

## **“Bekhiya le-dorot” – something to lament for generations...**

### **The breakdown of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations – four scenarios\***

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The Palestinian explosion, long prophesied (with anxiety or glee) by observers and critics, has finally taken place. This initial analysis tries to elucidate both its causes and some possible outcomes. The October 2000 popular revolt against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem followed the collapse of Israeli-Palestinian talks over the ‘final status’ issue. The question to explain here is not why these talks did not succeed: after all, the sides’ positions appeared from the onset to be too far apart to bridge. The point is rather that peace negotiations went on for such a long period, and that – prodded on by their mediator, US President Clinton – Israelis and Palestinians very nearly reached a comprehensive accord that would have put an end to their prolonged conflict. This pseudo-achievement is all the more remarkable in that a whole series of negative political, military, socioeconomic and ideological factors that had perceptually become associated with the Oslo process, made such a last-minute breakthrough improbable. Room for maneuver was restricted for both leaders, yet the Israeli PM Ehud Barak broke a long-standing Israeli political taboo by offering partition of Jerusalem. It was a calculated bet on the part of the Israeli leader who had staked his political future on a peace accord. Why did Yasser Arafat, who is politically less dependent on a peace agreement than his Israeli counterpart, reject the rather far-reaching Israeli proposal – certainly the best he can ever hope to get through negotiation? It will be argued here that the causes for the Palestinian refusal have to be located in Palestinian political culture: on the one hand, the gap between the goals that Palestinians could realistically expect to obtain through negotiation and those the Arafat leadership itself had convinced the people to insist on as a minimum, forcing Arafat in the end to stick to the latter; on the other hand, the absence of flexible Palestinian counteroffers in spite of extensive pre-negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis, leading to a stalemate. Both factors are ultimately reducible to a lack of in-depth democratization of Palestinian society, for which both sides must share blame.

By ending talks without any perspective, the leaderships effectively condemned their nations to a new round of violence as the only alternative path. Although timing and extent of the October 2000 “Al `Aqsa Intifada”<sup>1</sup> may have surprised the Palestinian leadership, it was quick to exploit the uprising, with its scores of Israeli - caused casualties. Arafat sees it as a propagandistic strategy to bring about increased international pressure on Israel. His aim seems to be to weaken Israel so far that he can coerce it into accepting an agreement on Palestinian terms. Looking into four possible scenarios, we find that this outcome, although preferred by Palestinians, is only one among a range of possibilities that goes from a renewal of talks on the original terms, to a full-scale war. We conclude that a prolonged low-intensity conflict combining Palestinian revolt and Israeli physical self-isolation is the most likely path in the near future. This will bring political gain to neither Palestinians nor Israelis, and only make a negotiated solution of the conflict more difficult.

## **Weaknesses of the Oslo peace process**

The current crisis, which started with the provocative visit of Likud leader Ariel Sharon to Jerusalem's Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif) on 28 September 2000 and escalated into a full-fledged popular uprising against Israel, has within a very short period led to a complete breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian communication. This seems all the more surprising as Barak and Arafat were during their negotiation at Camp David in August 2000 tantalizingly near to a comprehensive agreement. Still it did not come completely unexpected to observers who have followed Israeli-Palestinian relations over the past years. Already before the failure of the last summit, ominous signs of radicalization among the Palestinians, as well as a growing impatience on the Israeli side, were spelling trouble. The peace process was supposed to keep the counterforces under control; but deep divisions between Israeli and Palestinian minimum positions meant that the peace process itself has been weakened for a long time now. Among the long-term causes affecting the Palestinians, five factors stand out: (1) the way how the very basis of peacemaking: the Oslo Accords, were seen as flawed; (2) the contrast between the hope for liberty and the reality of occupation; (3) Israel's settlement policy, viewed as a hypocritical counterpoint to peace talks; (4) the autocratic structures of the Palestinian polity that developed in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords; and (5) gross economic inequalities which were stimulated rather than mended by the peace process and its social 'fallout'. Besides these influences, one can point at two more factors: (6) the delegitimation of the peace process in the eyes of many Israelis following Palestinian rejectionist violence; and (7) the insufficient anchoring of peace and coexistence values among both peoples.

1) Perceived one-sidedness of the 1993 Declaration of Principles (DOP). This, the "Oslo" framework underlying all peace talks reflected the balance of power in 1991-93 which was tilted in Israel's favor. E.g. there was no guarantee that the outcome would include an independent Palestinian state; the issue of Jerusalem was for a long time tabooized; etc. As Palestinians became more assertive this imbalance became less and less acceptable.<sup>2</sup>

2) Ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian areas: While negotiations dragged on without much perspective, humiliations and human rights violations continued to be perpetrated by Israeli soldiers in the territories. Throughout the duration of the peace process, land expropriations have continued unabated; water allocations discriminate against Palestinians; the struggle against Palestinian violent radicals has on numerous occasions led to (sometimes prolonged) closures of Palestinian territories, at times even isolating one Palestinian town from another, effectively turning the Palestinians into prisoners in their own houses. This has been accompanied by massive arrests, blowing up houses of relatives and supporters of convicted terrorists, etc.

3) Continuing Israeli colonization empties peace negotiations of content. The negotiation process was not only too long but also gradually despoiled of content, partly as a result of Israel's extreme stinginess – in particular under the Netanyahu government (1996-99). Meanwhile all successive Israeli governments have throughout the negotiations imposed on the Palestinians forceful and ongoing changes of the status quo, e.g. expanding settlements and the judaization of East Jerusalem.

4) The “democratic deficit” of the peace process. This was probably its most important weakness. The Oslo framework had hardly been discussed in public before it was officially accepted by the leadership on either side. Israeli occupation was replaced by the establishment Arafat’s despotic and inefficient regime, only half-democratic and with strong autocratic tendencies (which Israel studiously ignored). Save for the 1996 elections, it was never subjected to any ‘referendum’ on the Palestinian side. This does not mean the Palestinian population rejected the Oslo peace process. As long as negotiations bore concrete fruits, such as limited Israeli withdrawals from Palestinian territories, relaxation of military tension with the Arab world, etc., was accepted by virtue of its results, especially in the 1994-95 period. However, the more it transpired how meager and impermanent these fruits were, the more popular support eroded.

5) Failure of economic progress and Israeli-Palestinian economic interdependence. The peace process has not brought the Palestinians the widely expected ‘*peace dividend*’. On the contrary, Palestinian society underwent an unfortunate polarization, which was closely bound up with the Oslo process. A new elite stratum of newly rich came into being, whose power depended on intimidation and patronage, and whose limited legitimacy rested upon their ability to obtain for their clientele an ongoing series of advances in the peace process. The Palestinian majority, however, experienced little progress in their miserable socioeconomic situation.. Closures led occasionally to a near-famine situation. But also in more ‘normal’ intervals, the West Bank and Gaza’s economic situation did not improve (save for a few thousand *nouveaux riches* associated with the Arafat regime). Moreover, the *economic infrastructure for peace* has remained weak. While the international community has so far come forward with much less aid than promised, the main mistake is Israel’s. There has been little Israeli investment in the Palestinian territories, and few joint ventures. Instead of building a dense network of economic interdependence (e.g. by opening the Israeli market for Palestinian agricultural produce and handicrafts), Israel has opened its internal market only very hesitantly, and from a certain point on even opted for a long-term policy of separation. On the other hand, settler agricultural products are widely and successfully marketed in Israel. Essentially the only profits were reaped by Israeli companies producing cheap “Italian” shoes and textiles through subcontracting inexpensive Palestinian labor in Gaza and Hebron. The resulting labor exploitation, while providing useful incomes to Palestinian families, did little to endear Israel in Arab eyes, and only reinforced fears of Israeli economic imperialism ;<sup>3</sup> in this way, what little investment there was even militated against rapprochement! While one cannot force private investors to put their money in what must appear as an unstable, dangerous and bankrupt Third World fiefdom, the Israeli government could – had it so wished – have created stronger bonds. As a result of its failure to do so, Palestinians have today precious little incentive to shy away from violence lest they destroy their own livelihood: the neoliberal idea of ‘peace through prosperity’ in reverse!

6) On the Israeli side, only the most Left-oriented would accept the Palestinians’ argument that the Oslo Accords were unbalanced. A substantial part of the Jewish population remained opposed for ideological reasons. More insidiously, however, even among the majority who supports it, the process has become delegitimized. This happened as a result

of Islamist fundamentalist violence, which was only halfheartedly denounced and repressed by the Palestinian leadership, thus fueling Israeli doubts about the reliability of its partner.

7) Frailty of education for peace. Finally, the peace process has remained an affair between two leaderships rather than growing into a process of rapprochement between two peoples. Attempts to bring about people-to-people reconciliation – in the spheres of education, media, grassroots encounters, etc. – have remained superficial, and restricted themselves largely to the group of the ‘already converted’. Not surprisingly, these included more Israelis than Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, participation in “p2p” initiatives was too often coextensive with the same elite group whose careers depended on the peace process.

As a result of all the above factors, a popular revolt against the Oslo peace process was already simmering before Barak and Arafat went to Camp David. Already early 2000 and before, Israeli-Palestinian cooperation had become tenuous, and ‘normalization of relations’ in the economic and cultural realms had come under pressure from the Palestinian side. Pessimism reigned about chances for a breakthrough in the negotiations. The underlying dissatisfaction, particularly among Palestinians, was so strong that the final breakdown of meaningful negotiation – such as occurred in August – nearly fatally led to some return to violent confrontation.

### **The remaining strength of extremist factions on both sides**

To the weaknesses of inherent in the peace process must be added the strength of the oppositions, which show interesting parallels on both sides. In either case, the major opposition is constituted by a substantial minority of the population; is centered in the most conservative and religious elements; is bound together by a coherent fundamentalist ideology that rejects the territorial compromise underlying the Oslo model, and indeed negates any collective rights of the other side. In either case, extremist fringes of the opposition are prepared to use violence, and their numerous more moderate followers do not reject this.

On the Israeli side, the settlers are only the spear-point of the Far Right. Although the ultra-nationalist parties fared badly in the 1999 elections, the two main groupings in Israeli society: Rightist - Oriental - traditionalist/ religious vs. Leftist - Ashkenazi - secular continue to be numerically and politically balanced. Even at their lowest point, the expansionist Zionist Right can presumably still count on some one-third of the Israeli Jewish population. This includes quasi all settlers and part of their relatives living elsewhere in Israel, the overwhelming majority of the religious electorate, and a good part of the secular Right: Likud is in an ideological crisis since it accepted the Oslo framework, but has considerable remaining strength.. More importantly, among the settlers a hard core of fanatics estimated by Israeli intelligence sources at some 5,000, is known to harbor designs to prevent implementation of their evacuation. They are willing to provoke violent incidents against Palestinians, forcing the Israeli army to come to their aid, and even envisage using violence against fellow Jewish soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

The remaining strength of the Israeli Right was also reflected in the outcome of the 1999 elections, which obviated the possibility of a clear-cut Leftist coalition based on a double program of peace externally and secularization/modernization domestically. Instead, Barak was forced to choose between Shas and Likud. He opted for Shas so as to have his hands free in negotiations with the Arab world and the Palestinians, but ultimately it made little difference: the Religious Right scuttled any progress on the secular/religious front, and also obstructed progress on the Arab-peace side, thus essentially fulfilling Likud's function. The settler lobby remained strong enough to forestall any discontinuation of the colonization of Palestinian territories.

A similar remaining strength of the rejectionist Right can be documented on the Palestinian side. Support for Islamist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad never exceeded some 30 % – and even this figure seems to be based more on their network of social, educational and health institutions, the devotion and uncorruptibility of their cadres, and a general Palestinian concern with the corrosive effects of westernization on traditional mores, than on their anti-Israeli militancy. Yet with its coherent ideology of struggle, sacrifice and eventual redemption, and a sustained record of unflinching rejection of Israel, the peace process, and the Arafat regime, the Islamist opposition has enjoyed a relative success. Its actions have apparently acted as a pole of attraction and influenced the recent extremization of its main competitor, the local Fatah cadres.

Jointly, the rejectionist groups among Israelis and Palestinians can be counted upon to do whatever is in their power to obstruct or break up the peace process.

#### **Why did Arafat opt out of a Camp David accord?**

Having thus established that the political ground for an accord on the permanent status questions was already extremely shaky, it still remains surprising – in the face of growing popular disenchantment and opposition – that Israeli and Palestinian leaders not only continued to negotiate with great stubbornness, but apparently came very close to a comprehensive peace accord before they allowed their talks to break down.

According to the US mediator, the onus for the failure of the last-minute negotiation lies more on the Palestinian than on the Israeli side. Due to the strict news blackout during the talks and as long as the relevant documents are not open, the exact apportioning of responsibility must remain a moot question. However, there can be no question that Arafat was the one to terminate the talks, over the Jerusalem question according to most reports. How are we to interpret, after all the efforts made, his abrupt breaking off of negotiations – from which a straight line leads to the outbreak of the Temple Mount riots less than two months later?

In the first place, we seem to be on safe ground if we accept that Israel proposed much more compromises than the Palestinians. While an independent Palestinian state in some parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was already more or less accepted in Israel, the question of its size and location remained highly controversial; the return into Israel of any

1948 refugees, and unfettered Israeli control over the whole of Jerusalem were just as non-negotiable in Israel as in the Palestinian polity. Both Israeli and Palestinian sources show that Israel distanced itself significantly from its original position, particularly regarding Jerusalem, and that the Palestinians essentially stuck to theirs.<sup>5</sup>

Barak seems to have prepared what he believed to be “an offer that Arafat could not refuse”. Yet he did. If Israeli reports of far-reaching Israeli concessions proposed by Barak in Camp David are true (and they have not been denied), it is hard to understand the Palestinians’ adamant refusal, in particular on the Jerusalem question. Why did they prefer to break off negotiations rather than accept an offer that would have given them 90 % of what they demanded: a Palestinian state in 92 % of the West Bank; the right to absorb 1948 and 1967 refugees in this state, and an Israeli commitment to take back up to 150,000 1948 refugees; and full Palestinian sovereignty and control over nearly all Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, as well as over the Christian and Muslim neighborhoods of the Old City, and de facto control over Temple Mount?

This is all the more puzzling since Arafat knew this was the maximum he could expect to get, ever. The Palestinian leader must have known that this proposal represented a major shift in Israeli position, and was sure to create deep division within Israel. He must also have been aware that Barak would only with difficulty have been able to win domestic support, and then only if the peace agreement would be really ironclad and put a final end to a century of strife. Arafat must also have known that it is excluded that any Israeli PM would ever agree to more than this, unless Israel were militarily defeated. Even among those Israeli politician who are willing to grant Palestinians far-reaching political rights in and over Jerusalem (a minority to begin with), hardly any would ever agree to the Palestinian demand that Israel relinquish sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and Western (Wailing) Wall. Loss of this quarter is unconceivable without a deep and possibly lethal internal collapse of the Jewish State. Palestinians may not dislike the idea of Israel collapsing, but they cannot logically expect an Israeli Prime Minister to commit political suicide.

Could Arafat have accepted the Israeli offer? While the outcome sketched above would have been less than optimal for the Palestinians, Arafat could certainly have presented it to his people as an enormous advance and an honorable compromise. Since both sides refused to entertain the idea of any shared sovereignty over the Holy City, such partition would be the most rational outcome. It would leave the Palestinians with the vast majority of Jerusalem’s Christian and Muslim holy places. True, Arafat was under pressure from Palestinian popular opinion not to agree to *any* additional concessions. Yet, in view of the overall package, it is hard to see how he could have lost the public battle had he accepted Barak’s basic bargain. In view of all this, the ultimate Palestinian rejection and reversion to violence comes as something of an enigma. Instead of putting Israel on the defensive by coming with a counteroffer, Arafat stuck to his initial all-or-nothing position: complete Palestinian sovereignty over the totality of the Old City, preferring to blow up the talks over agreeing to any split-the-difference outcome.

Arafat may have arrived at the conclusion that the Oslo peace process could not deliver the minimum that he could convincingly sell to his own people. His angry walkout highlighted

the Palestinians' irreducible demands. While it killed the peace process, it restored at least temporarily his prestige in the Arab world.

If this is indeed the cause of the Camp David summit failure, the question to answer becomes: what made Arafat believe that he could not credibly present Barak's package as an acceptable minimum to his people? There are probably two answers, one related to the contradiction between Arafat's diplomacy and his domestic propaganda, and the other to his failure to prepare effective counterproposals.

#### **Arafat – prisoner of his own propaganda?**

Hostile observers have over the years collected evidence – largely ignored by the Israeli peace camp – of a double game the Palestinian leadership was playing. By unceasing propaganda Arafat kept Palestinian expectations of the final status agreement that would be attained consistently high. Critics of the Palestinian leadership have long documented how Palestinian engagement in diplomatic interaction with Israel went all the time along with fiercely anti-Israeli propaganda. Militarism, continuing extreme anti-Israeli positions in schoolbook texts, and obfuscation of the difference between legitimate political struggle and a military war under the heading of a "jihad for Jerusalem".<sup>6</sup> *By presenting the peace process as one subspecies of the wider struggle to retrieve Palestine, Arafat and Fatah blatantly mixed political-national with religious categories.*<sup>7</sup> *The same approach also implied that the choice for the path of peace was tactical/opportunistic rather than strategic/principled, and could, if necessary, be reversed.* Whatever the interpretation, the Palestinian leadership thus failed to delegitimize the armed struggle.<sup>8</sup>

To (pro-) Israeli critics, this double approach smelled of hypocrisy; Palestinian activists, however, could well defend it as an unavoidable strategy to win the Palestinian public for the peace process: the pro-peace Palestinian mainstream has to contend with an active Islamist opposition to peace with Israel, and many Fatah leaders are personally religious. Instead of educating his people to coexistence, Arafat, permanently under political fire from his own radicals, opted to buy time to try his diplomatic card as one option among others, such as an ongoing diplomatic and diplomatic war against Israel, terrorism, and now possibly a regional war. But the upshot has been an ideological situation in which Palestinian support for the peace process has been wide but shallow.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the Israeli Right had a point when it clamored for 'lowering the Palestinian expectations' – they only forgot that this lowering could only have been accomplished by Palestinians themselves speaking to other Palestinians – and not by Israel bulldozers!

Thus Arafat's upbeat propaganda about the Palestinians eventually achieving their independent state was perhaps an inevitable strategy, both to safeguard his own legitimacy – incessantly assailed from the Right by Islamist rejectionists – and to keep Palestinian morale at a credible level as a bargaining tool. The specifics of his propaganda messages, however, were not predetermined, and here the Palestinian leadership may have set a trap from which they could not disentangle themselves anymore. A key element of Arafat's propaganda war was his oft-reiterated promise to "return to Jerusalem, capital of the independent Palestinian state". As long as negotiations continued, it was possible to play both cards simultaneously: a peace based on an attainable compromise (i.e. one which both sides can convince their respective constituency of) – or a propaganda victory leaving

ideological holy cows intact but failing to achieve peace. However, at some point, at the end of the game, he had to choose one. It seems possible that (whether he himself believes his lies or not) Arafat simply became the prisoner of his own propaganda.

Arafat may have simply seen no other honorable way out but to blow up the whole game. This leaves unanswered, however, the question why he had to go through the motions of these prolonged bargaining sessions with the Israeli government, since he knew all along that he would never willingly obtain from them what he had promised his people. Maybe he only played for time and delayed the moment of truth as long as he could...

#### **The Palestinian leadership – failure of negotiation strategy?**

Failed to prepare serious counterproposals that would have put Israel on the defensive. At best, this would have led to an accord better for the Palestinians; at worst, the Israelis would have been faulted as the party responsible for negotiations failure. The resultant American stance would have been different, and might have avoided the need for an Al-Aqsa Intifada.

A more structural factor seems to be the negotiation concept itself used by the Palestinian leadership. This becomes clear if we compare the Israeli and Palestinian *modus operandi*.

Israeli strategy has all along been one of tergiversation while changing basic data through colonization. However, at least some Israeli governments have been open to a variety of proposals, as long as the models proposed did not contradict certain 'red lines'. Basically these red lines have to do with Israel's perceived necessary minimum to defend itself. Over the years some other more ideological principles were added to the list - in particular the inviolability of unilateral Israeli control over Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> The more a certain demand became anchored in popular imagination as vital, the more it also became part of the "national consensus" which politicians could only transgress at their political risk. However, there were always some Israeli politicians who did not fear to do so. Historically, the Far Left played this role of speaking the unspeakable in Israeli political discourse. Furthermore, certain ideas of the Far Left gained legitimacy when senior members of Israel's political-military elite publicly adopted them – in fact, so senior that they could take the risk. This happened when Dayan accepted (and forced upon Begin) Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in return for peace with Egypt, and when Rabin and Peres accepted to deal with the PLO. By the force of their personal prestige and aura of security experience, these leaders swayed Israeli public opinion, which traditionally tends to follow the elected leadership. Barak's Jerusalem proposal is of the same caliber.

How does this compare with the Palestinian 'crossings of the Rubicon'? It cannot be denied that the PLO made underwent a deep ideological evolution from its original model of the multiconfessional secular state to the two states solution. Palestinian acceptance of the loss of three quarters of historic Palestine is what made possible the Oslo Accord, and represents a major Palestinian concession. So it is understandable that Palestinians have



been loath to endorse further concessions on top of the one they already made. However, this concession was also born out of Palestinian weakness and lack of realistic alternatives. The Oslo accords prescribed negotiation on a set of permanent status issues: borders, settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem. It did not set out their outcome in advance. Built in the very framework of 'Oslo' was, therefore, already the need for further bilateral concessions – from both sides. Here is, however, where Israelis and Palestinians differed. Israelis saw the accords as a framework for further negotiation on the basis of mutual give-and-take. Palestinians considered they had already made all the compromises by accepting Israel within its pre-1967 borders, and saw the accord solely as a framework for gradual return to the pre-June 4, 1967 situation. This conceptual difference led to incessant misunderstandings at the negotiating table, and precluded the Palestinians from developing effective counterproposals.

Together with Israeli partners, Palestinian politicians and intellectuals participated in a variety of preparatory 'games': discussion groups, problem-solving and pre-negotiation workshops etc., to brainstorm in a secure, noncommittal and/or deniable environment possible outcomes and bargaining 'packages'. Participants used these to develop a whole gamut of policy options.<sup>11</sup> These encounters constituted an additional avenue that made the Palestinians fully aware that any final status outcome of the negotiations could only be based on a compromise, probably in the form of traded-off packages.

I have personally participated in several of such academic encounters as well as in other dialogues. The dialogues, which really continued in another format earlier meetings that had been instrumental in bringing about the peace process in the first place, were a learning process for both sides, and both sides made obviously mistakes.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of my observations, I would question if Palestinian participants in general made as good a use of these opportunities as did the Israelis, to develop more flexible models of thinking and learn about their adversary, and in particular about the constraints under which they operate. Quite often Palestinian participants felt compelled to keep a 'common front' vis-à-vis their Israeli colleagues, and this lowest common denominator was often the most extremist stance. This was not always the case, but it was the rule.<sup>13</sup> However, on occasion, Palestinian participants evinced (just like their Israeli counterparts) far more flexibility in these 'games' than their leadership later did at the real negotiating table. Palestinian participants knew (and transmitted upward to the leadership) that a more or less far-reaching Israeli proposal was possibly in the cards, even about Jerusalem. They could never have expected that Israel would relinquish *all* of East Jerusalem including the Jewish Quarter and the Wall.

The links between Palestinian academics who participated in this informal 'pre-negotiation' with their leadership were probably more direct than those of their Israeli counterparts. On the other hand, the similar interplay between political leadership and civil society which characterizes modern pluralistic democracies such as Israel, is as yet largely absent from Palestinian political life. Without free media, and in the absence of free public debate and widespread acceptance and institutionalization of democratic nonviolent collective will formation, Palestinian politicians have a far more reduced latitude to deviate from the consensus, and may even risk their life if do so. As a result, shifts and deviations from the

Palestinians' "red lines" and a national consensus have been enforced rather than accepted. The best example is the weak legitimacy of Arafat's regime itself, which has suffered on account of its 'capitulations' no less than on that of its corruption, authoritarianism or inefficiency. In the end, the weakness of Palestinian civil society, which the Arafat regime itself kept subdued, took its toll. In spite of all the 'foreplay' between Westernized Palestinian intellectuals and Israelis, Arafat had in the end to take into account the inflexibility of his popular opinion, which he had himself mightily fostered – for short-term political advantage. We may surmise that far less 'modeling' and preparation for various negotiation outcomes took place among Arafat and his advisers than among the Israelis. This may in turn have led Arafat in the "endgame" to not have been sufficiently prepared mentally to either accept Israeli final proposals or to confront them with credible counteroffers. Throughout the Camp David summit, Palestinians demonstrated against concessions by their leadership. Already under pressure from the street, he may have panicked and seen no other honorable outcome but to fall back on complete rejection.

### **Consequence: The new intifada – semi-spontaneous?**

The failure of Camp David weakened the international position of the Palestinians, who were seen as the more inflexible party. Internally, it only further frustrated the Palestinians and made the domestic Israeli situation more volatile. In this conjuncture, a relatively minor provocation such as Sharon's visit to the Haram al-Sharif could have dramatic results – probably undreamt of by its author.... Just as the beginning of the original intifada in November 1987, the subsequent outburst of riots was probably spontaneous, but was at once seized upon by Arafat and his lieutenants. The Palestinian leadership doubtlessly realized its potential to turn an unfavorable international constellation upside down. Arafat grasped that by unleashing Palestinian popular anger against Israel he could (a) avert criticism against himself, and how the Palestinian leadership had handled the Camp David negotiations, and (b) by provoking Palestinian casualties, cast Israel back in the role of aggressor and restore/reinforce the Palestinian image (both its self-image and international image) as victim.<sup>14</sup>

Since the beginning of the new revolt, there has been ongoing speculation as to how far Arafat "controls" a situation that has escalated from week to week. Israeli observers (Barak himself, and in particular army commanders and security services) have repeated that the violence could end on a nod of Arafat.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Israel has predicated its response wholly on this presumption – threatening Arafat with sanctions if riots did not end, negotiating with him and his security chiefs on how to end it, etc. On the other hand, the Palestinians have systematically presented the protests as spontaneous and uncontrolled (and basically nonviolent) protests by a population whom Arafat cannot simply keep in check by 'remote control'. Outside observers and journalists tend by and large to the latter interpretation. In support of the Palestinian view is the fact that funerals of victims, which then turn into points of departure for new protests, seem to respond to an overwhelming popular anger; and the fact that Hamas calls for "days of rage" appear to influence the situation more than Arafat's calls.

In favor of the Israeli point of view is the ambiguous (to say the least) role of Palestinian security forces who instead of reining in the masses are either 'overruled' by it or actively

fight alongside it (on occasion shooting live fire at Israeli soldiers and settlers); the weak and ambiguous appeals to calm that have been issued by the Palestinian authorities; and the fact that on some days, demonstrations seem to diminish simultaneously all over the West Bank and Gaza.

The reality is probably more complex. Local Fatah commanders such as Marwan Barghouti, who overnight gained a certain international profile, seem to have a certain independence from Arafat leadership. Arafat is clearly dependent on them, and cannot risk alienating a seething population without risk of losing control to the Islamist opposition. A more sophisticated view has been aired by Shlomo Ben-Ami, who describes Arafat as “riding a tiger” that he barely controls. This describes a more open-ended situation, one in which Arafat and his leadership group have a certain *interest* in not having full control over the situation. In view of what is known of the criticism leveled at Arafat before Camp David, his full control would actually not be very likely. He seems to be in the driver’s seat of a car careening down a steep and dangerous slope, still in charge of the steering wheel, but with its brakes broken.

Precisely because the leadership appears to exert only limited control of this popular revolt, we have to develop scenarios that deal with all eventualities – from Arafat regaining control and reining in the revolt to him losing any power over it to more radical elements.

#### **Four scenarios**

In the wake of the breakdown of the peace process, there are basically four possible paths that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can follow in the near future:

- 1) A return to peace talks according to Oslo formula
- 2) A return to the pre-Oslo situation of “no war no peace” with continuing low-level conflict (i.e. a new intifada)
- 3) An escalation of violence short of war, leading to internationalization of conflict
- 4) An escalation of violence leading to international war involving Arab countries

A fifth possibility, that of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on the basis of a formula other than the Oslo Accords - one presumably more favorable to the Palestinians – does not seem possible at this juncture, as will be explained below.

#### **ad 1. return to peace talks according to Oslo formula.**

Media reporters have been systematically impressing us with the certainty that “the peace process is dead”. Indeed, the current wave of hostilities appears *prima facie* to make it impossible for the parties to return to the status quo ante. Yet, although highly unlikely at this point, this outcome – the one preferred by the Israeli Left – is not totally impossible. While the Palestinian and Israeli ‘street’ appear at this point implacably hostile towards each other, more or less sudden reversals in Palestinian *and* Israeli public moods have not been unknown in the past.<sup>16</sup> Under which circumstances could a return to the negotiating table be expected? Either a national emergency government with the Israeli Right, or failure to form one and new elections, may force Barak to increase Israeli violence against the

Palestinians, which may in turn provoke more rage and counterviolence. Moreover, Palestinian attempts at terrorist attacks against Israeli civilian objectives are nearly a foregone conclusion. Thus more rather than less violence seems probable. However, the following possibilities are not precluded:

(1) there is still a dim possibility that – in the weeks of grace still left to Barak – the Israeli Left (including the Left wing of the Labor Party) may prevail on Barak to unilaterally diminish Israeli army violence.

(2) Slightly less improbable, a massive outburst of illegal settler violence against Palestinians could occur, and if it does, may elicit an Israeli reaction of revulsion. This might then lead to Israel reining them in and protecting Palestinian civilians, and may even cause significant ripples in Israeli public opinion – along the lines of Israeli public mobilization against the Begin-Sharon government in 1982, after the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Such a scenario might conceivably alter the current political dynamics, which are now only pointing in the direction of anti-Arab sentiment gaining momentum among Israel's Jewish majority. It should be remembered that since the onset of peace talks in 1993, substantial and continuous majorities among both Israelis and Palestinians have remained in favor of a solution based on a negotiated territorial compromise. The problem is that Israeli opinion popular and pundits alike view the Palestinian side as responsible for the current deterioration. A case of clear-cut Israeli responsibility for violence against civilians has the potential to bring about a switch in this perception.

(3) Palestinian violence may gradually peter out, as a result of exhaustion – due to either a limitation of Israeli violence or (less likely) Israeli overkill. As the closure continues it will take its toll on Palestinian livelihoods and this may also force it to wind down.

(4) Over the years a rather dense if not very efficient web of Israeli-Palestinian dialog contacts have been established; although these are now in a state of shock, these can also be instrumental in helping the parties return to the table.<sup>17</sup>

(5) Lastly, it is not excluded that both sides will agree *in extremis* to renew their security cooperation and for selfish reasons allow this to expand into more substantive negotiation. In Sharm al-Shaikh, both sides have in fact officially committed to restart negotiations. Arafat may feel that he has now made his point, and reach the conclusion that, as the expected advantages of continued rioting fail to materialize, further escalation may endanger his own rule (this could happen e.g. if militant grassroots cadres of Fatah such as Marwan Barghouti start to organize themselves as a credible alternative to Arafat's own ascendancy). I.e. both Barak and Arafat may somewhere along the road come to the insight that they have more to gain than to lose by reopening negotiations. While both leaders would by now face very substantial domestic obstacles, overcoming them is not unthinkable.

Each of the above constellations could bring about a renewal of peace talks. However, even if a renewal of peace talks succeeds, Barak will not easily get a second chance (even if he still wanted) to propose to Arafat what the latter refused in August. And Arafat may have even less leeway than he had in Camp David to accept what he could not stomach then. Still, once peace negotiations are resumed, they are quite likely to “fatally” revert to the Oslo ‘bedrock’. In spite of deep misgivings on both sides, it is hard to see on which other set of principles they could agree... unless there were some drastic shift in the power balance.

## **Ad 2. Return to the pre-Oslo situation of no war no peace (*intifada*)**

A continuation or increase in mutual violence, without serious negotiations and without massive efficacious Arab or international interference either, seems at this point the most likely outcome. Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy such as it existed until a month ago, is now for all practical purposes dead. Mutual hatred and anger has accumulated on both sides and is continuously fueled anew by fresh victimization. Both sides live close enough to each other for Palestinian protesters, Israeli settlers and sundry vigilantes and terrorists to inflict substantial harm, yet neither is strong enough to decisively knock out the other – except in case of massively escalated Israeli military violence. If things get really scary, Israel's vastly superior firepower could easily defeat the Palestinians who have no army at all. The political price, however, might be higher than Israel is ready to pay. This is a political decision that can only be taken at the highest level, by Barak or his successor, and they will only do so if no other option is available.

The current strategic situation seems not to favor Israel, but does not dramatically endanger it either. It forces Israel to keep to a mainly reactive posture – so long as it wants to avoid further damaging international censure (which is not to say its reaction cannot be forceful). The Palestinians can try to gain points and additional territory, by forcefully breaking Israeli blockades and closures. Conversely, Israeli troops can try to establish more permanent corridors to outlying settlement outposts. Such territorial consolidation is already happening but will only marginally affect the overall situation. Basically, Israeli security forces are digging in for a prolonged period of violence, which will perhaps be tempered by occasional lulls in fighting during hypothetical new negotiations.

However, in this confrontation, Israel has – short of the massive violence option – a number of cards in its hands that it has not yet used. Thus it could significantly hinder Palestinian mobilization by cutting off Palestinian centers from one another, arresting the main protest leaders, etc. More practical is the option, now under consideration, of “unilateral separation”. This ‘physical separation’ scenario exists already for some time as an idea. It became increasingly popular among the Israeli public after the wave of suicide bomb attacks in 1994-96. Enforced *apartheid* even became the official Labor Party stance as against the Likud, who was accused of fostering a permanent dangerous mixture of populations by its policy of colonization of “Greater Israel”. Plans have at various times included: electronic fences between Israel and the Palestinian territories; a concrete wall; prohibiting entry of Palestinian laborers and replacing them with more docile Thais, Turks and Rumanians on short term contracts; a tunnel or an isolated railway or elevated highway to connect the West Bank and Gaza Strip; etc. In fact, this preference speaks less of active anti-Arabism than of a naïve Israeli-style isolationism. Israel was created as a safe haven for persecuted Jews, and it continues to cherish dreams of being on a separate planet where it can live unencumbered by anti-Semites and other enemies. Unfortunately, Zionism chose to realize this utopia in the midst of a global and regional economic, religious, and ethnic crossroads where the chances to attain this paradise are about as good as building a quiet and tropical palm beach cottage in the midst of a São Paulo traffic jam.

While unrealistic in its extreme variant, a *relative* Jewish-Arab physical disengagement is quite implementable, and could be Barak's best bet if a return to negotiations fails. The specter of "unilateral separation" now brandished by him is a variant of 'no war no peace', but one in which Israel will be better protected against Palestinian violence, but Palestinians would pay a high price, albeit in a rather undramatic way. Unilateral separation could turn the current undeclared civil war of attrition to Israel's advantage if daily clashes with moderate, not excessive, force and loss of life become so routine as to lose news value – a process already underway –, and the attention of world opinion gets tired. Over US objections (the only opposition that would count), Israel would perpetuate the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and gradually introduce more physical and military obstacles to Palestinian mobility. This would effectively imprison Palestinians within their own zones. Save for more of the same (i.e. violent protests at checkpoints), this would effectively reduce Palestinian protests to impotent strikes against themselves, plus the occasional terrorist outrage. The latter would raise Palestinian morale but hardly endear them to outsiders.<sup>18</sup>

In whatever form, a "no war no peace" scenario is doubtlessly the outcome the Israeli Right would prefer. It might go hand in hand with a limited reoccupation of some strategic positions earlier transferred to Palestinian authority. Partial annexations (e.g. in reaction to a Palestinian declaration of independence) would do little to change the military status quo, although they may have some limited political significance.

Less probable is an Israeli outright reconquest of areas "A" including Palestinian towns. Even Sharon would presumably be loath to do so outside the framework of all-out war. Israeli tanks in Nablus and Gaza would have few military advantages for Israel, and plenty of international disadvantages. Incidentally, Israeli-enforced unilateral separation from the Palestinians would make it possible for Israel to continue its colonization of Palestinian territories, and in this sense to keep changing the demographic balance against the Palestinians in those territories it wants to eventually absorb in the Jewish State. If Likud returns to power, they may make mass settlement of (by then perhaps pacified) areas into a priority, in order to preclude them from ever being offered back to the Palestinians again.

### **Ad 3. Escalation of violence short of war leading to internationalization of conflict.**

If the conflict spirals so far out of control as to arouse foreign intervention, the balance of power, which currently still favors Israel, could drastically change. Such intervention need not be military but can be diplomatic and/or economic, although a UN intervention or peacekeeping mission to force Israel to obey UN resolutions demanding full withdrawal from the occupied territories, and protecting the Palestinians from Israel, would doubtlessly be the preferred crisis outcome for the Palestinian mainstream. As the weaker party, Palestinian official statements have for years now been clamoring for stricter adherence to international law and for a more active role of the international community. In fact, what the Palestinian leadership seems to try and engineer is precisely such an increased international involvement, leading to full Israeli withdrawal on the basis of UN resolutions rather than on Israeli unilateral decisions.<sup>19</sup> In the UN General Assembly, the Palestinians

have long had the advantage over Israel, enjoying the support of nearly all Arab and Islamic and of most other Third World countries. In the Security Council, however, US solidarity with Israel poses a more substantial obstacle, to any form of effective sanction imposed on Israel – let alone to military action.

This scenario seems neither likely nor absolutely impossible. A “reshuffling of the cards” that would weaken Israel and enable the establishment of a Palestinian state on conditions acceptable to the latter (i.e. including dismantling all settlements and giving up the entirety of East Jerusalem) is unlikely without sanctions and/or (the threat of) war against Israel. This could only happen through a further, radical *Verelendung* (provoked worsening) of the current situation.

However, many among the Palestinian elite must be aware that even a limited popular war against Israel is an extremely risky proposition that could well lead to a new catastrophe for the Palestinians themselves. It is extremely unlikely that Israel, under whatever government, will countenance *any* armed foreign intervention. Since the international community is also aware of this and is in general averse to military risks, this scenario is unlikely – not to speak of the fact that the US will veto any such action. However, less drastic measures by which the international community shows it “means business” are not impossible, and may have a certain effect. This could take the form of a UN inquiry, further international isolation, and/or international economic and other sanctions. Israel is extremely dependent on external trade, and even more so on Europe, which generally leans towards the Palestinian side, than on the USA. Half the Israeli population is already very ‘globalized’, and would not take easily to travel restrictions, a trade embargo, fuel and food shortages, and a generalized exclusion from international life. A further radicalization of the struggle on the ground, leading to more forceful outside action, is therefore not necessarily ‘hopeless’ (from the Palestinian viewpoint).

From the Palestinian perspective, the best chance to steer the conflict into a situation calling for effective international intervention would be a particularly lethal battle, an especially bloody retaliation, or a massive atrocity committed by Israeli extremists, getting extensive media coverage and eliciting a wave of international sympathy for the victims. It is not very probable that the Israeli army will lend itself to this, but Arafat knows that he can count on the more fanatical settlers. His trouble is, Israel also knows this. Thus the most extremist colonists are now Arafat’s best friends and Israel’s worst enemies; and Barak’s most critical task in the coming weeks will be to have the army keep them effectively in check.

This will not be an easy task.<sup>20</sup> On its outcome will probably depend – in the absence of other successful diplomatic initiatives or some international surprise – if Arafat will succeed in getting his international intervention, or if Barak will succeed in imposing unilateral separation on the Palestinians. As is usual in these struggles, the time factor is of the essence here. Every day of escalation increases the risk/chance for a massacre that, by calling forth an international intervention, may decisively alter the balance in favor of the Palestinians. Yet if Israel can hold back long enough, the Palestinians will lose. They have already thoroughly alienated the Israelis, their supposed peace partners. Now they can lose even more by boring the world. And if they commit atrocities themselves, it is Israel who

will gain media points. Once mutual isolation has become a fact, the chance for more protests and headline-grabbing bloodletting will decrease.

In the improbable event that the Palestinians succeed in bringing about international intervention on their behalf, and this intervention indeed brings about a Palestinian state, this would outcome not necessarily preclude Israeli-Palestinian peace and coexistence, later. The Palestinians' official objective as well as that proposed by most Palestinian intellectuals (and by most Arab countries) is still to attain peace and coexistence. There is as yet no indication of a reversal to earlier and more radical stances.<sup>21</sup> However, this new situation would presumably be based on a completely new Israeli-Palestinian relationship – one based much more on equality than the current one. This implies a structural weakening of Israel's position.

#### **Ad 4. Further escalation of violence leading to war**

International war is at this point the least probable outcome. However, it is not an impossible one. A revolutionary situation forcing Arab/Muslim countries into a war against Israel is without doubt the preferred outcome of the Palestinian religious Right; from their own perspective, it would probably also be welcomed by the Israeli Far Right 'lunatic fringe'. For most Arab rulers, however, war is not a desirable option at all. In spite of verbal support for Palestinian 'brethren', privately most view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more than anything else as a bother that stands in the way of their own projects of nationbuilding and economic development in a globalizing world. Moreover, Israel is presently still stronger than any Arab war coalition. Interstate war therefore means either coercing present rulers – Egypt and Syria foremost among them – into a course of action they reject for obvious reasons, or bringing them down and replacing the leadership with a more bellicose one. This, however, is a tall order. Palestine retains the power to galvanize the Arab masses. Thousands of Egyptian students have demanded to unleash Arab armies against Israel. Radical states such as Iraq and Yemen (supported by Hizbullah) have called for a holy war against Israel. Iran criticized the recent Arab League for its wimpiness, and reiterated its call for eradication of Israel. However, while emotional identification with the Palestinians gives a propagandistic weapon in the hands of revolutionaries, they will be hard put to translate this into a concrete program. Even though Arab popular mood seems to point to a wish for a fiercer confrontation, neither option appears therefore likely in the near future. Of the possible 'confrontation states', Egypt has been living close to twenty years in a state of 'cold' but stable peace with Israel. Its regime, while disliked, has largely suppressed the Islamist tide, at least for the time being, is heavily supported and armed by the US, and can probably survive for a long time as long as there is no immediate economic crisis. Syria's regime has an even narrower social base, but both the opposition and population at large are divided along sectarian lines; the Ba'ath-'Alawi regime has maintained stability along the Golan front, and is now engaged in a search for peace as a precondition for modernization. The Lebanese border remains unpacified but does not have the potential by itself to draw the wider Arab world into a military confrontation, as long as Israel withstands the temptation of a renewed large scale invasion. This leaves Jordan as the weakest link in the chain. Formally at peace with Israel, its Palestinian majority has become progressively disenchanted with the Hashemite regime's stance. Political unrest coupled with massive economic misery could potentially destabilize the country, as became



manifest in the recent “march of return” of Palestinian refugees in Jordan. All this is, however, highly hypothetical. From a revolution in Jordan to an Arab war against Israel is still a long way, though. Nor is it likely that Israel will passively await events. There exists doubtlessly a revolutionary potential, and most Middle East regimes have only a weak legitimacy base, yet so far, discontent has been rather disorganized and dispersed.

An additional reason why war is more conceivable today than ten or even five years ago, lies in the decline of Israel’s deterrent profile. It is not just that Arab rejectionists’ attacks, such as Hizbullah’s in South Lebanon, have become more daring and efficient. It is also that Israel’s military and strategic edge is gradually dwindling, its army less efficient and gripped by low morale. Israel has become a thoroughly civilian-ruled and predictable (waning) power. As long as it behaved as the bully of the neighborhood (backed by the West), in other words, when it played itself a little bit the terrorist, it impressed its enemies. Now it is the other way around. Civilian pressure due to soldiers’ casualties forced Israel out of Lebanon without any guarantees or agreement – in the vain hope that this would stop attacks to its northern settlements. When Shi’ite militia recently kidnapped three Israeli soldiers, most Israelis polled preferred their country to treat Hizbullah with kid gloves so as safeguard the lives of the soldiers rather than to react forcefully.<sup>22</sup> That will stimulate Hizbullah, and perhaps Palestinians resistance groups as well, to take prisoners with the aim of extorting advantages.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, although the likelihood of war is low at this point, once it erupts, it may lead to a range of unpredictable outcomes: limited or complete Israeli retaking of Palestinian territories; collapse of the Arafat regime and of Palestinian local authority (this would probably lead to a renewal of guerilla and terrorism, against Israel from outside the country); regional destabilization; an international financial and economic crisis; US or UN armed intervention; Arab/Islamic use of chemical or biological weapons; a decisive defeat by Israel; Israeli use of nuclear arms; ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian territories, with subsequent destabilization of Jordan and/or other Arab states. The more apocalyptic the vision, the less probable its occurrence. The most unlikely outcome of a war is, however, that it would inaugurate any stable Israeli-Palestinian peace!

There is one more possible outcome of the current crisis: peace talks according to a new formula that will supersede the Oslo Accords. This is the option the Palestinian Left prefers, and it has i.a. been proposed in by a manifesto signed by Palestinian intellectuals in the territories.<sup>24</sup> The idea behind it is that the Oslo framework is too heavily tilted in Israel’s favor to be acceptable for Palestinians: while peace remains the aim, it should be based on a stricter application of UN resolutions 242 and 338, full withdrawal from all 1967 territories, including all settlements and all of East Jerusalem. There is a certain logic in this Palestinian position, but the problem is how to translate it into reality. Since convincing Israel of the justice of this position proved already unsuccessful before the al-Aqsa intifada, and will have even less chance now, the only way would thus be to force Israel against its will to accept it. But this would only become possible if Israel is seriously weakened. Practically speaking, then, it would therefore be possible in the aftermath of either a war or massive international pressure on Israel. Willy-nilly, this places the proponents of this option in the camp of those striving to bring about a war against Israel.

## Conclusion

As the result of longer term popular Palestinian discontents with the Oslo peace process, Arafat went to Camp David with a narrowly circumscribed room for maneuver. It was probably due to his own incessant propagandistic hammering on the Jerusalem issue that he felt compelled to finish off negotiations over this issue – in spite of Israeli proposals that in other circumstances might have provided a mutually acceptable way out. The failure of the permanent status negotiations and the prospect of perpetuation of a status quo viewed as intolerable, provided the fuel for a violent popular explosion which has since fed on itself, and is partly controlled by the Palestinian leadership, at best. This confrontation has in turn, in a record time, burned nearly all bridges between Israelis and Palestinians.

From here, the conflict can evolve in four different ways. For Israel, renewing talks on the basis of Oslo would be most advantageous; a second best choice would be to close off Palestinian territories and devolve the humanitarian costs on the international community. In either case, the process of Jewish settlement of the West Bank will continue. For the Palestinian leadership, the optimal outcome would be to provoke international intervention that would put Israel under irresistible pressure. Continued intifada, including its militaristic symbolism designed to anger and frighten Israelis - axes and guns, masks, burning flags, anti-Semitic slogans... – may temporarily lift Palestinian spirits. More so since these go together with increasing national unity, intense international attention to their plight, and at least verbal Arab solidarity. This constellation is, however, precarious and may soon dissipate. As a second best, a return to negotiation would probably be preferable to Arafat over an exhausting revolt devoid of perspective, which will eventually burn out. Indeed, if the scenario of no war and no peace with increasing physical separation materializes, it may leave the Palestinians without many tangible advantages over where they stood a month ago. However, with Israel still the strongest party, and a Palestinian exit back to Oslo perhaps blocked off because of the implied humiliation, this may well be the most probable midterm result.

As for international war, while not totally excluded, it would for any Israeli as well as for the current Palestinian leadership be most dangerous, and is therefore least probable outcome – more so since it is conditional upon a revolutionary transformation of at least part of the Arab world, which is nowhere in sight.

While low-intensity Palestinian revolt will hardly affect Israel's pose, the resulting superficial calm will not restore Israel's strength either.. I argued earlier that in the long run Israel will not be able to survive as a Jewish state.<sup>25</sup> Either it will keep its confrontational identity, and will go under in a confrontation with a massively more numerous enemy, once the Arabs/Muslim world overcome their technological gap (obviously also depending on the overall development of international affairs). Or it will internally modify its stance, and change into a 'normal' state with a Jewish majority and Jewish collective symbolism, but without the skewed citizenship structure discriminating in favor of one population which now characterizes it. This would be the better outcome, for everybody involved, but it presupposes a subtle interaction between the peace process and domestic ideological contenders within Israel. Paradoxically, post-Zionism may be the only way to salvage at least the minimal moral core of Zionism: security of the Jewish people, and the possibility

to develop its culture in a setting of territorial concentration. Not necessarily or preferably an exclusivistic setting, though! A period of calm would permit gradual and mutual accommodation between the Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, this now seems further away than ever.

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<sup>1</sup> The uprising is called intifada after an earlier Palestinian revolt in 1987-1993, and al-‘Aqsa after the Mosque on Haram al-Sharif, indicating the centrality of Jerusalem in Palestinian demands.

<sup>2</sup> The most thorough Palestinian analysis of the Oslo Accords remains EDWARD SAID, *Peace and its discontents*. 1995. The Oslo Accord was in some important instances unfavorable to Israel, and this made it vulnerable to trenchant criticism from the Israeli Right. Israel agreed to territorial withdrawals and to arming Palestinian security forces in exchange for little more than verbal reassurances.

<sup>3</sup> On Arab fears on Israeli economic neocolonialism as a ‘next stage after Israeli military expansionism’, cf. CHK

<sup>4</sup> A returning recipe: extremists put themselves in harm’s way, thus manipulating interventions on their behalf that endanger the peace process. If on top of that the outcome puts international blame on Israel and/or engenders anti-Semitic outbursts, “so much the better”: first of all, this confirms their worldview that “the whole world is against us”, and tends to undermine leftist-universalistic assumptions of peaceful coexistence between Jews and non-Jews (with the ‘risk’ of assimilation). Secondly, Jews in danger abroad may ultimately have no choice but to immigrate to Israel, thus adding to the “Ingathering of the Exiles” and the strengthening of the Jewish state. On the ideology of the settlers, cf. IAN LUSTICK, *For the lord* CHK.

<sup>5</sup> *Haaretz* 22 September 2000, DANIEL SOBELMAN on Nawaf Massalha’s leakage of Barak’s offer, as well as other reports around same time; the political report read by the PLO Executive Committee Secretary Mahmoud Abbas before the Palestinian Central Council meeting on September 9, 2000, as reported in Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre final status update reflects a less far-reaching Israeli proposal which still goes much further than the Palestinian one. It seems beyond doubt that Barak’s position at Camp David involved a high-risk gambit. By offering the Palestinians a partition of Jerusalem, he broke a long-standing Israeli political taboo, to the rage and dismay not only of the Right but a good number of his own Laborites as well. He doubtlessly speculated that a peace deal with the Palestinians on the basis of his proposed “historical compromise” would lead to new elections, and that he could win those. This we may never know. During the Camp David talks, Israeli willingness to compromise over Jerusalem rose during the talks to ca. 40 %, much higher than before: *Haaretz* CHK. The Israeli electorate has traditionally followed and endorsed the initiatives of Israel’s political leaders. After he lost his bet, however, Barak is now viewed as someone who showed Israel’s hand and was prepared to give ‘away’ sacred core territory. *Maariv* 20 October 2000, reported a poll showing Binyamin Netanyahu winning against Barak by a 21 % margin: 48 against 27%.

<sup>6</sup> The word *jihad* is an Islamic religious term implying both ‘making efforts to spread the faith’ and ‘holy war to extend the realm of Islam’. Cf. RUDOLPH PETERS, CHK

<sup>7</sup> Amalgamating secular political and religious concepts by the Palestinian National Authority is not unlike the practice of Mafdal and (sometime) Likud in Israel; however, there is no equivalent on the Palestinian side of the Labor party or Israeli secular peace camp (with the exception of the minuscule Fida and defunct People’s Party – a reflection of the fact that Palestinian society is largely non-secular.

<sup>8</sup> Just at the beginning of the current al-Aqsa Intifada, Arafat declared that war against Israel was an option that he did not exclude. *Haaretz* CHK.

<sup>9</sup> According to periodical CPRS polls, support garnered consistently some 60% throughout most of its phases in 1993-2000. CHK.

<sup>10</sup> Chaim Weizmann still refused to include Jerusalem in the Zionist map in the 1920s; Israeli governments 1949-1967 would have agreed to sign a peace with its Arab neighbors on the basis of the 1949 armistices leaving the entire Old City in Jordanian hands; and Moshe Dayan objected to conquering it in 1967. However, after 1967, the city was forcibly ‘reunited’ and annexed to Israel, and massive Jewish colonization of East Jerusalem took off. And only after 1967 was the Jerusalem myth gradually stoked up as a central identity element of the Israeli psyche, until it has become effectively internalized as an indispensable ingredient of Israeli collective identity. Over the past years, the Jerusalem taboo has been very efficiently manipulated by the Right against the Israeli peace camp, and successfully erased discussion of the future of Jerusalem from legitimate public debate. *source*.

<sup>11</sup> These exercises were generally funded and often facilitated by well-meaning outsiders such as the European Union, the United States Institute of Peace, Harvard University, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. my “Unofficial contacts and peacemaking: Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, 1967-1993”. in: Frederick A. Lazin and Gregory S. Mahler (Eds.), *Israel in the Nineties: Development and Conflict*. Gainesville, etc.: University Press of Florida, 1996. pp. 73-104.

<sup>13</sup> Exceptions included Rashid Khalidi's call for a limited return of 1948 refugees in exchange for an Israeli acceptance of the Right of Return: CHK. It may have influenced Camp David negotiating.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. warnings by Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat that Israel is preparing a "genocide". Source TV... His utterings seem to reflect an ancient mode of thinking that is far easier than grappling with real-life policy dilemmas that demand painful compromises and generating consent around them. The mechanism is, however, true of both sides: collective self-identification of each side revolves around a mythology of victimization and redemption.

<sup>15</sup> The Israeli point is made by AMOS HAREL in *Haaretz* 3 October 2000. For an early divergent Israeli view, cf. DANNY RUBINSTEIN, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> There are precedents of Israeli-Palestinian relations 'coming back from death', e.g. after Palestinian mass identification with Saddam Hussein during the Gulf Crisis and War 1990/91. Palestinian applause for Iraqi missiles landing on Israeli roofs was followed, a few months later, by the Madrid Conference, a breakthrough where Israeli and Palestinian negotiators shook hands for the first time; the Gulf episode has since been conveniently shrouded in amnesia.

<sup>17</sup> cf web CHK. A group of prominent Palestinian academics and activists published an appeal to the Israeli public, asking for a genuine peace agreement on the basis of full Palestinian sovereignty over all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. Disseminated through AMESP - The Alliance of Middle Eastern Scientists and Physicians. However, cf. DANNY RUBINSTEIN in *Haaretz* 25 October 2000 for a more pessimistic assessment of Palestinian peace activists suspending joint activities with Israeli partners. Hanan Asfour, Palestinian negotiator of the original Oslo Accords, called for Palestinian NGOs to cut ties with Israeli counterparts such as the Peres Center for Peace: Jerusalem Post 24 October 2000. Black lists circulate of Palestinian NGOs still working with Israelis.

<sup>18</sup> ALUF BENN, *Haaretz* 23 October 2000 outlines Barak's and Sharon's various plans for isolating the Palestinians, and the implications for Israeli settlement policy.

<sup>19</sup> AMOS HAREL in *Haaretz* 20 October 2000. Interview of AMIRA HASS with JIBRIL RAJOUB, head of Palestinian security forces in the West Bank, *Haaretz* 24 October 2000.

<sup>20</sup> On infiltration by extremist settlers of Israel's military command structure in Samaria (North West Bank) and collusion of army middle rank with them, cf. articles by AMOS HAREL and AMIRA HASS in *Haaretz* 20 October 2000.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Yasser Abd Rabbo lauded the Arab League resolution supporting the 'peaceful' intifada against Israel; Palestinian spokesmen have dissociated themselves from Palestinians using firearms against Israel; etc. *Haaretz*.

<sup>22</sup> Israel's popular aversion to risk-taking is not the result of any presumed higher value that Jewish religion puts on human life than Islam, as is sometimes suggested, but is an outcome of postmodernization. It bespeaks of the same reluctance to endorse losses as has become the rule in the USA and Western European countries, making anti-dictator and peacekeeping interventions harder.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Palestinian security chief Tirawi wanted to exchange for Palestinian prisoners the two Israeli reservists in Ramallah who were later killed. *Haaretz* CHK.

<sup>24</sup> This idea is also supported by EDWARD SAID. *Folha de São Paulo* CHK.

<sup>25</sup> PETER DEMANT, *Israeli and Palestinian identities: A brief history of ideologies, and some scenarios*. São Paulo, Forthcoming.