine as the universal battle for justice of our time.

In a Brecht play on Galileo, there is an interesting scene where a disciple says, "Unhappy are the people who have no heroes," to which Galileo responds, "Unhappy are the people who still have a need for heroes." We are obviously still in need of heroes. I bow in respect to the Palestinian collective hero - the people themselves - for their steadfastness, their endurance, their capacity to absorb unimaginable pain and suffering. And I firmly believe that there is today a need to define or redefine heroism.

# Rome and its Belligerent Sparta<sup>1</sup>

As a peace enthusiast, I was heavily involved at the end of the 1980s-early 90s in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue when every university, think-tank and political party around the world was organizing a seminar of its own to contribute to a rapprochement they saw as desirable and inevitable. In all those encounters, every possible scenario in peacemaking and its opposite was explored *ad nauseum*. This led many to believe, naively, that when a peace process would finally be triggered, it would be of short duration since much of the preliminary homework had already been done in these *fora*, which, though unofficial, were nonetheless high-powered.

Posted in London, a very exasperating and time-consuming assignment, I was mercifully not engaged in the negotiating process that began in Madrid in October 1991. In 1998, however, I attended three meetings here in London between Yasser Arafat and the American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. After one of those encounters, retiring to our hotel depressed because of the absence of any tangible progress, I told Yasser Arafat, "Abu Ammar, we the Christian Palestinians are two percent of society in Palestine and we were two (Nabil Abu Rudeinah and myself) out of eight in the Palestinian delegation: that is 25 percent. The Jewish community in the USA represents also two percent of society, yet it constituted eight out of eight of the American delegation: that is 100 percent. We are either under-represented or they are over-represented."

Before objections start flooding in, I wish to remind readers that when in any analysis of the French and British domestic

---

<sup>1</sup> A version of this piece first appeared in The Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies, *News Brief*, Vol. 22, No. 8 (August 2002). ISSN 1471-3330.

scenes it is said that the Corsicans and the Scots play a disproportionate role, there is no avalanche of expressions of indignation and outrage. Yet their role and status is modest in comparison.

### **The Loss of an Ally and the Loss of an Enemy**

Between 1985-1987, I spent two years as a visiting scholar at Harvard University. Two memories stick out.

- 1) It was obvious then, in academic and political circles, that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a matter of years away. Within the Third World and in some leftist Western circles there was a certain level of disquiet about the possible global and regional repercussions of such a major alteration in the international system. To my surprise, within pro-Israeli circles in America, a worry of a different nature was manifesting itself. Contrary to those who were assessing the possible impact of the loss of an 'ally,' their worry was about the loss of an 'enemy' and what it might mean for the *raison d'être* and the strategic function and utility of Israel in American foreign policy as a bastion and strategic asset in terms of containing Soviet expansionism. It was precisely during this period that the ideological construction of an alternative global threat, the peril of Islam, took shape. This self-fulfilling theory/prophesy/ ideology gained a momentum of its own, rendered more plausible by the shallowness, irrationality, and extremism of some Oriental responses to occidental challenges.
- 2) In magazines such as *Commentary* and *The New Republic* there was an acute awareness that one day a peace process would have to get started and a number of serious articles explored the avenues that might best suit Israeli interests. The architecture and the choreography of negotiations, it was said, had to reflect the "non-centrality" of the Palestinian problem in the Middle East and there was a need to de-couple the different negotiating tracks to make it difficult to link and to synchronize progress. The American role had to be limited to convene the parties to the ne-

gotiating table, but not to be decisive towards achieving a certain finality. The outcome would be "as agreed upon by the local negotiating sides" as though the US had no international commitments in the United Nations, no international responsibilities necessitating leadership and guidance, no regional interests and friendships that such a complacent attitude towards the Israeli territorial appetite might jeopardize.

When after the Gulf War of 1991 the US Administration felt the need to invite for a peace conference (out of fidelity to the Arab members of the coalition, to confer retroactive respectability to the war in the Gulf by showing sensitivity also to the endless ordeal of the Palestinians etc.), that was the model of negotiations suggested. It was considered an offer Israel could not refuse precisely because it corresponded to its preferred negotiating strategy. It was called "the only game in town," "the only deal around." Negotiations started in Madrid at the end of October 1991 and then predictably stagnated in Washington until August 1993 when a parallel and secret track witnessed a breakthrough the Americans were not involved in.

### **The Decline of the Arabists**

Henry Kissinger has had an enduring impact on American foreign policy beyond his years of service. He was, as National Security Advisor, the one who undermined in 1970 the Rogers Plan by repeating to whoever cared to listen that it was precisely only that: a Rogers plan. Once dear Henry succeeded in supplanting Rogers at the State Department, he proceeded to purge the Arabists because, as far as he was concerned, they were infected by 'localitis' and gradually replaced them by staff who had acquired their political experience working in the many organs of the pro-Israeli lobby. Their influence varied depending on the personality of the Secretary of State. It was immense during the time of George Schultz, Warren Christopher, and Madeleine Albright, who were after all employees of the President not belonging to the inner circle but contained with James Baker who was a close friend and behaved as a partner to George Bush Sr.

## **A Messenger without a Message**

Dennis Ross emerged as the most influential of the pro-Israelis among the senior civil servants, not because of his powerful intellect, but because of his survival capabilities and hence his durability. For 12 years, he was a frequent visitor to the area. He incarnated the self-inflicted impotence of the only remaining superpower. He was the most distinguished representative of the strategy outlined in *Commentary Magazine*. He advocated this approach tirelessly, and he practiced it unwaveringly. I called him on BBC World "a messenger without a message" since he never came with any original idea or any American proposal not cleared in advance with the Israeli Government, but always conveyed and explained the Israeli position. The USA, the only global superpower, thus neutralized, had abdicated its role and status in favor of its regional *protégé* Israel. History will record that if Dennis Ross had nothing to do with the diplomatic breakthrough of 1993 he was heavily guilty of the breakdown in 2000. His name will always be associated with bias, partiality, and the absence of American even-handedness in the quest for peace in the Middle East. The way Dennis Ross conducted himself the Palestinians were reduced to negotiating at the mercy of a very asymmetrical balance of power. He allowed the Israeli side to indulge in the illusion that the diplomatic outcome will reflect Israeli power and American alignment on the Israeli preference and that Israeli 'generosity' will decide the territorial contours of the agreement.

## **Rome and Its Belligerent Sparta**

The study of American-Israeli relations has fascinated, intrigued, occupied, and preoccupied two generations of scholars. Two competing schools of thought have addressed the 'who wags whom' debate. The first school spoke of "an American Israel" with the United States dictating to the local ally what its regional policy should be in accordance with the American global vision. Noam Chomsky wrote two decades ago that Washington was the contemporary Rome and Israel its regional belligerent Sparta.

The second school, meanwhile, projected the image of 'an Israeli America,' a complex relationship where the global superpower simply adopts the regional policy of its client state and integrates it in its global strategy. This was considered a result of the powerful pro-Israeli lobby that succeeded in turning Capitol Hill into another Israeli occupied territory.

I have always believed that both schools of thought were correct but at different moments in history, depending on a variety of considerations such as the electoral and intellectual strength of the American President, on how comfortable he is in the country and in Congress, and on how comfortable the US is in the world.

After the horror of 9/11, when the predictable retaliation was being discussed, the pro-Israeli lobby immediately emerged as the 'maximalist school,' which wanted to expand the theater of operations beyond Afghanistan to engulf more countries. America now prepares itself to wage an attack against Iraq that nothing justifies except Israel's regional hegemonic inclinations. The lobby has really grown accustomed to using one muscle too many and to going one pressure too far. The satisfaction among the rightwing Israeli establishment is immense now that the US appears to be Israel's regional belligerent Sparta.

### **The Two Americas**

In today's administration, the pro-Israeli lobby, in alliance with the Christian fundamentalists and their delirious theology, has totally dominated and confiscated the debate around American foreign policy in the Middle East. During a recent quick visit to America on the third and fourth of July, I was dazzled to watch on all TV channels the artificially imported Israeli discourse on insecurity and terrorism, which gave the impression that the US was under massive attack on Independence Day. Colin Powell and the State Department still represent a pocket of resistance, aided occasionally by the distant voices of Jimmy Carter, Brent Scowcroft, and Zbigniew Brzezinski. When Ariel Sharon waged his reinvasion of the Occupied Territories, I believe that Presi-

dent Bush expected the withdrawal to take place "now," "immediately," and "without delay" but had to retract because of massive pressures in Washington. Bush was defeated even before Powell departed for his slow motion trip to the area. Again, it turned out that the lobby does not suffer from dual loyalty. When, on the rare occasion the President happens to differ with an Israeli Prime Minister, the lobby does not side with the President. Both Bushes, the father and the son, have experienced that in less than a decade.

When Vice-President Cheney passed through London in March on his way to the region I published in *The Guardian* an open letter in which I wrote the following: "The Arab World has no ideological dispute with the USA. Our belief is that there are two Americas, two political cultures, two historical memories. There is the America of the early settlers who, on discovering the New World, clashed with the indigenous population and almost totally exterminated them. The America that established slavery and had an elastic conception of its frontiers expanding shamelessly at the expense of Mexico. This is the America with which Ariel Sharon always seeks an alliance. When 'the shared values' are invoked, it is in this national experience that the common traditions are deeply rooted.

"But there is another America. The America of the War of Independence against the colonial power. The America that took the painful decision to undergo a civil war to abolish slavery. The America of Woodrow Wilson that came to the Versailles Conference upholding the principle of self-determination. The America of the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King's dream. It is this America that we Palestinians appeal to and seek an alliance with. These two Americas do not coincide with Democratic America and Republican America. The two historical memories cross this political divide."

I could have added the America of Dwight Eisenhower who in 1956-57, just after the Suez War, obtained through 'friendly persuasion' Israel's withdrawal out of the occupied Sinai in 24 hours. Israel, then, was governed by Ben Gurion and, unlike President Bush, Eisenhower obtained Israeli acquiescence without having the 'reward' of the Saudi initiative, which enjoys

Palestinian blessings and now has been endorsed by the Arab Summit of Beirut.

## **Choices**

Decision-makers in Washington always had a choice between a foreign policy that will make America loved and respected around the world or a policy that will make it feared and hated. They now have to decide what the unfinished business on the international agenda is: disciplining Israel diplomatically or crushing Iraq militarily. In the meantime, Dennis Ross, after a 12-year stint in the State Department, is back home in the pro-Israeli lobby as Director of the Washington Institute for Near East policy. In the new administration, the center of gravity of the pro-Israeli lobby has moved from the State Department to the Department of Defense. Ross frequently appears on all TV channels on both sides of the Atlantic as the peacemaker *par excellence* pontificating in the most irritating fashion as though he is an equidistant third party. He indulges the character assassination of Yasser Arafat, trying to demolish politically what the military campaigns of Ariel Sharon did not succeed in achieving.

In a very gloomy situation, the birth of the new structure of the Quartet – US-UN-EU and Russia – is the only source of optimism in the immediate future. It has the double advantage of reintroducing important players who were deliberately excluded or marginalized because, as Kissinger wrote, their presence might "raise Arab expectations" and of strengthening the more reasonable and decent school of thought within the American Administration. With the vision of the Two-State solution, we now have the light. The Quartet could be the missing tunnel.

I have always believed that the Arab-Israeli conflict is a test between moral courage and political cowardice. Having encountered cowardice so frequently, I still hope that we may soon have a rendezvous with history.



# Diplomacy in the Middle East: The Art of Delaying the Inevitable<sup>1</sup>

A joke was extremely fashionable in Palestinian circles at another stagnating moment in the Middle East Peace Process: Yasser Arafat went to see God and told Him, "God Almighty, will there ever be peace in Palestine?" Apparently, God looked at him melancholically and said, "Yes, yes, of course, but not during my lifetime." Accredited also to the Holy See, I have it from reliable sources that God would not mind being proven wrong, at least in this case.

In the last ten months, the Palestinians have been blamed in certain influential circles for having missed a historical opportunity by rejecting the most generous offer by the most dovish Israeli Government and it has been claimed that our *Intifada* allowed Likud and Sharon back to power. This perception stemmed from the undeserved good reputation that the Israeli Labor Party enjoys in the West and from statements made by former President Clinton that Ehud Barak was bold, courageous, audacious, generous, magnanimous, constructive, creative, imaginative, and innovative. English is not my first language, it is not even my second, but I have never seen those concepts used in such a questionable manner. As for the favorable prejudice that Labor benefits from, I keep telling my numerous Israeli interlocutors that historically, it was Labor that made Palestine unlivable for the Palestinians. What Likud does also makes Israel uninhabitable for many Jews. As a result of this misperception, unlike in the 1970s when European governmental positions were far better informed when compared to their

---

<sup>1</sup> This is an edited transcript of a lecture delivered at the Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies in London on 2 July 2001. A version of this text first appeared in *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 146, No. 4 (August 2001). ISSN 0307-1847.

respective public opinions, today public opinion is more sympathetic towards Palestinian suffering and more supportive of Palestinian aspirations than European official positions.

It was General Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque that inflamed the situation and triggered the second *Intifada*. It was only the straw that broke the camel's back. We had warned Barak and Clinton not to permit this. In retrospect, there were obvious Machiavellian calculations that allowed that visit to occur. This coincided with the day that the Israeli Attorney General cleared Binyamin Netanyahu in an investigation he was conducting because of insufficient evidence. Every commentator foresaw that Netanyahu would be able to capitalize politically from this decision and stage his comeback in the political arena. At the time, it was in Barak's interest that Sharon remained the leader of Likud precisely because he thought he was beatable in a national election while Netanyahu's flashy and charismatic character was seen as a more formidable challenge to Barak's reelection efforts. Barak wanted to provide Sharon with an advantage over Netanyahu by not allowing the latter to steal the limelight. Once again, however, Barak, a supposedly excellent chess player, miscalculated. As it turned out, even Sharon beat him electorally.

In my opinion, the *Intifada* has three explanatory factors. First, the Palestinians have witnessed 53 years of forced diasporization and 34 years of endless occupation. Forced diasporization does not only include the Palestinian refugees who happen to be in Lebanon, Syria, or Jordan. Two out of every three inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are refugees in refugee camps and one out of every three inhabitants of the West Bank is a refugee in a refugee camp, so it's not an external phenomenon, it's also an internal factor. One also has to bear in mind that the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem is the longest military occupation in modern history with humiliation and harassment of an entire people on a daily basis.

The second factor is the ten years of an unconvincing peace process. When we went to Madrid in 1991, I qualified our attitude as being 'unreasonably reason-able.' We then accepted to function as half a delegation representing half the people and seeking half a solution just because we wanted to give peace a chance. In Oslo in 1993, we were promised a five-year transi-

tional period for the accords to be implemented. By 1998, we were supposed to have achieved final status. It is useful to recall Yitzhak Rabin's maxim that "there are no sacred dates" yet if there was anything precise in the Oslo Agreement, it was precisely the timetable for its implementation. There was no need for an unnecessarily protracted peace process. A territory that was occupied in 1967 in less than six days can also be evacuated in six days so that we can all rest on the seventh.

After ten years of negotiations and agreements, we have received only 65 percent of the Gaza Strip with 35 percent still under Israeli exclusive total control since there are 20 illegal settlements and 5,000 illegal settlers in the area. In the West Bank, arrangements are even more complex. At present, we have three zones: A, B, and C. We control totally or partially 40 percent (Zones A and B) whereas 60 percent remain under Israel's exclusive control. What we have witnessed during the last ten years can only be described as an accelerated expansion of the settlements, hence an expansion of the occupation rather than real withdrawal. This was more real during Labor governments including Barak's than during the Netanyahu years. The total number of illegal settlers rocketed up to 400,000. In a way, throughout those years of 'theoretical' peacemaking there was an *Intifada* in the making.

The third factor is the failed nature and the content of the Camp David talks that took place in July 2000 – talks that undoubtedly poisoned the diplomatic and political environments in which we are currently operating.

Why is this the case? Because for the first time since we reached the moment of truth, Palestinian public opinion discovered what was the ceiling of the possible and the permissible in this particular peace process. Barak, with Clinton's help, succeeded in projecting the image that Israel offered us 95 percent plus one or plus two in the territorial swap. It was never the case; the Israeli maps offered at Camp David excluded four areas: expanded East Jerusalem; the Latroun Salient; the no man's land around the West Bank between 19480 and 1967, and the shores of the Dead Sea. What Barak was offering was 95 percent of 90 percent, which is close to 85 percent.

Barak recently published an op-ed piece in the *New York Times/International Herald Tribune* where he explicitly stated that Israel should keep 15 percent of Judea and Samaria plus a security zone in the Jordan Valley. In spite of that, prominent commentators like Thomas Friedman continue to write with a vengeance about the ungrateful Arafat who rejected 95 percent as though Barak's article was never written or published.

What was the Israeli offer at the Camp David talks? Israel wanted to keep a security zone in the Jordan Valley and the settlements that are scattered in this valley although some serious Israeli generals noted that this would give Israel only one additional second of earlier warning in case of a missile attack. This is an insignificant advantage. The same generals have also made it clear that these settlements, in the case of belligerency, would become a military burden and a liability. At Camp David, Barak asked for major territorial rectifications to absorb and annex to Israel 80 percent of the settlers and since the settlements in which they lived were deliberately built on the water aquifers in the area they would, *en passant*, swallow our rare hydraulic resources. The West Bank would end up as several dislocated, disconnected Bantustans.

Thirdly, in the Camp David talks, Israel refused to acknowledge any historical, moral, or legal responsibility with regard to the refugee issue. During informal talks, the Israelis were only accepting back a maximum of 100,000 refugees and in installments of 1,000-5,000. We would have needed the entire Third Millennium to bring back a significant number of refugees.

Anything dealing with Jerusalem can hardly be seen as a minor territorial rectification. Last but not least, Barak explored the possibility of returning one out of every three neighborhoods in occupied East Jerusalem, maintaining control of almost half of the Old City of Jerusalem - the Jewish Quarter, the Armenian Quarter (I wonder why), the Wailing Wall (50 meters), and/or the entire Western Wall (450 meters) - and wanted shared sovereignty over the Islamic shrines. This came as a shock to the Palestinian leadership and society. The Palestinian state will neither have control of its airspace nor of its frontiers.

A word on the Taba talks that occurred two weeks before the Israeli elections. The Israeli proposals were undeniably more advanced than in Camp David but everybody knew that it was, by now, too late. The Israeli negotiating team did not have any legitimacy to speak on behalf of a government that was deserted by most of its coalition components and which, it was predicted by all opinion polls, was going to perform lamentably in the forthcoming elections.

Often the Israeli territorial appetite is disguised in terms of security needs and requirements even though we, and others, have told the Israelis repeatedly that security comes from regional acceptance and not from territorial aggrandizement and that we are the key to Israel's regional acceptance. Israel's doctrine towards its regional environment is better described by the concept of 'compellence' than deterrence. Deterrence is a policy aiming to dissuade a neighbor from undertaking policies seen as detrimental or damaging to one's national interests. On the other hand, 'compellence,' an under-exploited concept of Thomas Schelling, is a policy that tends to coerce, compel, and reorder the environment in a way that is seen to suit better one's own national interest. In spite of that, some commentators still write as though it is Palestine that occupies Israel and not the other way around.

What kinds of lessons can be drawn from ten years of diplomatic failures? The major flaw in the Peace Process is the fact that the local belligerent parties and negotiating partners were left to fend for themselves. The international community only played the role of facilitating the dialogue and financing the process. We need a decisive input from third parties. If we are left to 'sort it out' by ourselves, we will not achieve an acceptable peace. We will continue to have talks about talks and engage in negotiations *ad nauseam*. An acceptable peace with durability, without external support, is not achievable. What is democratically acceptable to the Israeli people is simply unacceptable for the Palestinian people and *vice versa*. In matters of war and peace, the international will should have primacy and should prevail over the national whim.

The issue of democracy in Israel is often mentioned and used as an argument to improve Israel's public image abroad. I adhere

to the school of thought that argues that Israel is a democracy for its Jewish component but I also maintain that the fact that Israel is a democratic state is not an extenuating factor but an aggravating one. There is nothing more morally disturbing than a democratic oppression supported by the informed consent of the voter and the citizen. At present, negotiations in the Middle East are taking place in a total imbalance of forces. Peace is too important to be left for the Israelis alone to decide upon yet we are constantly told that we should always rally the Israelis to any pursuit of peace. Israeli public opinion will always maintain that Israel needs to withdraw as little as possible I was in London when Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait and was unequivocally vocal in condemning his occupation of Kuwait. At the time, nobody argued for a referendum in Baghdad to see if the Iraqis wanted to withdraw and if, yes, how far; Saddam Hussein was simply asked to withdraw. International Law and oil were both invoked then as an explanation for external intervention. I have news for you. We too happen to have oil: olive oil. The Palestinians crave for international intervention and have appealed for it on numerous occasions. There is a need for international protection and constructive intervention on the part of external actors. At the moment, we are negotiating and suffocating at the mercy of a balance of power that is not favorable to achieving our recognized legitimate aspirations.

Israel has three military and strategic advantages over the Palestinians. First, the Israelis maintain an unclear monopoly in the region. Secondly, they have an overwhelming conventional military superiority *vis-à-vis* any possible coalition of Arab forces. Thirdly, Israel maintains an unwritten alliance with the only remaining superpower, the United States. An unwritten alliance with the only remaining superpower is even more important than a formal alliance since it allows Israel to benefit from all the advantages such an alliance can offer without having the responsibility and the restraint that alliances imply for the junior partner. An unwritten alliance also allows the senior partner to look unaccountable *vis-à-vis* the behavior of its *protégé* and its *protégé* can act as a sort of 'undisciplined ally.'

The Israeli political establishment - left, right, and center - was hoping for a diplomatic outcome that would reflect Israeli intransigence, American alignment on the Israeli preference, Rus-

sian decline, European abdication, Arab impotence, and what they hoped would be Palestinian resignation.

This is the framework within which we are operating. Where do we stand today? Today, Israel is incapable of suppressing the *Intifada* but the *Intifada* by itself is incapable of terminating the occupation. We have a deadlock that can only be solved by bold diplomatic initiatives. Until now, we have witnessed the failure of diplomacy, specifically preventive diplomacy, in achieving a breakthrough in our negotiations with the Israelis.

Now is the time for a major diplomatic initiative. If not now, I wonder when. I often joke with my Norwegian friends by telling them if the Oslo back channel has not yet put Palestine fully on the map it has put Norway on the map. I usually offer this thought as an incentive to European interlocutors by telling them that Europe is still perceived as an actor in search of a role and that we in the Middle East have a role in search of an actor. A merger of the two would be beneficial for all concerned. We share the desire in Europe to transform the European role from merely being a 'payer' into becoming a 'decisive player.'

The US remains a decisive player and I for one believe that the battle for Washington is winnable. A serious strategic debate will inevitably soon surface in Washington on the nature of the American-Israeli relationship. Is Israel still a strategic asset or is it gradually becoming a strategic burden and a liability? Today, after the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of Arab militant regimes, the Arab regional system is profoundly conservative and pro-Western. Israel, with its insatiably territorial appetite, is defying, de-legitimizing, and destabilizing the network of friendship America enjoys in the region. Arab public opinion, from Morocco to Muscat, is boiling. Islamic public opinion, from Nigeria to Malaysia, is angry at the perceived American complacency over and complicity with Israel's endless occupation of Palestinian territory. Israeli regional expansion, if perpetuated, can disrupt and endanger American global interests.

In this era of mediocrity, I often remember the late Dr Nahum Goldmann, for decades the leader of the World Jewish Congress and an enlightened Zionist. In the middle of the 1970s, he published at least two books and several articles in the American

journal *Foreign Affairs* where he commented, critically, on the step-by-step shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger. Three points are as relevant today as they were pertinent then. First, watching, at close range, the deployment of Kissinger's genius in dismantling the Arab alliance of 1973 by decoupling the tracks and marginalizing the Palestinian dimension, Goldmann wrote that he believed in the centrality of the Palestinian problem and the inevitability of addressing the Palestinian dimension. He then offered what I believe is an accurate definition of the way diplomacy is still practiced when dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Diplomacy in the Middle East, he wrote, is the art of delaying the inevitable as long as possible.

Second, Goldmann was not in favor of a gradual approach, with advances of small steps towards nowhere. He explained the risks and found that instead of building confidence they increased the mistrust. Being a sophisticated leader with his finger on the pulse of the Israeli national mood, Goldmann explained that each Israeli partial withdrawal - be it in the Sinai, in the Golan, or in the West Bank - would be extremely problematic, with many Israelis denouncing 'the rape of Israel,' the policy of 'national suicide' and so on. Goldmann explained why he preferred a quick process of implementing an agreed upon final status and thus having to deal once and for all with such a predictable collective outcry.

Third, there is a need for a more assertive American role. Goldmann writes in one of his books about a discussion he had with Moshe Dayan. He says that he told him, "Moshe, America gives you a lot of aid and some advice. Up to now, you take all the aid and you leave the advice aside. What would happen if ever America were to tell you: 'You can have the aid only if you also take the advice?'" Goldmann says that Moshe Dayan, with resignation, answered, "Then we would have to take the advice, too."

I am in favor of a policy of linkages and hope that one day the Americans will be converted to this idea of linking aid and advice since I believe this policy has worked twice in the last decades, once, in 1957, when Eisenhower asked the Israelis to withdraw from the Sinai after the Suez War and once for six months in 1991 during the tenure of Bush senior and former Secretary of State James Baker when they linked the issue of the loan guarantees to

the freezing of settlement activity. Consequently, the Israeli leadership went reluctantly to Madrid and enforced a six-month freeze on building or expanding settlements. Establishing the link between American advice and aid is critical.

We are witnessing a new phenomenon in international relations: global tribes. The Jews are the global tribe *par excellence* but so are the English, the Irish, the Scots, the Indians, the Chinese, and also the Armenians, the Palestinians, and the Arabs. Today, the Palestinians are no longer the 'small kid on the block' but because we are the Jews of the Jews, we were scattered to the periphery of Palestine and beyond. The Palestinians are not only a local phenomenon but also a regional factor and an international actor. One encounters Palestinians all over the world. The same applies to Arab communities. I believe that in any future strategic thinking these diasporas will function as important actors in international politics. We should concentrate on maintaining the links between these communities and their countries of origin and in a parallel manner help and encourage their further integration in their countries of adoption. This is a source of political empowerment that we have somewhat neglected.

I am very encouraged by the fact that the Arab- and Muslim-American communities in the United States are becoming better integrated and better equipped with political institutions to express aspirations and preferences. In the past, many of our failures were attributed to our pattern of tribal behaviors. Tomorrow the challenge for us is to behave like a global and a modern tribe – a challenge for all Arab communities scattered mainly in Western societies.

During the last 34 years, we Arabs have reduced our levels of expectation and have aligned ourselves with what was called the international consensus in the UN, which was mainly formulated by European states and favored the adoption of a two-state solution and the implementation of relevant UN resolutions. Years ago, it was Kissinger who dwarfed a potential European role by stating that Europe would be unhelpful in any peace process because "it would raise Arab expectations." Europe has not aligned itself with Arab preferences. On the contrary, it is the Arab World that has aligned itself with the way Europe and the international community want to see the

conflict resolved. The responsibilities of the international community have increased. We have respected our commitments to the international community and it is now up to the international community to respect its commitments to us. The Israelis need to be made aware of what is expected from them in the Peace Process. If this is achieved in the near future, the Israelis will vote for their leadership not in function of how much territory they are ready to condescendingly concede. Instead, they will frame their choices based on how much experience or inexperience a candidate enjoys, charisma or its absence, and the nature of their economic policies. With the absence of such an unequivocal message, the Israeli voter believes that he or she has the ability to choose a leader whose program for the future coincides with their preference on how much they are ready to tolerate in terms of territorial concessions.

I am politically very nostalgic of De Gaulle. After the War of 1967, President de Gaulle suggested *'laconcertation à quatre'*: the coordination of the major four countries (China was not yet in the Security Council) to help solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The idea never really got off the ground because the Americans seemed comfortable with the Israeli victory of 1967 that compensated for their humiliations in Vietnam. The Soviets, shortsightedly, were unenthusiastic because they preferred a bi-polar international system and did not see why they should recognize equal status to lesser countries like Britain and France. The British were not supportive because it was initially a French initiative. A few meetings of the permanent representatives at the UN in New York took place, the idea then vanished into historical oblivion. Thirty-four years later the conflict remains unresolved. Rather than leaving both societies 'to sort it out' in search of an elusive 'mutually acceptable solution' maybe an elegantly imposed solution by the international community - 'a mutually unacceptable formula' - would have been the only way out of this vicious circle. In the meantime, instead of a durable peace, we now have a permanent peace process.