

# The Israel-PLO deal: A dangerous illusion

by Elias Davidsson, 30.8.1993 (slightly edited in February 2002)

The Palestine Question has been on the agenda of the United Nations since 1947. In 29 November 1947, the General Assembly proposed a Plan for the Partition of Palestine into two states, a 'Jewish' and an 'Arab' State. The Plan included details regarding rights of the population inhabiting each part and provisions regarding economic cooperation between the states. This proposal was endorsed, in the form of General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947, by a comfortable, though not overwhelming, majority of UN members. A substantial minority supported the Arab proposal that Palestine become a democratic and undivided state, where the rights of every inhabitant, including Jews, be ensured through a written Constitution. The Partition Plan envisaged for the "Jewish" State in Palestine 55% of the Palestinian territory and for the "Arab" State 45% of the territory. At that time the Jews, individually and collectively, owned less than 6% of the land. The overwhelming majority of the population within the country was Arab and even within the confines of the proposed "Jewish" State, almost half of the population was not Jewish.

This UN resolution had no legal basis nor legal relevance. But it constituted nevertheless the first international statement of intent that both the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs possessed the right to self-determination.

Since then, Israel's behaviour towards its neighbours, including numerous unprovoked acts of military aggression on Tunis, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, was the subject of dozens of Security Council resolutions, in which Israel was unequivocally condemned. These resolutions would have been more numerous and effective were it not for the persistent use by the United States of its veto power and other manipulative practices, which made even those resolutions approved by the Council toothless. Thus, successive Israeli governments learned that they could disregard Security Council resolutions with impunity. The United States would consistently shield Israel from any effective pressure. This practice is continuing until this very day, thus giving rise to the charges of double standards by the Security Council.

The General Assembly was much more forthcoming in its condemnation of Israel. Each year, since the establishment of the State of Israel, resolutions condemning Israel for aggression, racist behaviour and human rights violations were approved by the vast majority of UN member states. The number of such resolutions as well as the number of member-states supporting these resolutions increased in recent years, reflecting the growing impatience of the world community with a defying Israel.

But the General Assembly did not only condemn for the sake of condemnation. It also specified a blueprint for a just, peaceful, lasting and comprehensive solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>1</sup> This constructive endeavour by the General Assembly was not widely reported in Western media. On 15 December 1988, practically the entire membership of the United Nations, (with the notable exception of the United States and Israel) affirmed such a blueprint in the form of General Assembly Resolution 43/176 ( [http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.nsf/\(Symbol\)/A\\_RES\\_43\\_176](http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.nsf/(Symbol)/A_RES_43_176) )

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<sup>1</sup> For a historical overview of the idea of such a Conference see International Peace Conference on the Middle East, 1983 by Prof. Dr. Ahmad Tell ( <http://www.jerusalemitem.org/peace6.html> )

This resolution is highly significant in the history of the Palestine question: For the first time, a quasi universal consensus emerged concerning the solution of this persistent conflict, including endorsement by all Arab states and the PLO. However, due to United States and Zionist occult power, it was not possible to implement this resolution. The U.N. Charter has provisions for the General Assembly to overrule Security Council resolutions (such as reflected by the United for Peace resolution). But US allies did not resort to this mechanism, and thus all General Assembly resolutions voted by a overwhelming majority were left to fade away. So much for international dereliction towards the Palestinian people, the main victim of this century-old tragedy.

After the demise of the Soviet Union, an opportunity opened up for the United States and Israel to impose their common agenda: To consolidate the annexation of Jerusalem and the creeping annexation of other parts of the occupied territories, prevent the emergence of an independent Palestinian state and liquidate the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right of return. The 'Peace process' has been going on - officially - for 22 months. In the course of this process it appears that the United States government succeeded in alienating the Palestinian leadership from the masses, so much so that some commentators expect Israel to provide protection for these leaders from the enraged Palestinian masses.

It must be reasserted here that the US-led 'peace process' was not and is not based on principles of international law nor on the international consensus, as represented by General Assembly resolutions. The United States imposed the selective use and interpretation of UN Security Council resolution 242 and 338 as a reference. These resolutions do not even address the right of the the Palestinian people to self-determination nor the status of Jerusalem, let alone the right of Palestinian refugees to return. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) refers to Palestinians solely as refugees, not as a people. The Palestinian delegation had to accept the degrading procedure of being 'accepted' by the Israeli government as a valid partner for the discussions. The United States did not even attempt to hide its overwhelming bias towards, massive economic support to, and strategic alliance with, Israel while expecting from the world community to be viewed as a fair peace broker! The mass media succeeded - itself a not meagre feat in propaganda techniques - to create the illusion in Western public opinion, that the United States administration can be a fair broker acting in good faith, despite its principled and publicly declared rejection of Palestinian rights and its unequivocal strategic support of Israel.

Many Palestinian cadres of the occupied territories - among the most capable ones - are in Israeli prisons. More than 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners are still in Israeli prisons: A high figure even by standards of repressive regimes. It is significant that the PLO has not made it conditional for any agreement that Israel release these political prisoners and allow the deportees to return to their homes, in accordance with Security Council resolutions. This is no oversight. The PLO leadership clearly prefers these prisoners to wait in prison until Palestinian prisons are erected. Any deal that does not include freedom for all Palestinian political prisoners and the unconditional repatriation of deportees, will certainly be considered suspect by the Palestinian masses.

The PLO is generally regarded as representing the Palestinian people. But such representation is not unconditional. The Palestinian people can, at any time and in democratic procedures, withdraw the mandate they give, implicitly or explicitly, to the PLO, or for that matter, to any organisation deemed to represent their interests. If the PLO, for some reasons decides to waive any of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, the right of return and principles of international law, the people - in whom sovereignty resides - are entitled and can simply withdraw the mandate given to the PLO. The emergence of Hamas and

the claim of Hamas to numerous seats in the Palestinian National Council, can be understood as a vote of non-confidence to the PLO leadership.

If the current opposition of secular and religious Palestinian organizations and individuals to the 'deal' made between the PLO and the Israeli government, is considered as extremist, then it follows that the UN General Assembly, including its Western European members, is equally extremist for supporting such "outrageous" demands as the recognition of the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Western media highlight calls by terrorist leader Jibril to assassinate Yassir Arafat, while giving scant coverage to the non-violent opposition of eminent Palestinian personalities and to the disintegration of the PLO leadership. It is as if the aim were to discredit the struggle of the Palestinian people for its legitimate and unfulfilled rights.

Among supporters of Palestinian rights there are some who maintain that although the 'deal' is unsatisfactory, it is still a 'step in the right direction' which can lead to bolder steps towards complete disentanglement from Israeli control. Thus, it is claimed, the decision of the PLO leadership to sign this 'deal' should be supported. This school of thought does not provide any tangible evidence to support this claim.<sup>2</sup> After a certain period of 'good behaviour', the Palestinians might obtain from the Israeli occupier a few more minor concessions, that is if the occupier agrees (and who will force him, if he does not wish to agree?). The occupier would of course demand that the Palestinians stop the Intifada - which was the only tangible pressure they could put on the occupier. The Palestinians, so the story goes, would get rid of the occupation by stopping to struggle against it.

Another school of opinion has it that the Palestinian leadership, having gained ground in parts of Palestine, would expand its struggle for the redemption of the land and for the liberation of Palestine from Zionism. The term "liberation of Palestine from Zionism" can mean different things: It can mean "throwing the Jews to the sea" and establishing an Islamic Palestine. It can equally mean the dismantlement of the Zionist State, its racist institutions, and its replacement by a democratic, secular, government. While the former blueprint could be regarded as mirroring Zionist policies and practice, only in the other direction, the latter blueprint is compatible with international human rights norms. By focussing on the former interpretation of "liberation" and refusing to address the latter, Zionists attempt to paint their struggle as existential.

Suffice to say that the basis of the 'deal' signed between some PLO leaders and the Israeli Government on 31.8.1993 is extremely shaky, legally, morally and politically. For that reason, any jubilation about an 'historic breakthrough' is out of place and creates dangerous illusions. Peace will only be attained on the base of truth and justice. These values are glaring by their absence in the present 'deal'.

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<sup>2</sup> As these lines are reread and edited in February 2002, the "peace process" based on bilateral "negotiations" between the occupier and the occupied, has not yet proved, ten years after the "deal", to be the right approach for a peaceful solution of the Palestine question.