

The Arab Israeli Conflict: is there a Peace Process?

At the end of 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) accepted the US conditions for a dialogue; and the United States recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. As a consequence, President Reagan authorized the US ambassador in Tunisia to open a dialogue with representatives of the PLO, and a peace process was launched, causing expectations for a political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict to rise. However, no breakthroughs were made and the situation continued to deteriorate year after year. In 1991, following the conclusion of the first Gulf war, President George Bush senior and Secretary of State James Baker pressured all parties to the conflict to attend the Madrid Peace Conference which gave birth to several specialized committees to address the many conflicting issues. More than 20 years have passed since the opening of the US-PLO dialogue and no settlement has been concluded. In fact, the chances of making peace have worsened, not improved.

In 1993, the PLO and the Israeli government of Mr. Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords, which called for the PLO to recognize the right of Israel to exist, and for Israel to recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; the accords also called for the creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Gaza. Subsequent agreements led Israel to hand over some parts of the occupied territories in the West Bank to the PA. However, Israeli appropriation of Palestinian land and the erection of new Jewish colonies in the territories Israel occupied in 1967 have continued, making the possibility of reaching a solution less probable. In 2003, Mr. Sharon, who refused to recognize the Oslo Accords and accept the Road Map, ordered his troops to reoccupy the areas under the control of the PA, practically ending all hopes for peace. Several attempts were made thereafter to revive the dormant peace process; PA president Mahmoud Abbas and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert held several talks, but no agreements were concluded. When Binyamin Netanyahu became Israel's Prime Minister in 2009, he made the resumption of negotiations subject to new conditions that no Palestinian is able to accept. Thus the peace process came to an end and serious efforts to negotiate a political settlement were fatally wounded.

In light of these facts, we have the right to ask: Is there anything left of the old peace process that could be salvaged; and if there is it, then what should be done next?

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The first contact between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and certain elements of the Israeli political establishment occurred in 1974. Abu Iyad, the most radical PLO leader at the time met with Israelis in Romania, signaling PLO willingness to deal with Israel and seek a peaceful solution to the Arab Israeli conflict. Israeli Palestinian contacts were renewed few years later by Dr. Isam Sartawi, a PLO operative; he met with representatives of the Israeli government and the World Zionist Organization several times; most meetings took place in Vienna. Dr. Sartawi was encouraged by Bruno Kreisky, the Jewish chancellor of Austria who worked tirelessly to promote peace in the Middle East. Kreisky met with Yasser Arafat in 1974 and then invited the PLO chairman to Vienna in 1979; thus giving legitimacy to the PLO and the Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination. In 1983, Dr. Sartawi was assassinated. However, Israeli Palestinian contacts continued and expanded following the forced evacuation of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982; several Israeli Knesset members and prominent Jewish Americans made many trips to Tunis where they held talks with the PLO leadership. Meanwhile, dialogue groups seeking to narrow the gaps between Arabs and Jews mushroomed; several forums were established in Europe, the United States, Palestine/Israel, and elsewhere.

At the end of 1988, the PLO accepted the US conditions for a dialogue; and the United States recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Following that announcement, President Reagan authorized the US ambassador in Tunisia to open a dialogue with representatives of the PLO, and the peace process was launched, causing expectations and optimism on all sides to rise. However, no breakthroughs were made due to several reasons; most notable among them is US support of Israel and failure to act as an honest mediator. In 1991, following the conclusion of the Gulf war to liberate Kuwait, President George H. W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker pressured all parties to attend the Madrid Peace Conference; the conference gave birth to several working committees meant to address the major issues of the conflict but produced nothing. 22 years have passed since the opening of the US-PLO dialogue and almost 20 years since the Madrid Conference and no peace has been achieved. In fact, the chances for peace have worsened, not improved.

The Oslo Accords

The failure of the Madrid process to produce tangible results on the one hand and the intensification of the Palestinian Intifada which started in December 1987 on the other led the PLO and the Israeli government of Mr. Yitzhak Rabin to sign the Oslo Accords in 1993. The Accords called for the creation of a political process to facilitate mutual recognition and lead to peace. Whereas the PLO recognized "the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security," the Israeli prime minister said in his statement that he "has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process." Thus, the Accords gave Israel the legitimacy it sought while giving the Palestinian people nothing of substance in return. Nevertheless, the accords called for the creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Gaza but failed to recognize the Palestinian national rights or even call for freezing the Jewish settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. When I read the text of the Accords in the New York Times several days before it was signed in the White House on September 13, 1993, my first reaction was: "this agreement as is will only lead to creating a Palestinian administration to facilitate continued Israeli occupation."

Subsequent agreements led Israel to hand over some parts of the Palestinian occupied territories to the PA. However, Israeli appropriation of Palestinian land, the expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, the building of a separation wall that divides families and villages, and the intensification of discrimination against the Palestinian people did not stop. Efforts to insulate the Jewish colonialists from the natives of the land and make life intolerable for them in order to encourage them to leave have led to erecting hundreds of barriers to prevent Palestinians from moving freely within the West Bank, sometimes within their tiny villages. As a consequence, most Palestinians are unable to farm their land and go to work, while their children are forced to waste 5-10 times the time they used to spend to get to school. Today, Jewish settlers living on confiscated Palestinian land in the West Bank and Jerusalem exceed 500,000 and form an armed militia whose only objective is to intimidate Palestinians, confiscate their land and force them to leave their homeland. Professor James Ron of The Johns Hopkins University criticized the Israeli settlement policy warning that it might lead to civil war; he wrote, "If Israel is ever to

dismantle settlements, withdraw from East Jerusalem and relinquish its grip over Palestine, it must first undergo a traumatic internal upheaval.” The Israelis, “by adopting and diligently pursuing an expansionist, colonialist policy in the occupied Palestinian territories, have created a frightening ghost whose very existence drives the Israeli public toward more radicalism and polarization as it deepens its fear and sense of insecurity.” It is this very policy that serves today to revive and legitimize calls by Muslim and Arab radicals to continue the fight till the end.

The Oslo Accords produced neither a solid basis for negotiations nor a realistic outline for a mutually acceptable peace settlement. In fact, the process had failed to define its point of departure and, more importantly, its destination, causing negotiations to fail miserably; they produced nothing except Palestinian frustration and, at times, rage. Professor Shlomo Avineri of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem said on November 28, 2000, “The Oslo process was aimed at creating confidence-building measures. We now have less confidence than we had the first day after Oslo.” On August 10, 2001, he was quoted in the *Washington Post* saying; “We remain in a neocolonial relationship with the Palestinians, which forces us to do things that are incompatible with being a democracy. It coarsens Israeli life, making us all racists. Every time we see an Arab, we assume he’s a terrorist. And it is utterly demeaning for the Palestinians, who are lined up and searched like cattle every day.” In 2002, Mr. Sharon, who refused to recognize the Oslo Accords and accept the Road Map, ordered his troops to reoccupy the areas under the control of the PA, practically cancelling the Oslo Accords and ending all hopes for peace. Several attempts were made thereafter to revive the dormant peace process; PA president Mahmoud Abbas and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert held several talks and made some progress, but they failed to bridge the gaps that separate their respective positions and therefore no agreements were concluded.

Looking at life conditions in the occupied territories, the settlements activities, the separation wall which Palestinians call the apartheid wall, and the general mood of Palestinians and Israelis alike, we must conclude that 17 years of intensive negotiations under the Oslo process have made peace more remote than ever before. Considering the Oslo achievements, the accords accomplished what they were intentionally or unintentionally designed to accomplish; ending Palestinian quest for freedom, legitimizing Israel's racist nature, and creating a Palestinian administration to facilitate continued Israeli

occupation. The Palestinian security forces which the United States built in the West Bank is not employed today to protect the Palestinian people or to defend their land from Jewish settlers but to provide security for Israel and silence opposition to the Oslo process, while Israel continues to expand Jewish sovereignty over the rest of the West Bank. The peace process inaugurated by the Oslo Accords has transformed Palestinian hopes for independence from Israeli colonialism and apartheid to Palestinian dependence on Israel for their economic survival.

In 1993, when secretary of state James Baker pressured Yitzhak Shamir to attend the Madrid Peace Conference, The Israeli Prime Minister said that he will negotiate for ten years without signing a peace treaty. In light of what had happened since then, Shamir was very shortsighted; he underestimated the will and deviousness of his followers who managed to negotiate for 20 years without committing themselves to a settlement. Mr. Dov Weissglas, chef de cabinet to the then prime minister Ariel Sharon, described the strategic goal of Sharon's diplomacy in an interview in *Ha'aretz* in 2004 as being "to secure the support of the White House and Congress for Israeli measures that would place the peace process and Palestinian statehood in 'formaldehyde.'" He further said that "the purpose of Sharon's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was to gain US acceptance of Israel's unilateralism, not to set a precedent for an eventual withdrawal from the West Bank." Formaldehyde is a process that prevents the deterioration of dead bodies, and often creates the illusion that they are still alive. Yes, Israeli deception and manipulation have succeeded in appeasing successive US administrations and putting the peace process in a state of formaldehyde; yet they were unable to save Mr. Sharon from being placed in the same state.

Obama and Netanyahu

When Binyamin Netanyahu became Israel's Prime Minister in 2009, he made the resumption of negotiations subject to new conditions that violate relevant UN resolutions and the principles that facilitated the creation of the 'peace process' in the first place. Netanyahu called for negotiations without preconditions; yet he placed the most stringent conditions ever, prejudging the outcome of negotiations regarding all core issues of the conflict; the right of return for the Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, the borders

of the Israeli and Palestinian states, the fate of the Jewish colonies built in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and the Palestinian right to self-determination.

As for the refugees, Netanyahu said, "There must be a clear understanding that the Palestinian refugee problem will be resolved outside Israel's borders." Yet he failed to define such borders; Israel in fact is the only state in the world that has no self-defined or internationally-recognized borders. The Only borders that Israel could legitimately claim are those defined by the UN partition plan of 1947; General Assembly resolution 181 divided Palestine almost equally between Jews and Palestinian Arabs; however, Israel was able to increase its share by 50 percent as a result of the ethnic cleansing campaign it conducted in 1948. Regarding the Jerusalem issue, Netanyahu said, "Jerusalem must remain the united capital of Israel." And because he does not acknowledge that Israel is in the West Bank as an occupation power, he neither agreed to freeze settlement activities as demanded by President Obama and international law, nor recognized the right of the Palestinian people to self determination and statehood. In fact, the term 'Palestinian national rights' does not exist in Israel's lexicon; and never used by Zionists in America or Europe.

And to make the probable impossible, Netanyahu demanded that the Palestinian Authority recognizes Israel as the state of the Jewish people before negotiations could be resumed. Israeli claims that Palestinians must recognize Israel's right to exist not only in peace and security but also as the state of the Jewish "people." Such a demand makes Israel a super empire claiming to represent people who are citizens of other states and do not live within its borders; people who may not wish to be identified with its racist ideology. Israel want to make all Jews in the world regardless of their wish, nationality, place of residence and political beliefs subject to its jurisdiction and partners in its racist, colonialist enterprise.

The United States and several other European nations insist that only Palestinians and Israelis are able to negotiate a settlement; as a consequence, they keep trying to resurrect a dead peace process. While Palestinians and Israelis did work together before, history tells us that they have failed time and again to make peace on their own. Former French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine said on July 7, 2001 in Rome that "the outside world is becoming convinced that the Israelis and Palestinians are no longer capable of resolving their differences on their own. We cannot leave the Israelis and Palestinians alone in this atmosphere of growing hate and panicky fear." In fact, no Israeli or Palestinian leader has

had the courage to articulate a peace plan that has the remotest chance of being accepted by the other. And because of political fragmentation and ideological infighting within each camp, hopes that Israelis and Palestinians could somehow make peace on their own are unrealistic, if not illusionary.

Today, Israel has a widely fragmented society and a deeply divided government, making it impossible for any Israeli government to sign a peace treaty with the Palestinians, even if the proposed deal incorporates most of the expressed demands of Netanyahu. The only time that Israelis and Palestinians were able to produce an agreement with little outside help happened 17 years ago when they signed the "Oslo Accords" in 1993. However, time has proven that the accords were not meant to launch a genuine peace process to settle the Middle East conflict; instead, they were a mere scheme to create a Palestinian administration to foster Israeli occupation and colonization, nothing more and nothing less. Mr. Henry Siegman, the director of the Middle East Project in New York who led the American Jewish Congress from 1978 to 1994, said that "the Middle East peace process may well be the most spectacular deception in modern diplomatic history."

Due to these facts, and because of America's unconditional and undisciplined support of Israel, articulating a comprehensive peace settlement to the Arab Israeli conflict has become the responsibility of the international community. It was hoped that President Obama would lead such an effort and help achieve Middle East peace; unfortunately, he adopted the same disastrous policies of his predecessors; calling for negotiations that lead to nowhere. And by so doing, Obama allowed US foreign policy to be as before; an extension of Israeli foreign policy. For example, past American administrations have used the veto in the UN Security Council 32 times to protect Israel from international criticism and to enable it to continue its colonialist, hegemonic policies in Palestine and elsewhere, more than the total number of vetoes cast by all other permanent members of the Security Council. The US, moreover, has failed repeatedly to support UN resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories as stipulated by UN resolutions.

While many American intellectuals and former officials have criticized US Middle East policy in the past, the army never got involved in this uncomfortable debate. However, things seem to have changed; Gen. David Petraeus told the US Senate in March 2010 that the Arab-Israeli conflict "hurts America's ability to advance its interests in the Middle East."

This is a new development that has the potential of changing the rules of the debate in the United States. On the 13th of April 2010, just few weeks after Petraeus remarks, President Obama said that resolving the Arab Israeli dispute was a "vital national security interest of the United States," adding that conflicts like this one ended up "costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure." In other words, the US president now says that the continuation of the Arab Israeli conflict, which he seems to blame Israel for it, threatens the safety of American soldiers fighting extremists in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, and costs the loss of American lives and resources. Nevertheless, the Obama administration has so far failed to articulate a Middle East policy; it needs a policy to define where it stands and a strategy to launch a process to resolve the conflict and achieve peace.

Despite committing his administration to achieving peace in the Middle East, and reaching out to the Muslim world in unprecedented fashion, Obama has failed to advance the cause of peace one inch; he was unable to even articulate a workable strategy to advance peace. Meanwhile, his unsuccessful attempt to get Netanyahu to freeze the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem have alienated and angered both Israelis and Palestinians. However, Obama's apparent failure is not unique; all previous peace initiatives have gotten nowhere for one simple reason that no American or European leader has enough courage to admit; the consensus reached long ago by Israel's ruling elite that Israel will never allow the emergence of a Palestinian state that denies Israel effective military and economic control over the West Bank. To be sure, Israel would most likely allow the creation of a number of isolated enclaves or Bantustans in the West Bank that Palestinians could call a state; not because Zionists believe that Palestinians have a right to a state, but in order to prevent the formation of a bi-national state in which Palestinians would eventually become the majority.

Just one year after the 1967 war, Moshe Dayan, a former IDF chief of staff who at the time was minister of defense, described his plan for the future as 'the current reality in the territories... What exists today must remain as a permanent arrangement in the West Bank.' Ten years later, at a conference in Tel Aviv, Dayan said: "the question is not what the solution is but how do we live without a solution." Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir said when was asked about the rights of the Palestinian people, "where are the Palestinians; they do not exist." Shimon Peres, emphasizing Israel's disregard for UN resolutions said upon his return to Israel after signing the Oslo Accords, "We are not negotiating with the

Palestinians; we are negotiating with ourselves. The question is how much we are willing to give them. They have no leverage over us.” Ehud Barak, the ‘dovish’ former prime minister said about the Palestinian refugees’ right of return, “there is no right and there is no return.” Geoffrey Aronson says, “Living without a solution, then as now, was understood by Israel as the key to maximizing the benefits of conquest while minimizing the burdens and dangers of retreat or formal annexation.” Meanwhile, the process of transforming the West Bank and Gaza into Bantustans through the expansion of Jewish settlement and the building of new roads and highways and hundreds of barriers and check points has enabled Israel to impose its sovereignty over the entire Palestinian territories; from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

Henry Siegman says that “since the failed Camp David summit of 2000, and actually well before it, Israel’s interest in a peace process – other than for the purpose of obtaining Palestinian and international acceptance of the status quo – has been a fiction that has served primarily to provide cover for its systematic confiscation and deepening occupation of Palestinian land.” He says further that the evacuation of Gaza settlements was intended to serve as the first step in creating a series of Palestinian Bantustans. The siege imposed on Gaza since 2006 and the devastating destruction it sustained as a result of the Israeli military attack in late 2008 and early 2009 shows us what these Bantustans will look like if their residents do not behave according to Israeli dictates. Since its occupation in 1967, Gaza became a prison guarded by Israeli forces; however, the election of Hamas in 2006 has transformed Gaza from a prison to a concentration camp surrounded by the Israeli military; a camp where the old die of lack of healthcare and abject poverty, and children live under conditions that deny them access to nutritious food, safe shelter, medicine, and education. Going back to the old process of negotiations, therefore, is not a recipe for peace but for more frustration and despair that breeds violence. Baroness Catherine Ashton declared recently, “we cannot and nor can the region tolerate another round of fruitless negotiations.”

Where do we go from here?

The so-called Arab Israeli conflict has never been an Arab Israeli conflict only; it is rather a conflict between a colonialist apartheid enterprise fuelled by a racist Zionist ideology and

the community of civilized nations; it is a conflict between an army of settler colonialists and the people of conscious around the globe who detest colonialism and reject racism. Though the Palestinian people have been the major victims of this Zionist enterprise, every nation in the world has paid and continues to pay a price for the existence of Israel. It is a well known, but rarely acknowledged, fact that the Palestinian problem is the root cause of Middle East instability and violence; it is also the force that encourages radicalism and justifies terrorism in the eyes of many Muslims. In fact, American soldiers and civilians killed inside and outside the United States due to US immoral support of Israel and in defense of Israel outnumber all Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers since 1967. Gen. Petraeus called the conflict one of the "root causes of instability" and "obstacles to security" in the region - which aids al-Qaida." He argued further that "serious progress in the peace process could weaken Iran's reach, as it uses the conflict to fuel support for its terror group proxies."

As a consequence of these facts and developments, the question that must be raised is what should be done? In my view, there are two options to deal with this problem and transform conditions on the ground to be more conducive to peace and peacemaking:

The first option calls for a great power such as the United States or the European Union to take the initiative and articulate a vision for a comprehensive Middle East settlement and invite all other world powers to endorse it. A peace plan proposed by the US or the EU or both and backed by the international community, including the UN, China, Russia and India, is the only feasible way to achieve Arab-Israeli peace; it gives leaders on all sides a legitimate excuse to accept it, and no safe route to escape from it. To facilitate the implementation of such a plan, the major powers must employ all the carrots and sticks at their disposal to persuade the parties concerned that they have no choice but to accept the internationally sanctioned plan and live in peace. And in order to make such a proposal hard to resist, it must include enough carrots to entice all parties to welcome it, and enough sticks to punish whoever decides to defy the will of the international community.

Uri Avnery, an Israeli peace activist and an old terrorist outlined a possible settlement for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "a sovereign and viable State of Palestine side by side with Israel, the pre-1967 borders with minor and agreed exchanges of territory, the dismantling of all the settlements that will not be joined to Israel in the territory exchanges,

East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, a mutually acceptable solution to the refugee problem, a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, mutual security arrangements." Peter Munch wrote in *The Atlantic Times*, "In order to protect the existence of a Jewish state, Israel relies on the power of walls. Israel reacts to any kind of danger by isolating itself. If Israel does not separate itself from the Palestinians and continues its occupation, the entire concept of the Jewish state will implode. Israel not only builds barricades along its borders but in its mind... the country is in danger of becoming its own captive." In fact, Israel has surrounded itself with walls from all sides except the west side where the Mediterranean Sea lies.

Issues that scare Europeans and Americans most, particularly the increasing radicalization of Muslims and the spread of terrorism cannot be solved without establishing justice and peace in the Middle East. General David Petraeus told the US Senate that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has foreign policy and national security ramifications for the United States. "The conflict," he said, "foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the Area of Responsibility... Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda and other military groups exploit that anger to mobilize support." A few days earlier, Vice President Joe Biden told Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel that "what you're doing here undermines the security of our troops who are fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan." However, the idea that a dead peace process could be resurrected because the U.S. has a new enlightened president who is aware that peace in the Middle East is in the US national interest is naïve and dangerous. "It's dangerous because failed negotiations are worse than no negotiations. What they do is induce a new cycle of despair that generates a new cycle of violence," says Richard Falk. The failure of the 2000 Camp David summit was followed by the second Intifada which caused the killing and maiming of thousands of Palestinians and paved the way for Sharon to become Israel's prime minister and for Hamas to form the Palestinian government in 2006.

The second option calls for launching of an international campaign to delegitimize Israel as a colonialist, racist entity that occupies the land of another people, uses brutal force to subjugate the indigenous population, deny the natives their human and

national rights, confiscate their land, and discriminate against them on the bases of religion and race. Recent weeks and months have witnessed a surge in activities to boycott Israel and expose its apartheid system; in the United Kingdom, in Norway, in Sweden and on the campuses of several American and European universities; students, labor unions, writer, poets, artists, and university professors are participating in this campaign. The international community, for the sake of peace and fairness, should organize a general boycott of Israeli goods and institutions similar to the one that led to the liquidation of the apartheid system in South Africa. Neve Gordon, an Israeli tenured professor at Ben Gurion University, wrote few months ago in the Los Angeles Times, "It is indeed not a simple matter for me as an Israeli citizen to call on foreign governments, regional authorities, international social movements, faith-based organizations, unions and citizens to suspend cooperation with Israel. But today, as I watch my two boys playing in the yard, I am convinced that it is the only way that Israel can be saved from itself."

On March 26, 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) appointed professor Richard Falk a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967. On December 9, 2008, the United Nations released a statement by Falk expressing deep concern for the "desperate plight" of civilians in Gaza. Falk said: "Israel still maintains its Gaza siege in its full fury, allowing only barely enough food and fuel to enter to stave off mass famine and disease." He outlined steps that must be taken to avoid a "humanitarian catastrophe" that include implementing the "responsibility to protect" a civilian population from collective punishment, and a determination of "whether the Israeli civilian leaders and military commanders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted and prosecuted for violations of international criminal law," which *The Jerusalem Post* wrote would go before the International Court of Justice at The Hague in the Netherlands. On December 27, 2008 Falk issued a new statement condemning the December 2008 and January 2009 Israeli strikes on Gaza as "war crimes because they included collective punishment, the targeting of civilians and a disproportionate military response to Hamas rocket attacks on Israel." He also condemned nations which provided Israel military support and participated in the siege of Gaza. In a *Houston Chronicle* article Falk reaffirmed that he had called on the International Criminal Court to investigate Israeli leaders responsible for possible violations of international criminal law. In March 2009, Falk stated that Israel's offensive in Gaza constituted a war

crime of the "greatest magnitude," and called for an independent group to investigate the war crimes committed on both sides.

I met Professor Richard Falk for the first time in 1991 during our participation in the "European Conversations" conference held in Sweden; he was then teaching international law at Princeton University. I asked professor Falk one evening about his Zionist credentials, saying, in light of your harsh criticism of Israeli settlement policies, do you consider yourself a non-Zionist Jew? He answered, "To tell you the truth, I cannot say that." I saw Falk again in October 2009 in Washington DC where he gave a lecture, *Imagining Israel – Palestine Peace: Why International Law matters*. I took the opportunity to remind him of the question I asked him 18 years earlier and ask him the same question again. His answer this time was clear and straightforward, "You cannot be for human rights and a Zionist."

Following the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2009, the UN Human Rights Council appointed Judge Richard Goldstone to investigate alleged Israeli war crimes in Gaza. The Goldstone report stated that "the lack of accountability for war crimes and possible crimes against humanity [in the Occupied Palestinian Territories] has reached a crisis point; the ongoing lack of justice is undermining any hope for a successful peace process and reinforcing an environment that fosters violence." The report added, "There is strong evidence to suggest that numerous serious violations of international law, both humanitarian and human rights law, were committed by Israel during the military operations in Gaza." Such findings confirm allegations made by human rights groups inside and outside of Israel, including B'Tselem, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others, that the Israeli defence forces had systemically violated human rights standards during the Gaza offensive. Commenting on the Goldstone report, Falk said this "does confirm the view held overwhelmingly outside the United States that Israel is an oppressor of the Palestinian people in the occupation and is relying on crimes against humanity and war crimes in order to maintain control." 30 brave Israeli soldiers who witnessed Israeli crimes in Gaza published a moving document called "Breaking the Silence" in which they in effect say they were told to be indiscriminate in order to eliminate risks of Israeli casualties.

Henry Siegman wrote in the *Nation* magazine on January 25, 2009, "Israel has crossed the threshold from 'the only democracy in the Middle East' to the only apartheid regime in the western world. Support for this government means supporting a regime that

disfranchises and dispossesses the Palestinian people. When a state's denial of individual and national rights of a large part of its population becomes permanent, it ceases to be a democracy. By definition, democracy preserved for privileged citizens – while all others are kept behind checkpoints, barbed-wire fences and separation walls commanded by the Israeli army – is not a democracy but its opposite.” Therefore, America's ‘special relationship’ with Israel must be considered an immoral policy to sustain a colonial, racist, undemocratic state for which the American people continue to pay a heavy price in material as well as human terms. European states supporting Israel are also supporting a settler colonialist state that practices discrimination and commits crimes against humanity; a state whose very existence threatens world peace.

As Israeli crimes against humanity and war crimes and false claims of being the only democracy in the Middle East and racist nature were being documented and exposed, Dr. Shlomo Sand, a Tel Aviv University professor and historian published a book, *‘The Invention of the Jewish People,’* in which he argues that there is no Jewish people and there has never been a Jewish people. Professor Sand proves beyond doubt that Jews are not a race or a people. According to Sand's findings, the claimed exile never happened and Jews were not dispersed by the Romans; he also argues that archeological discoveries in Palestine refute Jewish claims to the land of Palestine. He even says that all Zionist leaders who came to Palestine before 1936 knew that the exile never happened and that the majority of Palestinians are the descendants of the Israelites who inhabited parts of Palestine in earlier times. Modern Jews, he explains, were invented in the late 19th century by European Jewish historians who used few facts and much imagination to write a history of Jews in retrospect going back to the ‘mythical Kingdom of David’ in order to create a national myth around which Jews could unite, formulate a ‘nation’ and claim a right to have a state in Palestine.

Conclusion

Both options discussed above seek to achieve one goal; to free the Palestinian people from the chains of Israeli occupation and discrimination, and free all Jews from hatred and a superiority complex that threatens world peace, as well as their lives and the future of their children. While the first option seeks to establish two states in Palestine, one Israeli, one Palestinian living side by side in peace; the second option seeks the establishment of a secular, democratic state on the entire land of Palestine where all Israeli Jews and all

Palestinians live in one state with equal rights and obligations. As more people around the world join the struggle for peace and justice in Palestine and support the ongoing campaign to delegitimize the Israeli apartheid system, pressure will be increasing on Israeli and non-Israeli Zionists to accept an internationally sanctioned two-state settlement. Meanwhile consensus will be building slowly among Jews and Palestinians for the eventual establishment of a secular, democratic state where all Jews living today in Palestine/Israel and all Palestinians living inside and outside of Palestine would have the right to live together in peace.

The Failure of the peace process and the political and ideological polarization within Israel has led to the death of the Israeli, European and American peace camps. As a result, Israelis committed to the Zionist ideology have joined the anti-peace camp adopting the Likud position, while the more liberal ones, recognizing the racist nature of Zionism and Israeli fatal policies, are joining in increasing numbers the international movement to delegitimize Israel. One of those people is the grandson of former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the son of Benny Begin who is a leading Likud member supporting the process of ethnic cleansing started by his late father. The late Begin was a terrorist whose Irgun gang committed the Deir Yassin Massacre on April 9, 1948, in cooperation with the Lehi gang headed by Yitzhak Shamir. During the massacre Jewish gang murdered more than 100 innocent villagers; Begin claimed in his memoirs that without the Deir Yassin massacre, Israel would have never been created. Terrorism and violence that characterized the behavior of Jewish gangs in Palestine before the creation of Israel in 1948 has become a state sponsored terrorism after the occupation of the rest of Palestine in 1967. It is time for the rest of the world to recognize Israel for what it really is and join the fight against discrimination, racism, colonization and state sponsored terrorism.

If the current situation in the Middle East remains unchanged for a few more years, all concerned parties will lose badly; the American and European peoples have a lot to lose; and thus they have much to gain from peace. The Europeans no longer have an excuse not to get fully engaged in the search for peace or to claim that the United States is preventing them from doing so. They must also acknowledge that they are directly responsible for the tragedy of the Palestinian people and the creation of Israel. Britain is the state that promised the Zionists a homeland in Palestine in 1917 in order to create a buffer zone separating Arabs in Africa from Arabs in Asia; it is also the colonial power that helped Jewish

settlers enter Palestine illegally and acquire public land to build walled settlements. Nazi Germany committed untold crimes against European Jews; a tragedy that hastened and facilitated the creation of Israel. Germany has also provided Israel with more than 120 billion dollars, in addition to tanks, submarines and other military equipment. France provided the Jewish state with the nuclear technology to become a nuclear power threatening every nation its missile reach. The United States and other European states that continue to back Israel must realize that they are fostering colonialism, promoting racism, defending crimes against humanity, and enabling Israel to violate UN resolutions and international law with impunity; Israel represents today the most serious challenge to western values of equality, justice, democracy and freedom of religion.

The fight within the Muslim world as well as within the Arab world has never been over moderation, radicalism, terrorism or hating the West; it has always been over ideas and ideals and ways to achieve justice for all. Therefore, the fight against radicalism and terrorism will not succeed using bombs and missiles to kill and get killed; the only way to end terrorism is to seek justice, peace and equality, and eradicate racism, hunger and poverty. While Israeli Jews today enjoy living on Palestinian land and in Palestinian homes, Palestinians die every day in refugee camps while they are still alive.

Mohamed Rabie is professor of international political economy; he is the author of *"The Politics of Foreign Aid: US Foreign Assistance and Aid to Israel," "Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity," "The US – PLO Dialogue: Secret Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution,"* and other books.

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