

Which Way is Forward?¹

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".² 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-

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

² 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.³ 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.

³ *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.