

A Painful Peace

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Sometimes it requires judgment to select the lead stories of the day, but in November 1995 it's easy enough: on the domestic front, balancing the budget; in the international arena, the Middle East peace process, framed by two dramatic events, the signing of the Oslo II agreement by Israel and the PLO under Washington's guiding hand, and the assassination a few weeks later of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, another "martyr for peace," in President Clinton's words.

I will return to a word on the domestic story, but would like to concentrate on the "historic trade" in which the two longtime adversaries abandoned their traditional goals, at last coming to recognize that a "painful peace" requires compromise and sacrifice. Let's begin with the bare facts of Oslo II, then turn to background developments, the commentary that all of this has elicited, and finally the significance of the events themselves and the reaction to them.

The "Historic Trade"

On September 28, Israel and the PLO initiated the second major step in the peace process (Oslo II), dividing the West Bank into 3 zones, with extensive further arrangements (not yet fully available). The Palestinian National Authority (PA) is to exercise total control in Zone A while Israel exercises total control in Zone C. Zone B is the region of "autonomy": here the PA administers Palestinian villages under overall Israeli "security control." Zone A consists of the municipal areas of towns populated exclusively by Palestinians. Zone C includes all Jewish settlements. Zone B is a collection of scattered sectors, about 100 of them according to Israeli maps.

In addition to Zones A, B, and C there is a fourth zone that incorporates part of the occupied territories: Jerusalem, which is assigned without comment to Israeli control, including formerly Arab East Jerusalem and an indefinite region beyond. The maps published in Israel and the New York Times identify the Jerusalem area as part of Israel (with slightly different borders). Arafat's announcement of a "Jihad" to seek Palestinian rights in Jerusalem (in accord with the terms of Oslo I) aroused much fury in the United States, demonstrating that the devious old terrorist had not changed his stripes. Rabin's announcement that Israel's Jihad had been completed and that Jerusalem will be the eternal and undivided capital of Israel elicited no reaction; nor did the maps published after Oslo II, ratifying that announcement. Official rhetoric aside, Israel's decision accords with U.S. intentions, and is therefore legitimate by definition.

The delimitation of the three zones is not precisely clear. According to the analysis accompanying Israeli maps, Zone C covers two-thirds of the West Bank and Zone B another 30 percent, with 3 percent in the Palestinian Zone A. Prime Minister Rabin, however, informed the Knesset (Parliament) on October 5 that Zone C includes 73 percent of the West Bank, the Israeli press reported. The map and analysis in the New York Times assigns 70 percent of the West Bank to Zone C. The authoritative Washington Report on Israeli Settlement estimates Zone A at 1 percent of the West Bank, Zone C at 72 percent (relying on published Israeli sources). Of the Palestinian towns, one was disputed, Hebron, with 450 Jewish settlers among some 100,000 Palestinians; Israel therefore retains substantial control. Zone C includes 140,000 Jews, Zones A and B 1.1 million Arabs. "About 300,000 Israelis are living in the areas conquered by Israel in 1967," veteran Israeli correspondent Danny Rubinstein observes, about 150,000 of them "in the municipal area annexed to Jerusalem after 1967."

Oslo II reaffirms the provision of the Cairo accords of May 1994 that Palestinian legislation cannot "deal with a security issue that falls under Israel's responsibility" and cannot "seriously

threaten other significant Israeli interests protected by this agreement.” The basic terms of the Cairo accords apparently remain in force for all three zones, including their provision that the Israeli Military Administration retains exclusive authority in “legislation, adjudication, policy execution” and “responsibility for the exercise of these powers in conformity with international law,” which the U.S. and Israel interpret as they please. The meaning, as the knowledgeable Israeli analyst Meron Benvenisti observed after Cairo, is that “the entire intricate system of military ordinances...will retain its force, apart from ‘such legislative regulatory and other powers Israel may expressly grant’” to the Palestinians, while Israeli judges retain “veto powers over any Palestinian legislation ‘that might jeopardize major Israeli interests’,” which have “overriding power” (his quotes are from the text of the Cairo agreement).

Oslo II stipulates further that the Palestinian Council that is to be elected must recognize the “legal rights of Israelis related to Government and Absentee land located in areas under the territorial jurisdiction of the Council.” In effect, the PA therefore accepts the legality of already existing Jewish settlements and any further ones that Israel may choose to construct, and recognizes Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank that Israel decides to designate as state and absentee lands (unilaterally, as in the past): up to 90 percent of Area B, according to “well-informed Palestinian sources” cited by the Report on Israeli Settlement, an estimate only, because the ruling authorities do not release information.

By incorporating these provisions, Oslo II rescinds the position of virtually the entire world that the settlements are illegal and that Israel has no claim to the territories acquired by force in 1967. Oslo II reaffirms the basic principle of Oslo I: UN resolution 242 of November 1967, the basic framework of Middle East diplomacy, is dead and buried; UN 242, that is, as interpreted by those who formulated it, including — quite explicitly — the United States until Washington switched policy in 1971, departing from the international consensus it had helped shape. The “peace process” keeps to the doctrines that the U.S. has upheld in international isolation (apart from Israel) for 25 years, a matter of no slight significance.

To summarize, Israel runs Zone C (about 70 percent of the West Bank) unilaterally, and Zone B (close to 30 percent) effectively, while partially ceding Zone A (1 percent-3 percent). Israel retains unilateral control over the whole West Bank to the extent that it (and its foreign protector) so decide, and the legality of its essential claims is now placed beyond discussion. The principles extend to the Gaza Strip, where Israel retains full control of the 30 percent that it considered of any value.

To illustrate with an analogy, it is somewhat as if New York State were to cede responsibility for slums of South Bronx and Buffalo to local authorities while keeping the financial, industrial, and commercial sectors, wealthy residential areas, virtually all of the usable land and resources, indeed everything except for scattered areas it would be happy to hand over to someone else, just as Israel is delighted to free itself from the burden of controlling downtown Nablus and Gaza City directly. Here and in the isolated villages of Zone B Palestinian forces are to manage the population on the standard models: the British in India, Whites in South Africa and Rhodesia, the U.S. in Central America, and so on. Israel has at last recognized the absurdity of using its own forces for to keep the natives quiet.

To take another standard of comparison, recall that in 1988, at the most extreme period of U.S.-Israeli refusal to recognize any Palestinian rights or to have any dealings with the PLO, Rabin called for Israeli control of 40 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, speaking for the Labor Party and reiterating its basic stand from 1968 (with some variations). In 1995, Rabin recognized

the need to sacrifice, and at Oslo II was willing to accept Israeli control of only about twice as much as he had demanded before — 70 percent-99 percent of the West Bank and 30 percent of the Gaza Strip — along with recognition of the legality of whatever Israel and its sponsor have done and may choose to do.

There has been another change from 1988: at Oslo, Rabin and Shimon Peres were willing to negotiate with the PLO and recognize it as “the representative of the Palestinian people,” at least in a side letter though not in the official agreement. In 1988, they had flatly refused any dealings with the PLO. That transformation has evoked much acclaim from U.S. commentators, who were particularly impressed by Rabin’s ability to overcome the revulsion he felt for his old enemy — and who prefer not to listen to the explanation offered by the objects of their admiration: “There has been a change in them, not us,” Peres informed the Israeli public as the Oslo I accords were announced; “We are not negotiating with the PLO, but only with a shadow of its former self.” The new approved shadow effectively accepts Israel’s demands, abandoning its call for mutual recognition in a two-state settlement, the program that branded the PLO a terrorist organization unfit for entry into negotiations, according to the conventions of U.S. discourse.

Without consideration of the actual background, discussion of the issues can hardly be serious. The crucial facts of recent history, however, have been almost totally banned, even from scholarship for the most part; again, a matter of no slight significance.

Commenting on the early stages of the historic trade, Palestinian human rights lawyer Raji Sourani sees “the beginning of a trend towards the militarization of Palestinian society,” consistent with the standard model of population control by client forces. That trend proceeds, Middle East correspondent Graham Usher adds, alongside “the repressive Israeli regime of containment that since Oslo [I] has killed 255 Palestinians in the West Bank And Gaza, while attacks by Palestinians have claimed 137 Israelis” (to mid-1995), and has arrested 2400 Palestinians “for alleged ‘Islamist tendencies’ between October 1994 and January 1995” alone.

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U.S.-Israeli intentions to maintain those terrorist operations was made explicit the day that Shimon Peres assumed his duties as Prime Minister. “Peres Sets Tone of Post-Rabin Era,” a front-page New York Times headline read, introducing a report that “Israeli warplanes shrieked over Lebanon” and “pounded the bases of radical Palestinian guerrillas south of Beirut.” This is well beyond the “security zone” that Israel runs in South Lebanon with the aid of a terrorist mercenary force, in violation of the demand of the UN Security Council in March 1978 that it withdraw immediately and unconditionally. Peres won only praise for this demonstration of his intention “to assume Mr. Rabin’s soldier’s mantle as the scourge of Arabs who reject Israel’s offer of peace.” The adjacent column condemned the “desperate act, a horrible act, the work of cowards,” when terrorists attacked a U.S.-run military training center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the same day. Two weeks later, Hizbollah fired rockets into Northern Israel, wounding several civilians, an act of terrorism that it described as a “warning response” to “Israel’s continuing aggressions,” including the demolition of homes by the Israeli army in Lebanon and the Israeli Navy’s continuing refusal to allow Lebanese fisherman to fish off the Lebanese coast. As the rockets fell, a senior security

official of Hizbollah was blown up by a car bomb. Hizbollah's terror was condemned as a violation of the 1993 agreement that neither side would carry out actions outside of Israel's "security zone," an agreement that Israel violates at will: for example, two weeks earlier as Peres took office, or a month before that, on October 13, when "Israeli artillery bombarded villages outside the security zone," a tiny item reported, with "no immediate word on casualties," in retaliation for the wounding of Israeli soldiers in Israel's "security zone."

As Peres took office, the knowledgeable Middle East correspondent Mary Curtius explained that "Peres is expected to follow Rabin's course of selectively hitting at guerrilla targets rather than pouring huge numbers of Israeli troops into Lebanon and risking more Israeli casualties" — "Rabin's course" in July 1993, when he reacted to guerrilla attacks on Israeli troops in South Lebanon by pouring huge number of troops into Lebanon in an assault that killed 125 Lebanese and drove half a million people from their homes, as Curtius among others reported. Curtius also gives some historical background: Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 when the PLO "regularly fired Katyushas at northern communities and sent guerrillas on cross-border attacks." That is the standard way of referring to the fact that the PLO scrupulously adhered to the U.S.-brokered truce while Israel stepped up its terrorist attacks in Lebanon, killing many civilians by bombing and other actions in a desperate attempt to elicit some response that could serve as an excuse for the long-planned invasion. The facts are uncontroversial, but unacceptable, therefore turned into their opposite here with amazing regularity (though discussed frankly in Israel).

Israeli atrocities in Lebanon regularly pass without mention or comment. More than 100 Lebanese were killed by the Israeli army or its local mercenaries in the first half of 1995, the London Economist reports, along with 6 Israeli soldiers in Lebanon. Israeli forces use terror weapons, including anti-personnel shells that spray steel darts (sometimes delayed action shells to maximize terror), which killed two children in July 1995 and four others in the same town a few months earlier, and seven others in Nabatiye, where "no foreign journalists turned up" to describe the atrocities, British Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk reported from the scene. So matters continue. The occasional mention is usually in the context of a denunciation of Hizbollah terror against Israelis in retaliation.

The brutality of the new Palestinian forces and their cooperation with the Israeli security apparatus have been reported extensively by the Israeli press and human rights monitors, and should come as no surprise. That, after all, was the announced plan. Speaking to the political council of the Labor Party on October 2 1993, immediately after Oslo I, Prime Minister Rabin explained that the Palestinian security forces would be able to "deal with Gaza without problems caused by appeals to the High Court of Justice, without problems made by [the human rights organization] B'Tselem, and without problems from all sorts of bleeding hearts and mothers and fathers." His plan was as rational as it is conventional.

Small wonder that Henry Kissinger sees Rabin as a "visionary," though reaching his full heights as "a visionary late in life," on the path to Oslo I: "When you sit where I do and have, the number of world class thinkers among statesmen is very limited — and he was one of them," Kissinger explained.

Minister of Interior Ehud Barak, now Foreign Minister in the Peres government, announced that Oslo II "ensures Israel's absolute superiority in both the military and economic fields." Benvenisti points out that the Oslo II map, establishing the "peace of the victors," conforms to the most extreme Israeli proposal, that of the ultra-right General Sharon in 1981. Not surprisingly, Sharon does not appear too dissatisfied with the outcome. Correspondents report that after Oslo

II, he was “smiling broadly as he talked about the bright future for” a new West Bank settlement that he had “planned and helped build...and others like it” while watching the “construction going on” and showing the press his own proposed map from 1977, now implemented by Rabin, with whom Sharon said he “felt close,” thanks to the congruence of their programs. Yisrael Harel, the founder of the Yesha Council of West Bank settlers and editor of its extremist newspaper Neku-dah, agrees with Sharon and the governing Labor Party: “If they keep to the current plan, I can live with it,” he says. Prime Minister Peres’s right-hand man, Labor dove Yossi Beilin, explains that the Oslo II agreement “was delayed for months in order to guarantee that all the settlements would remain intact and that the settlers would have maximum security. This entailed an immense financial investment. The situation in the settlements was never better than that which was created following the Oslo II agreement.”

In his report on Oslo II to the Knesset, Rabin outlined “the main changes, not all of them, which we envision and want in the permanent solution.” In accord with these primary demands, hardly likely to be subject to negotiation, Greater Israel is to incorporate “united Jerusalem, which will include both Ma’ale Adumim [a town to its east] and Giv’at Ze’ev” [a suburb to its north]; the Jordan Valley; “blocs of settlements in Judea and Samaria like the one in Gush Katif” (the southern sector of Gaza that Israel retains surrounding its settlements). These blocs are to include “Gush Etzion, Efrat, Beitar and other communities” in the West Bank. The press reported that Ma’ale Adumim will be annexed to the greatly expanded Jerusalem area after expanded settlement establishes contiguity between the two urban areas.

The meaning of the “peace of the victors” has been spelled out accurately in the Hebrew press in Israel. Tel Aviv University Professor Tanya Reinhart observed after the Cairo agreement that the arrangements being imposed should not be compared with the end of Apartheid in South Africa; rather, with the institution of that system, with its “home rule” provisions for new “independent states,” as they were viewed by South African Whites and their friends. The analysis, since reiterated by Benvenisti and others, is quite reasonable. Political scientist Shlomo Avineri points out that “In one sense [Oslo II] is a major victory for Israel and a minimalist settlement for Arafat,” who “has done a relatively good job given the impossible circumstances under which he is working.” That is almost accurate. It is necessary, however, to recall other features of the Third World model: Arafat, his cronies, and rich Palestinians can expect to do quite well in the client relationship, whatever the effects on the population.

In brief, there is considerable agreement about the bare facts across a spectrum ranging from Sharon and Harel to the sharpest critics.

There is disagreement, however, about what the facts portend, a matter of speculation of course. Some believe that the foundation has been laid for Palestinian independence beyond the Bantustan level, even full Israeli withdrawal. To others, the more likely prospect conforms to the hopes expressed by New Republic editor Martin Peretz as he advised Israel to invade Lebanon in 1982 and administer to the PLO a “lasting military defeat” that will drive notions of independence out of the minds of Palestinians in the occupied territories: Then “the Palestinians will be turned into just another crushed nation, like the Kurds or the Afghans,” and the Palestinian problem, which “is beginning to be boring,” will be resolved. Speculation aside, at least this much seems clear: it would be pointless for Israel to retain anything like the territory it controls under Oslo II. Presumably, the government will sooner or later decide to restrict its administrative burden while continuing to integrate within Israel whatever land and resources it finds valuable, at which point another “historic trade” will be celebrated.

The “historic trade” just consummated establishes the most extreme position of U.S.-Israeli rejectionism that has been seriously put forth within the mainstream political spectrum. But however extreme a position may be, some will remain unsatisfied. Ten years ago, central elements of the Likud coalition reiterated their claim to Jordan, while conceding that “in the context of negotiations with Jordan we might agree to certain concessions in Eastern Transjordan” (the largely uninhabited desert areas). A similar position had long been held by the mainstream of the Kibbutz movement, Ahduth Avodah, which played a leading role in the Golda Meir government. To my knowledge, such claims have never been renounced. Today, some sectors, Americans and ultraorthodox prominent among them, claim the right to every stone West of the Jordan.

The pattern is the same everywhere. Saudi Arabia is the most extreme Islamic fundamentalist state in the world, but is under attack by Islamic fundamentalists for selling out to the West. If the recent terrorist bombing in Riyadh turns out to have been done by such groups, that will hardly prove the government to be “moderate,” just as one cannot seriously argue that Rabin is a “moderate” on the grounds that he was murdered by a religious extremist. The point is equally obvious in both cases — understood in the first and commonly denied in the second, consistent with doctrinal imperatives.

The Facts on the Ground

Looking more closely, we find that the expanding area of Greater Jerusalem-Ma’ale Adumim extends virtually to Jericho and the Jordan Valley, so that the anticipated permanent settlement effectively bisects the West Bank. A huge array of “bypass roads” is being constructed to fragment the region further into “cantons,” as they are called in the programs of the ultra-right now being implemented. The new roads link the territories under Israeli control so that settlers can travel freely without having to see the Arab villages scattered in the hills, or the municipal areas run by the PA. Construction of Israeli settlements, housing, and infrastructure has accelerated since Oslo I was signed in September 1993, using funds provided by the U.S. taxpayer with the agreement of the Bush and particularly the Clinton Administrations. The government of Israel continues to provide inducements to Jews to settle in the territories, where they enjoy a subsidized lifestyle well beyond the reach of the general population; most recently, new efforts to encourage settlement in lands confiscated from Bedouins in Ma’ale Adumim, where a new bypass road was opened on October 23 and 6000 new housing units are to be erected by the year 2005 along with 2400 new hotel rooms, its population projected to grow to 50,000. Building starts increased by over 40 percent from 1993 to 1995 (not including East Jerusalem), according to a report by Peace Now issued on October 10, though they are still well below 1992.

The same conception, Israel Shahak observes, has been implemented in Gaza, “sliced into enclaves controlled by the bypass roads [that] cut the Gaza Strip in two, in its strategically most sensitive spot: between Gaza town and the big refugee camps to the south of it.” The settlements “serve as pivots of the road grid devised to ensure Israeli control” over the areas granted “autonomy,” which are separated from Egypt and from each other. In both Gaza and the West Bank, these arrangements allow Israel to continue to imprison the population in whole or in part by road and area closures, as it has often done, sometimes for long periods.

The motive for curfew-closure may be punishment, or to deter possible terrorist action (particularly, after some Israeli atrocity, or for several weeks during the signing of Oslo II). Or simply to

liberate Jewish citizens from the annoying presence of the locals, as when the Arab population of Hebron was locked up under 24-hour curfew for four days during the Passover holidays in 1995 so that settlers and 35,000 Jewish visitors brought there in chartered buses could have picnics and travel around the city freely, dancing in the streets with public prayers to bring down “the government of the Left,” laying the cornerstone for a new residential building, and indulging in other pleasures under the protective gaze of extra military forces, using the opportunity “to insult the Palestinians imprisoned in their houses and to throw stones at them if they dared to peek out of the windows at the Jews celebrating in their city,” and finally bringing the celebration to a close “by settlers rampaging through the Old City, destroying property, and smashing car windows...in a city magically cleansed...of Palestinians.” “Children, parents and old people are effectively jailed for days in their homes, which in most cases, are seriously overcrowded,” able to turn on their TV sets to “watch a female settler saying happily, ‘There is a curfew, thank God’;” and to hear the “merry dances of settlers” and “festive processions,” some to “the Patriarchs Cave open only to Jews.” Meanwhile “commerce, careers, studies, the family, love — all are immediately disrupted,” and “the medical system was paralyzed” so that “many sick persons in Hebron were unable to reach hospitals during the curfew and women giving birth could not arrive in time at the clinics” (Yifat Susskind, Israel Shahak, Gideon Levy).

In annexed East Jerusalem, Israel is free to extend its programs to reduce Arab citizens to second-class status. These were devised and implemented by former Mayor Teddy Kollek, much admired here as an outstanding democrat and humanitarian, and are now being extended under his successor, Ehud Olmert of Likud. Their purpose, Kollek’s adviser on Arab affairs Amir Cheshin explained, was “placing difficulties in the way of planning in the Arab sector.” “I don’t want to give [the Arabs] a feeling of equality,” Kollek elaborated, though it would be worthwhile to do so “here and there, where it doesn’t cost us so much”; otherwise “we will suffer.” Kollek’s planning commission advised development for Arabs if it would have “a ‘picture window’ effect,” which “will be seen by a large number of people (residents, tourists, etc.)” Kollek informed the Israeli media in 1990 that for the Arabs, he had “nurtured nothing and built nothing,” apart from a sewage system — which, he hastened to add, was not intended “for their good, for their welfare,” “they” being the Arabs of Jerusalem. Rather, “there were some cases of cholera [in Arab sectors], and the Jews were afraid that they would catch it, so we installed sewage and a water system against cholera.” Under Olmert, treatment of Arabs has become considerably harsher, according to reports from the scene.

The Kollek programs are analyzed by Israeli community planner Sarah Kaminker (a City Council member and city planner in Kollek’s administration) in a June 1994 Report submitted to the High Court on behalf of Arab plaintiffs by the Society of St. Yves, the Catholic Legal Resource Center for Human Rights. In Jewish West Jerusalem, the Report concludes, “there is large-scale illegal construction” which the Municipality does not prevent and retroactively approves. In Arab East Jerusalem, standards are different. There, 86 percent of the land has been made “unavailable for use by Arabs.” The remaining 14 percent “is not vacant land but land that has already been developed”; vacant lands are reserved for development for Jews, or kept as “open landscape views” (often for eventual development for Jews, so it regularly turns out). “The dearth of land zoned for Arab housing is a result of government planning and development policy in East Jerusalem,” where the Kollek administration conducted “a consistent effort since 1974 to limit the land area available to Arabs for licensed construction.” The goal is “demographic balance,”

partially achieved in 1993 when Kollek's Municipality "was able to announce that the number of Jews residing in East Jerusalem had surpassed the number of Arabs."

The government has provided housing in formerly Arab East Jerusalem: 60,000 units for Jews, 555 for Arabs. Arabs whose homes have been demolished for Jewish settlement often "come from the lowest economic strata of their community" and now "live in makeshift hovels, doubled and tripled up with other families, or even in tents and caves." Those who are willing to build their own homes on their own lands are barred by law and subject to demolition if they proceed. The threat is executed, unlike Jewish West Jerusalem, where "the problem of illegal construction...is as serious, if not more so, than that in East Jerusalem." "Demographic balance" is advanced further by discriminatory regulations on building heights, far more limited in Arab than Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. An array of zoning provisions and other legal instruments has been designed to intensify the discrimination between Jews and Arabs, as throughout Israel itself, always using funds provided by the U.S. taxpayer directly or through tax-free donations, always with the approval of admiring U.S. commentators.

With Israel's Jihad for Jerusalem now officially over, such programs can be extended there and beyond. The cantonization of Arab regions and the new stamp of legitimacy for the right of closure should also make it possible to refine the long-term program of inducing the population to go somewhere else, except for those who may find a place in industrial parks handed over to Israeli and Palestinian investors, linked to foreign capital.

During the occupation, the military administration barred independent development. An official order declared that "no permits will be given for expanding agriculture and industry which may compete with the State of Israel," a device familiar from U.S. practice and Western imperialism generally, which typically permitted "complementary development" only. The facts are well-known in Israel. As Oslo II was announced, Ronny Shaked recalled that in the territories Israeli governments "were only interested in calm and cheap manpower. Decisions to develop any infrastructures, to create any industrial or agricultural development, were taken only to promote a specific Israeli interest and were forced on the inhabitants. In Hebron, for example, the Civil Administration refused denied a request to set up a factor for making nails, fearing competition with a factory in Tel Aviv. The health system, on the other hand, was taken care of, because diseases in the West Bank might also endanger residents of Tel Aviv." The Civil Administration was cheap to run, he adds, because its "minuscule" budget was covered by taxes from the local inhabitants. It effectively continues with little change under Oslo II.

Under the Israeli regime, the local population was left with few options beyond exile or employment in Israel under terrible conditions that have been bitterly condemned for years in the Israeli press, largely concealed from those who pay the bills. The only comparative scholarly study concludes that "the situation of noncitizen Arabs in Israel is worse relative to that of non-nationals in other countries" — migrant workers in the United States, "guestworkers" in Europe, etc.

Even these options have now been sharply reduced as Palestinians are being replaced by workers brought in from Thailand, the Philippines, Romania, and other places where people live in misery. Israeli investigative reporters have documented "inhuman" working conditions and treatment, including virtual slavery and "severe sexual harassment," much as in the Gulf principalities and other client states. The curfews and closures in the territories had "devastated the Palestinian economy and destroyed 100,000 families in Gaza alone," journalist Nadav Ha'etzni reported in May 1995, a "trauma" that can only be compared with the mass dispossession and expulsion of

Palestinians in 1948, he added. The situation is likely to deteriorate as imported semi-slave labor displaces the Palestinian workforce from the only employment that had been allowed them. In such ways, “the Oslo Accords have created a truly new Middle East,” Ha’etzni writes.

The rights of Palestinian workers in the “new Middle East” were spelled out in a May 1995 ruling by Justice Y. Bazak of the Jerusalem District court, rejecting a lawsuit brought by the workers’ rights group Kav La’Oved (“Workers’ Hotline,” Tel Aviv). The plaintiffs had requested restitution of \$1 billion withheld from salaries for social benefits that Palestinian workers had never received (pensions, unemployment payments, and so on); the funds ended up in the State treasury. The Court dismissed the case, accepting the government’s argument that Knesset legislation to implement the Oslo I accords retroactively legalized the robbery, thus removing any legal basis for the suit. The Court also accepted the government’s argument that Israel’s National Insurance Law grants rights only to residents of Israel. The deductions were never intended to ensure equal rights for the Palestinian workers, Justice Bazak ruled, but were designed to keep wages for Palestinians high on paper but low in reality, thus protecting Israeli workers from unfair competition by cheap Palestinian labor. This is “a worthy and reasonable purpose which is recognized by the Court,” Justice Bazak explained, “just as the legality of imposing customs taxes is recognized for the purpose of protecting the country’s products...”

One can see why the Israeli judicial system must retain veto power over any legislation that the Palestinian authorities might contemplate; and why American taxpayers must be kept in the dark about the use of the huge subsidies they provide to Israel.

These subsidies, incidentally, are opposed by the public even more than most foreign aid, and are the one component that is immune from the sharp reductions now being instituted in the miserly U.S. program, an international scandal and virtually invisible if Israel and other U.S. Middle East interests are excluded. It includes, for example, 25 of “the most sophisticated fighter-bombers in the world,” the British press reports, a deal that “slid through Congress with no objections by legislators and virtually no comment in the American media.” This is “the first time such high-performance military equipment has been sold unrestricted and unamended abroad since the Second World War” (“sold” means funded by U.S. military aid), a “decisive enhancement of Israel’s military capabilities, giving it the power to strike at potentially dangers nations far beyond its borders: Iran, Iraq, Algeria, and Libya for example.” The U.S. “appears to be reappointing Israel as local deputy sheriff, a role which ended with the disappearance of the communist threat in the Middle East” — which, rhetoric aside, was never the real threat as the extended appointment once again reveals, and has indeed been official conceded.

Though Israel’s barring of development in the territories was well known, its extent came as a surprise even to the most knowledgeable observers when they had an opportunity to visit Jordan after the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty of October 1994. The comparison is particularly apt, Danny Rubinstein observes, since the Palestinian populations are about as numerous on both sides of the Jordan, and the West Bank was somewhat more developed before the Israeli takeover in 1967. Having covered the territories with distinction for years, Rubinstein was well aware that the Israeli administration “had purposely worsened the conditions under which Palestinians in the territories had to live.” Nonetheless, he was shocked and saddened to discover the startling truth.

“Despite Jordan’s unstable economy and its being part of the Third World,” he found, “its rate of development is much higher than that of the West Bank, not to mention Gaza,” administered by a very rich society which benefits from unparalleled foreign aid. While Israel has built roads only for the Jewish settlers, “in Jordan people drive on new, multiple-lane highways, well-equipped

with bridges and intersections.” Factories, commerce, hotels, and universities have been developed in impoverished Jordan, at quite high levels. Virtually nothing similar has been allowed on the West Bank, apart from “two small hotels in Bethlehem.” “All universities in the territories were built solely with private funding and donations from foreign states, without a penny from Israel,” apart from the Islamic University in Hebron, originally supported by Israel as part of its encouragement of Islamic fundamentalism to undermine the secular PLO, now a Hamas center. Health services in the West Bank are “extremely backward” in comparison with Jordan. “Two large buildings in East Jerusalem, intended for hospitals and clinics to serve the residents of the West Bank, which the Jordanians were constructing in 1967, were turned into police buildings by the Israeli government,” which also refused permits for factories in Nablus and Hebron under pressure from Israeli manufacturers who wanted a captive market without competition. “The result is that the backward and poor Jordanian kingdom did much more for the Palestinians who lived in it than Israel,” showing “in an even more glaring form how badly the Israeli occupation had treated them.”

Electricity is available everywhere in Jordan, unlike the West Bank, where the great majority of Arab villages have only local generators that operate irregularly. “The same goes for the water system. In arid Jordan, several large water projects...have turned the eastern bank of the Jordan valley into a dense and blooming agricultural area,” while on the West Bank water supplies have been directed to the use of settlers and Israel itself — about 5/6 of West Bank water, according to Israeli specialists.

As reported by the London Financial Times last summer, “Nothing symbolises the inequality of water consumption more than the fresh green lawns, irrigated flower beds, blooming gardens and swimming pools of Jewish settlements in the West Bank” while nearby Palestinian villages are denied the right to drill wells and have running water one day every few weeks, polluted by sewage, so that men have to drive to towns to fill up containers with water or to hire contractors to deliver it at 15 times the cost. In summer 1995 the Israeli national water company Mekorot cut supplies to the southern and central parts of Gaza for 20 days because people had no money to pay their bills. While a handful of Israeli settlers run luxury hotels with swimming pools for guests and profit from water-intensive agriculture, Palestinians lack water to drink — or, increasingly, even food to eat, as the economy collapses, apart from wealthy Palestinians, who are doing fine, on the standard Third World model.

Individual cases clarify the general picture. For example, the village of Ubaydiya, where 8000 Palestinians were deprived of running water for 18 months while the nearby Jewish settlements are “flourishing in the desert” (though Mekorot did promise to restore service to deter a hearing at the High Court of Justice, with outcome unknown at the time of writing). Or Hebron, where thousands of people had no water from their pipes in August 1995. Journalist Amiram Cohen reports that in “the hot days of summer,” 1995, each Arab of Hebron received less than 1/4 of the water allotment of a resident of the nearby all-Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba.

The radically discriminatory use of water resources should persist under Oslo II, which “continues the old policy of keeping [Palestinians] from thirsting to death,” one analyst in Israel observes, while “not allowing the increases that would be necessary for economic growth.” Water is denied for Arab industry or agriculture, restrictions that do not hold for Jewish settlers. Meanwhile Israel itself will continue to use the waters of the West Bank under its claim of “historic use” since the 1967 occupation. The Oslo II accords provide that “both sides agree to coordinate the management of water and sewage resources and systems in the West Bank during the interim period,”

basically preserving the status quo. Only the waters of the occupied territories are subject to discussion, consistent with the general framework of capitulation.

The Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty has provisions on “achieving a comprehensive and lasting settlement of all the water problems between [Israel and Jordan].” They are outlined by David Brooks of Canada’s International Development Centre, a specialist on water resources of the region and a member of Canada’s delegation to the Middle East Multilateral Peace Talks on water and the environment, who comments that the terms are not “particularly remarkable as water agreements go,” with one exception: “what is omitted, or, more accurately, who is omitted. Not a word is said about water rights for the Palestinians, nor about giving them a role in managing the waters of the Jordan valley.” “Palestinians are not even party to the negotiations,” Brooks observes: “Their omission is staggering given that most of the Lower Jordan River (from Kinneret to the Dead Sea) forms the border between Jordan and what is likely in the near future to be Palestinian, not Israeli, territory.”

His basic point is correct, but the omission becomes less staggering when we depart from the rhetoric about what lies down the road and attend to its factual basis: specifically, to the fact that Israel has always made very clear its intention to retain the Jordan Valley within Greater Israel, so that Palestinian cantons that may some day be called “a state” will be largely cut off from the outside. Effective control over Palestinian enclaves by Jordan and Israel, if that proves to be the outcome, will bring to a natural conclusion the cooperative efforts of Israel and Jordan’s Hashemite monarchy that go back to the post-World War II origins of these states, including the 1948 war.

Neither Jordan nor Israel (nor the pre-state actors) has ever had any use for Palestinian nationalism, though there is a version that the U.S. and Israel do advocate: Palestinian nationalism in the sense made explicit in the official U.S. policy that provided the basis for the peace process initiated at Madrid in 1991. That conception had been spelled out in the Baker plan of December 1989, which identified the Shamir-Peres plan of Israel’s coalition government as the sole “initiative” to be considered in eventual negotiations. The basic principle of the Shamir-Peres-Baker plan was that there can be no “additional Palestinian state in the Gaza district and in the area between Israel and Jordan” — the latter already a “Palestinian state.” The terms of the Shamir-Peres-Baker plan, expressing the consensus of virtually the entire spectrum of U.S.-Israeli politics, are scarcely to be found in the United States (this journal being among the very rare exceptions), and the occasional references involve substantial misrepresentation. The highly efficient suppression of official U.S. policy makes good sense.

The Jordan-Israel Treaty is a component of the “truly new Middle East” that does receive attention in Western commentary, being far more significant than \$1 billion stolen from Palestinians laboring under subhuman conditions or the assignment of crucial Palestinian resources to important partners in the peace process. Its major achievement is the integration of Israel within the U.S.-dominated Middle East system. Long-standing tacit relations among participants are now becoming more overt and efficient, and Israel is taking on its intended role as a military-industrial-technological center for the region (possibly financial center as well). This goal was difficult to achieve as long as the Palestinian issue remained a festering sore, a source of unrest in the Arab world. But Arafat’s acceptance of “the peace of the victors,” in the apparent hope of salvaging some shreds of his waning authority by becoming an agent of the powerful, has helped to suppress the Palestinian issue, at least for the present (there are other factors, including the disintegration of secular Arab nationalism and the disarray of the South generally). One notable

consequence of this success is “the real peace dividend for Israel,” as the Wall Street Journal describes the fact that “the barriers are now down in the fastest-growing markets in the world, which are in the Far East, not the Middle East.” The Middle East is already pretty much in Washington’s pocket, but for a U.S. outpost to position itself in the contested Asia-Pacific region is a useful further accomplishment.

These consequences of the Oslo peace process are reflected in the rapidly rising level of foreign investment in Israel, which is increasingly seen as “the fulcrum of economic development in the region” (Lord Sterling, chairman of a major U.K. shipping company). “Israel will look back on 1995 as the year when international finance and business discovered its thriving economy,” the Financial Times observed — “thriving” in the usual manner of “economic miracles,” mimicking its patron by achieving unusually high rates of inequality and dismantling social services.

Another important component of the “peace of the victors” is the end of even a gesture towards Palestinian refugees. The Oslo settlement effectively abolishes their “right of return,” endorsed unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 1948 as the most direct application of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted the previous day, and reiterated regularly since. Immediately after Oslo I, in another “visionary” pronouncement, Rabin had dashed any hopes that refugees might return to the areas of Palestinian autonomy (let alone anywhere else). That is “nonsense,” he explained: “If they expect tens of thousands, they live in a dream, an illusion.” Perhaps some “increased family reunification,” nothing more. While the Clinton Administration offered \$100 million to the PA, mostly for security forces (in contrast to \$3 billion to Israel, perhaps twice that if we add other devices), it cut by \$17 million the U.S. contribution to UNRWA, the largest single employer in the Gaza Strip and responsible for 40 percent of its health and education services as well as for Palestinian refugees elsewhere. Washington may be planning to terminate UNRWA, which “Israel has historically loathed,” Graham Usher observed. Breaking with earlier policies, the Clinton Administration voted against all General Assembly Resolutions pertaining to Palestinian refugees in 1993 and 1994, on the grounds that they “prejudge the outcome of the ongoing peace process and should be solved by direct negotiations,” now safely in the hands of the U.S. and its clients. As a step towards dismantling UNRWA, its headquarters are to be moved to Gaza, which should effectively terminate international support for the 1.8 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The next step may be to defund it completely, UN sources report.

“A Day of Awe”

The signing of Oslo II and the Rabin assassination received enormous attention and coverage. Typical headlines after the signing give the flavor. “Israel agrees to quit West Bank.” “Israel Ends Jews’ Biblical Claim on the West Bank” in “Rabin’s historic trade with Arabs,” a “historic compromise.” “Israelis, Palestinians find a painful peace,” establishing an “undeniable reality: The Palestinians are on their way to an independent state; the Jews are bidding farewell to portions of the Holy Land to which they have historically felt most linked.” “Score One for Clinton.” “At White House, symbols of a Day of Awe.”

Editorials added that “the latest Israeli-Palestinian accord is a big one, making the historic move toward accommodation of the two peoples all but irreversible.” A Reuters chronology published here and abroad identified the Day of Awe, September 28, as the day on which “Israel and

the PLO sign agreement extending Palestinian rule to most of West Bank.” The New York Times lead story after the assassination reported that Rabin had “conquered the ancient lands on the West Bank of the Jordan” and then “negotiated the accord to eventually cede Israeli control of them to the Palestinians.” The major Times think piece on Rabin focused on the “evolution” in his thinking that was “taking place before your eyes,” as “his language underwent a remarkable transformation and so did his ideas about peace with the Palestinians”; “it was astonishing how far he had roamed from where he stood in 1992.” The former Jerusalem bureau chief of the Washington Post reported that “when Rabin offered Israelis the possibility of ‘separation’ — of walling off the Gaza Strip and West Bank and getting Palestinians out of sight and out of mind — the majority responded with enthusiasm.” “Those who murdered Rabin, and those who incited them, didn’t do so because they opposed plans to create a Palestinian Bantustan,” the New Statesman correspondent reported from Jerusalem, chiding Edward Said for thinking otherwise. “No: they knew that the course Rabin was charting would lead, unless stopped, to a Palestinian state.”

That’s a fair sample

One intriguing feature is that the factual assertions are not even close to true. Israel did not “agree to quit West Bank” or “End Jews’ Biblical Claim on the West Bank.” It signed no “agreement extending Palestinian rule to most of West Bank” or “to eventually cede Israeli control of West Bank lands to the Palestinians.” Rabin never so much as hinted at an offer “of walling off the Gaza Strip and West Bank”; quite the contrary, he was adamant, clear, and consistent in stressing that nothing of the sort was even a remote possibility. And although Rabin’s “ideas about peace” had indeed “roamed far” from 1992, it was not quite in the direction indicated: in 1992, as in 1988 and before, Rabin was advocating the traditional Labor Party stand that Israel should keep about 40 percent of the occupied territories, not the far greater proportion he accepted on the Day of Awe.

As for what is “undeniable” and “irreversible,” readers can make their own guesses, recognizing that these are speculations lacking any serious factual basis. Those who “know” that Rabin’s course would lead to an authentic Palestinian state, not “a Palestinian Bantustan,” might want to explain why they dismiss out of hand not all relevant facts, but also the explicit statements of the leadership, not only Rabin, but also Shimon Peres, even more of a “visionary dove” than Rabin. Explaining the Oslo II accords to a gathering of Ambassadors in Jerusalem, Peres responded to the question whether the permanent settlement could involve a Palestinian state by making it crystal clear that “this solution about which everyone is thinking and which is what you want will never happen.” Two weeks before, journalist Amnon Barzilai reports further in Ha’aretz, Peres responded with a “resounding ‘No’ when asked at a meeting with the editorial board of Newsweek whether a Palestinian state might be the eventual outcome. He proceeded with a “learned explanation,” which, however, was never completed, because the verdict in the O.J. Simpson trial was just then broadcast so that the meeting had to stop, and afterwards the Newsweek editors were “too excited about the verdict” to return to his thoughts.

Part of the standard story is indeed true. We should “Score One for Clinton” and observe what happened with Awe. The scale of the victory can only be appreciated by reviewing the history, almost totally suppressed in the U.S. — and, quite interestingly, by now largely forgotten abroad, not only in Europe but in Latin America and elsewhere. The facts are not in dispute, and need not

be reviewed here once again. In brief, from 1967 to 1971 the U.S. led the international consensus in support of a diplomatic settlement based on UN 242, which it understood as implying full peace in return for full Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 (with perhaps minor and mutual modifications). When President Sadat of Egypt accepted these terms in February 1971 in what Rabin describes in his memoirs as a “famous...milestone” on the road to peace, the U.S. had to decide whether to keep to the policy it had crafted or join its Israeli ally in rejecting it. Kissinger insisted on “stalemate” — no negotiations, only force — and won out in the internal conflict, setting the U.S. on a lonely path as leader of the rejectionist camp, not only ignoring Palestinian rights (as did UN 242 and Sadat’s offer as well) but also rejecting one of the two paired requirements of UN 242: Israeli withdrawal. U.S. isolation deepened a few years later as the international consensus shifted to support for a two-state settlement incorporating the wording of UN 242, compelling Washington to veto Security Council resolutions, vote alone annually at the General Assembly (with Israel, and occasionally some other client state), and block all other diplomatic initiatives, a task that became increasingly complex from the early 1980s as the PLO more forcefully called for negotiations leading to mutual accommodation, but was handled with ease, thanks to the services of the intellectual community.

It was not until the Gulf War established that “What We Say Goes,” in George Bush’s words, that the U.S. was able to initiate the Madrid negotiations, an authentic “peace process” because it was unilaterally run by Washington and restricted to its extremist agenda. The establishment of Washington’s rejectionist stand in Oslo I, and its affirmation in Oslo II, is an impressive achievement.

The character of the triumph is revealed in a different way when we compare the reaction to the Rabin assassination with other cases, the most obvious one being the assassination of Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir) by Israeli commandos in Tunis in April 1988. This act of international terrorism was probably intended mostly for morale-building in Israel at the height of the popular uprising (Intifada), which Israel was then unable to suppress, despite considerable brutality. On little credible evidence, Abu Jihad was charged with directing the Intifada, a claim reported as fact in the U.S. media, which did, however, recognize that Abu Jihad was known “as one of the more moderate and thoughtful officials in the PLO hierarchy” (Washington Post). The Post also reported that “many Israelis celebrated his killing as evidence of Israel’s willingness and ability to strike back at alleged terrorist leaders” and that the assassination evoked “widespread applause from Israelis, ranging from the liberal left to the far right.” The State Department condemned “this act of political assassination,” but that was the end of the matter. There were no regrets, flags at half mast, laments about the fate of the peace process, or other moving commentary. Abu Jihad was not a “martyr for peace.”

Why not? One possible reason is that he was a terrorist; true, but plainly irrelevant. His terrorist career, while bloody enough, did not even bring him close to those honored as “men of peace,” including Rabin and Peres, or still more obviously, the statesmen who praise them. Another possible reason is that he opposed the “peace process.” That too is true, at least in a technical sense. He did oppose U.S.-Israeli rejectionism, joining most of the rest of the world in advocating a two-state settlement to be achieved by negotiations leading to mutual recognition. If we adopt the usage of doctrinal convention, he opposed “the peace process,” insisting on something other than a peace of the victors in which the Palestinians become “just another crushed nation.”

Adopting the technical usage, we can make sense of the weird comments of Dennis Ross, chief Middle East negotiator for the Bush and Clinton Administrations, reported by Times Middle East

specialist Elaine Sciolino. Ross describes how in March 1993 Rabin presented Clinton with a “brilliant, cogent, clear-cut argument” explaining “exactly why the delegates then negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians would not be able to deliver” — to deliver a non-rejectionist settlement recognizing the rights of the indigenous population alongside of Israel, Sciolino refrains from adding. But the PLO refused to accept Rabin’s brilliant argument: “at that point they hadn’t demonstrated they were prepared to make peace,” Ross “recalled”; Sciolino’s term “recalled” implies that the recollection is accurate (one doesn’t “recall” what didn’t happen), as indeed it is, if “making peace” means accepting U.S.-Israeli terms, rejecting UN 242 and any thought of self-determination. When we adopt the conventions, Ross’s statement is transformed from gibberish to simple truth, and Sciolino is not misleading her readers by reporting all of this as factually accurate. A little confusing perhaps, but with a proper education it all works out.

We might ask what the authentic martyr for peace was up to when Abu Jihad was assassinated — at Rabin’s “enthusiastic” initiative, Times correspondent John Kifner reported from Jerusalem. Then Defense Minister, Rabin had ordered his troops to suppress the Intifada by brutality and terror, and shortly after, to attack villages using plastic bullets, because “more casualties...is precisely our aim,” “our purpose is to increase the number of (wounded) among those who take part in violent activities.” Their “violent activities” are to dare to assert that they are free, Rabin explained: “We want to get rid of the illusion of some people in remote villages that they have liberated themselves,” and by military attacks that produce “more casualties,” we “make it clear to them where they live and within which framework,” teaching familiar lessons in Western Civ. Shortly after, when the U.S. was driven to a “dialogue” with the PLO in a last-ditch effort to derail their increasingly irritating calls for negotiations leading to mutual recognition, Rabin assured a delegation of Peace Now leaders that the dialogue was of no significance, merely a delaying action intended to grant Israel at least a year to suppress the Intifada by “harsh military and economic pressure” — exactly what happened, allowing the “peace process” to resume on course.

Plainly, Rabin is a martyr for peace and Abu Jihad a terrorist who deserved his fate.

We might also ask what Washington’s men of peace were doing at that crucial moment in 1988 when the U.S. and Israel were desperately trying to fend off the growing threat of diplomatic settlement. The leading figure among them was surely George Shultz, untainted by Reaganite scandal. Just before Abu Jihad was assassinated, Shultz was pursuing his “peace mission” in Jordan, where he “explained his understanding of the aspirations of Palestinians,” Elaine Sciolino reported, offering the example of the United States, where he is a Californian and George Bush a Texan, but they have no problem living in harmony. Palestinian aspirations can be handled in the same civilized way, under whatever arrangements U.S.-Israeli power dictate; blandly reported, plainly uncontroversial.

Shultz’s understanding of the adversary’s aspirations has echoes elsewhere, as recent news reminds us. A week before Rabin’s assassination, Fathi Shiqaqi, head of Islamic Jihad, was shot in the back and killed in Malta, “probably by Israeli agents,” the Times reported. As in the case of Abu Jihad, Israel did not take responsibility, though the press did so with “huge headlines,” Israeli correspondent Haim Baram reports, extolling “the long arm of Israel” and “the night of revenge,” while articles praised the murder and warned that “Israel will punish whoever is responsible for the killing of Jews,” and “both Rabin and Peres hinted gleefully that Mossad was involved.” Peres commented that “Islamic Jihad are killers, so it’s one less killer” — true enough, though again

one might observe that Peres's own achievements put them well in the shade, not to speak of George Shultz.

Shiqaqi's position on peace was the mirror image of Shultz's. Shiqaqi probably understood the "aspirations of Israelis" in the Shultz style, and would have accepted an outcome in which Jews lived submissively under Palestinian rule. On non-racist assumptions, then, either both Shultz and Shiqaqi are men of peace, or both are murderous terrorists who deserve the fate that only one has suffered. Fortunately, such assumptions are unthinkable, so we need not pursue the exercise.

While Abu Jihad and (obviously) Fathi Shiqaqi do not enter the Pantheon, some Arabs do. When Rabin was assassinated, alongside the front-page story in the Boston Globe reporting that "peace has claimed another victim," the adjacent column recalled the assassination of Anwar Sadat — who qualifies as a peacemaker not because of his acceptance of a full peace treaty with Israel in terms of official U.S. policy in 1971, a "famous milestone" banned from history, but because of his visit to Jerusalem in 1977, opening the way to the Camp David settlement, admissible because it kept to Washington's rejectionist demands.

Power and Propaganda

The phrase "Day of Awe" is not out of place. The U.S. has carried out a very impressive power play. The events are a remarkable testimony to the rule of force in international affairs and the power of doctrinal management in a sociocultural setting in which successful marketing is the highest value and the intellectual culture is obedient and unquestioning. The victory is not only apparent in the terms of Oslo I and II and the facts on the ground, but also in the demolition of unacceptable history, the easy acceptance of the most transparent falsehoods, and the state of international opinion, now so submissive on this issue that commentators and analysts have literally forgotten the positions they and their governments advocated only a few years ago, and can even see that "Israel agrees to quit West Bank" when they know perfectly well that nothing of the sort is true. That is really impressive, and instructive.

The most important aspect of any doctrinal system is the way issues are framed and presented, the presuppositions that are insinuated to bound discussion, remaining invisible, beyond reflection or analysis. In the old Soviet Union, the game was over if the question under debate was whether the Kremlin had made a mistake in its defense of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan; or in Nazi Germany, if the issue was whether the threat of the Jews to civilization had been exaggerated. In the present case, what is important is the conquest of the notion "peace process," which must be deprived of its meaning and restricted to a technical usage that ensures that the game is over before it begins. That has been done, very effectively, not by the exercise of any particular skill, but by sheer power. It is by now unimaginable that the term "peace process" would refer to the effort to achieve peace.

To be sure, that concept of "peace process" is too broad. Everyone wants peace, even Hitler and Genghis Khan. The question always is: On what terms? Under whose direction? In our highly disciplined intellectual culture, the answer to those questions is a virtual reflex: On Washington's terms, and under its direction.

The conventions have useful consequences. One is that the phrase "the U.S. government is trying to advance the peace process" is true by definition, whatever Washington happens to be doing — say, undermining diplomatic efforts to achieve peace. And the phrase "the U.S. govern-

ment is trying to undermine the peace process” is meaningless, unthinkable, even if plainly true, as it often is, dramatically so in the present case for 25 years.

Though there is no space to review the matter here, the lead domestic story (the budget) reflects a similar achievement of the doctrinal institutions. The only issue is how long it should take to balance the budget, 7 years or a bit longer. There are other possible questions. Is that what the population wants? Demonstrably not, by very large margins. Does the plan make sense? It surely does for some sectors, those that hope to maintain a powerful nanny state for the rich while the majority “learn responsibility” under rigorous market discipline, enforced by the unaccountable private tyrannies that are to rule untroubled by unruly noises from below. But does it make sense for the health of the economy, understood in terms that have to do with human interests and concerns, even economic growth? That is hardly obvious, to put it mildly. But no such questions arise once we have restricted debate to a spectrum bounded at one extreme by statist reactionaries of the Gingrich variety, and at the other by the President, who tells us: “Let’s be clear: of course — of course — we need to balance the budget,” though not quite as fast as those a few millimeters to the right would like, while “centrists” like Paul Tsongas and Bill Bradley seek a more “moderate” course between the extremists of left and right. And if Americans think they oppose budget balancing under any realistic conditions, they can be reassured that they are wrong about their beliefs by tuning in to the ultraliberal media, for example, National Public Radio, where co-host Robert Siegel of “All Things Considered” assures them that “Americans voted for a balanced budget,” detailing the cuts in social spending pursuant to the public will (and irrelevantly, over its overwhelming opposition, during the election and since, at least if opinion polls are anywhere near accurate).

In case after case, that is just what we find. Open discussion is a fine thing, as great as democracy itself, if only it is kept within the bounds that support power and privilege. It’s about as close to a true historical generalization as one can find that respectability is won by adhering to these fundamental principles, and that rending these chains is a first step towards freedom and justice.

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Noam Chomsky
A Painful Peace
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