

Middle East Diplomacy: Continuities and Changes

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On October 30, the US-brokered conference on the Middle East opened in Madrid. The conference was described on all sides as a “historic event,” a remarkable achievement of George Bush’s diplomacy and the tenacity of his Secretary of State James Baker in exploiting the “historic window of opportunity” opened by changes in the world order. These observations are not unrealistic, when understood within their historical and policy context — a question of perspective and judgment, of course. I will review the way these matters look to me, contrasting that picture with a different one that dominates public discussion.

Three related questions arise at once about the current diplomatic efforts: First, why are they taking place right now? Second, do they signify a departure from the traditional US stand? Third, what is the meaning of the disputes between the US and Israel?

The answer to the first question is clear enough. The Bush administration desperately needs a foreign policy success to obscure the outcome of its war in the Gulf: hundreds of thousands killed and the toll mounting as a long-term consequence of the devastating attack on the civilian society; the Gulf tyrannies safeguarded from any democratic pressures; Saddam Hussein firmly in power, having demolished popular rebellions with tacit US support. US government interests and goals are hardly concealed. Washington seeks “the best of all worlds,” New York Times chief diplomatic correspondent Thomas Friedman explains: “an iron-fisted Iraqi junta without Saddam Hussein,” a return to the days when Saddam’s “iron fist held Iraq together, much to the satisfaction of the American allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia,” along with the Reagan-Bush administrations, which gave unwavering support to their murderous ally. These images, however, cannot be left in the public memory in the United States or elsewhere. The reality can be effaced by what the press describes as the “remarkable tableau” in Madrid, with its promise of a “sweet victory” built on the ruins of the Gulf slaughter.¹

Furthermore, the Arab clients who lined up in the US war must be helped to maintain some credibility. This requires gestures to suggest that the US-led crusade aimed at something more than merely reinforcing US dominance over the oil-producing regions, with the family dictatorships of the Gulf playing their traditional role as an “Arab Facade,” in the words of British imperialists of earlier days.

It is also necessary to divert the attention of the American public from the social and economic crisis resulting from Reagan-Bush domestic programs. Under such conditions, any powerful state would seek diversionary foreign policy exploits.

The second question is also readily answered: the available evidence reveals no departure from the traditional US stance on a Middle East settlement. In fact, another reason for the current diplomatic efforts is that the US monopoly of violence now offers a “historic window of opportunity” to advance traditional US goals.

The urgency of the current Bush-Baker diplomacy is understandable. Not surprisingly, Washington refused to permit the Madrid conference to be derailed by the intransigence of Israeli hawks, even at the cost of a confrontation with the government of Israel and its domestic lobby.

That brings us to the third question, the Bush-Shamir conflict. Though real, it is narrowly circumscribed. There is no fundamental disagreement about the denial of Palestinian rights or US support for measures to extend Israeli control over the territories, just as both governments agree that Soviet Jews should be denied freedom of choice and directed to Israel, with the US paying the bill on humanitarian pretexts. Not an eyebrow is raised when the Jewish Agency meets in

¹ Friedman, NYT, July 7; R. W. Apple, NYT, Oct. 30, 1991.

Jerusalem to demand that Jewish organizations “unite to sabotage” any efforts to open US doors to Soviet Jews, while in the Israeli press, Minister of Immigration and Absorption Michael Kleiner explains how he will induce Germany to reverse its decision to admit Soviet Jews but no other refugees: “Germany has already fulfilled its quota for discrimination concerning Jews in this century,” Kleiner will inform these German criminals, “and the time has come for it to treat Jews just like other people” — denying entry to Jewish refugees, so that they can be forced to Israel.² The cynicism of the enterprise will surprise only those unfamiliar with the vastly more shameful practices of the 1940s, well into the post-Holocaust years when the miserable remnants of the extermination camps were treated in much the same way.

The Bush-Shamir conflict arose over the timing of US guarantees for loans — which may eventually turn into grants — for the theoretical purpose of absorbing Soviet immigrants, though in fact they will be used to expand settlement in the occupied territories, whatever formalism is adopted. Huge sums are being “spilled like water” into the territories by the Israeli government for “ordinary and deluxe settlements,” including elegant subsidized villas for privileged settlers, the Israeli press reports, diverting the funds that Israel has available to absorb Soviet immigrants (thanks to US largesse). And while “Jewish immigration from the USSR may be a great accomplishment in Zionist or Jewish terms, there is nothing humanitarian about it.... The humanitarianism is one of the lies the two states have agreed upon,” in full knowledge that “the Jews of the USSR are now better off than any other ethnic group in that country,” protected by foreign powers, able to leave if they wish, permitted to obtain foreign currency from abroad, and so on — surely far better off than the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and others fleeing torture and harsh repression in Kuwait, most of them crowding into impoverished Jordan, or numerous other examples that readily come to mind. Israel’s 1992 budget calls for up to \$2 billion for expanding settlement in the territories, an amount “equivalent to one year’s installment of the loan guarantees that Israel wants from the United States,” the New York Times reports, hence an amount that Israel can take from other sources if these funds are assured by US “humanitarian” assistance.³

An official US decision to provide financial support for these projects would have made it very difficult for the US Arab allies to attend the Madrid conference; a few months down the road, it is assumed, the matter can be handled without too much fanfare. Ariel Sharon and other Israeli extremists were unwilling to accept even a temporary delay in their ambitious settlement project, and were also intent on undermining the US-run negotiations, which might interfere with their annexationist plans. That is one reason why “official Israel was dead silent” about the August coup attempt in the Soviet Union, while “some influential Israelis found it advisable to extend to the conspirators their joyous greetings and good advice,” possibly including Shamir’s expert advisers, the Israeli press reported, noting that a successful coup in the USSR might have undermined the unwanted Madrid conference.⁴ After the Soviet coup, the US propaganda system produced the required gestures of outrage about the alleged support for the coup or vacillation about it on the part of assorted official enemies, while keeping “dead silent” about unwanted realities, the usual pattern when atrocities and crimes afford an opportunity for service to power.

² Yotam Navin, *Yediot Ahronot*, Oct. 1, 1991; see my article in *Z* magazine, October 1991.

³ Editorial, *Ha’aretz*, Sept. 2; Yossi Sarid, *Yediot Ahronot*, Sept. 15; Nahum Barnea, *Yediot Ahronot*, Sept. 13; Jackson Diehl, *Washington Post — Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Sept. 29; Clyde Haberman, *NYT*, Sept. 21, 1991. See also Ehud Sprinzak, *WP Weekly*, Sept. 23, 1991.

⁴ Sever Plotzker, *Yediot Ahronot*, Aug. 25, 1991.

The Bush-Shamir dispute goes beyond the timing of US financial support for Israeli settlement plans. There are real disagreements between Washington and the current Israeli government, serious and long-standing ones. But they concern the modalities of rejectionism, not its essence, a matter that merits a closer examination, to which we return.

To clarify what follows, by the term “rejectionism” I mean the rejection of the right to national self-determination on the part of *one or the other* of the contending parties in the former Palestine. This is distinct from US usage, which restricts the term to those who reject the rights of Israeli Jews, denial of the right of self-determination of the indigenous inhabitants being considered proper and natural.

The standard usage reflects the limits of US discussion, largely restricted to support for some version of Israeli rejectionism. At one extreme, we find those who suggest that Palestinians deserve nothing, like all of those who stand in the way of civilization. Others, like Times chief diplomatic correspondent and Middle East specialist Thomas Friedman, take a more forthcoming approach, because “only if you give the Palestinians something to lose is there a hope that they will agree to moderate their demands,” abandoning the ludicrous hope for mutual recognition in a two-state settlement — a “demand” that Friedman refused to report and consistently denied while producing the “balanced and informed coverage” for which he received the Pulitzer prize. “I believe that as soon as Ahmed has a seat in the bus, he will limit his demands,” Friedman added, adopting the racist rhetoric used as a matter of course when dealing with the lower orders. He advised Israel to run the territories on the model of South Lebanon, controlled by Israeli troops and a terrorist surrogate army, with a hideous torture chamber in Khiam where hundreds are held hostage to ensure that the population will submit, Israeli administration of the flow and profits of heroin from the second largest drug production area in Lebanon (the most productive being the Bekaa valley, run by Bush’s other friend, Hafez el-Assad of Syria), and regular bombardment beyond the borders to prevent resistance — called “terrorism,” a term that extends to attacks on drug cultivators protected by the Israeli army and its clients.⁵

At the time of the US-Israel confrontation, it took scarcely more than a raised eyebrow from the President for the Israeli lobby to collapse, while major journals that rarely veer from the Israeli Party line took the cue and began to run articles critical of Israeli practices and hinting that US support for them was not inevitable. That should also occasion little surprise. Domestic pressure groups tend to be ineffectual unless they line up with significant elements of state-corporate power, or have reached a scale and intensity that compels moves to accommodate them. When AIPAC lobbies for policies that the state executive and major sectors of corporate America intend to pursue, it is influential; when it confronts authentic power, largely unified, it fades very quickly.

The essential issues just reviewed are more or less recognized within the doctrinal system, though they are presented more obliquely. It is no great secret that alleged “foreign policy triumphs,” quickly removed from view to obscure what has actually taken place, can help to divert the public from domestic crises, along with racist and jingoist appeals, manufacture of awesome foreign and internal enemies, and other familiar devices of population control. The utility of the Madrid conference in obscuring Gulf realities is outlined by New York Times diplomatic correspondent R. W. Apple in the column already quoted, as the conference opened: “Critics have suggested that the United States achieved far too little in the war, because Saddam Hussein was

⁵ Friedman, Yediot Ahronot, April 7, 1988; Hotam, April 15, 1988. Shlomo Frankel, Al-Hamishmar, July 14, 1991.

not overthrown, Iran remained as hostile and Kuwait as undemocratic as ever, and Saudi Arabia shed neither its isolation nor its archaic ways.” But the “remarkable tableau” in Madrid revealed “that a very great deal had changed,” thanks to the “diplomatic skills” of James Baker and the Gulf triumph. Thus “George Bush and the United States today plucked the fruits of victory in the Persian Gulf war, but it is still much too early to predict how sweet they will be.”

To rephrase in more accurate terms, by limiting the options in the Gulf to violence, its strong card, Washington was able to determine the basic contours of what happened. It barred any challenge to the “iron fist” in the client states. It continues to torture the Iraqi people exactly as planned in the attack on the civilian infrastructure, which had no relation to the military conflict — this was not a long war against Nazi Germany — but did lay the basis for postwar US policies, including the current policy of holding the population hostage to induce some tolerable duplicate of Saddam Hussein to restore “the best of all worlds.” Iraq aside, the US also intends to exploit the opportunity to teach valuable lessons to others who might have odd ideas about disobeying US orders, another standard policy; thus in mid-October, Washington once again blocked European and Japanese efforts to call off the embargo that the US imposed on Vietnam 16 years ago after direct conquest failed.⁶ Those who do not follow the rules must be severely punished, indefinitely, and others must learn these lessons — though the lessons must remain invisible to the American public, who are to be regaled with tales about the nobility of our aspirations and the grand achievements of our leaders.

Crucially, the American public must not be allowed to perceive that the outcome in the Gulf reveals the priorities of the state that held all the cards, the state that could accurately proclaim that “What we say goes,” in the President’s words. The consequences of Washington’s decisions must therefore be construed as a failure to achieve our noble goals, now to be compensated by Washington’s diplomatic triumphs.

The US Versus the Peace Process

Let us turn to the second question raised at the outset, and examine whether it is indeed correct to stress the continuity of US goals and policies.

For many years, the US has stood virtually alone in opposition to international efforts to initiate a “peace process” on the Middle East. The UN record brings out the issues with considerable clarity. The Security Council was eliminated as a forum years ago, thanks to the US veto. At its annual winter meetings, the General Assembly regularly passes resolutions calling for a conference on the Arab-Israel crisis, most recently, in December 1990 (144–2, US and Israel in opposition). In December 1989, the vote was 151–3, Dominica joining the two rejectionist states; a year earlier, 138–2; and so on. US international isolation dates to February 1971 — coincidentally, the very month when George Bush achieved national prominence as UN Ambassador. The US has also barred other initiatives. Given US power, its opposition amounts to a veto. Accordingly, there has been no international effort to deal with the conflict. The peace process has been effectively deterred.

Again, the matter is described differently within the ideological system; in this case, just about universally, including scholarship. We read constantly that the Middle East is “littered

⁶ Mary Kay Magistad, *Boston Globe*, Oct. 20, 1991.

with American peace plans” (editorial, Boston Globe),⁷ and that US efforts have continually run aground because of the fanaticism and irrationality of Middle East extremists. Such descriptions are accurate, if we bear in mind the literary conventions: the term “peace process” is restricted to US government initiatives, including moves to bar attempts to achieve peace. It then follows as a matter of logic that the US is always advancing the peace process, and if internationally isolated, as in this case, it is alone in this endeavor. Efforts that the uninstructed might misconstrue as “the peace process” are really attempts to obstruct peace, that is, to interfere with US plans. It is really quite simple, once the norms of political correctness are understood.

Departing from these norms, one should have no difficulty in understanding the traditional US opposition to the peace process. The UN resolutions call for an *international* conference, and the US brooks no interference in what President Eisenhower described as the most “strategically important area in the world,” with its enormous energy reserves. This is US turf: no independent force is allowed, foreign or indigenous. As Henry Kissinger explained in a private communication, one of his major policy goals was “to ensure that the Europeans and Japanese did not get involved in the diplomacy” concerning the Middle East, a goal achieved at Camp David in 1978, and again in the current diplomacy — that is, in the two cases that qualify as steps in the “peace process” in US rhetoric. Furthermore, UN and other initiatives endorse a Palestinian right of self-determination, which would entail Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. While there has been an elite policy split over the matter, the prevailing judgment for the past 20 years has been that enhancement of Israeli power contributes to US domination of the region. For these reasons, the US has always blocked attempts at diplomatic resolution, apart from its own rejectionist initiatives.

It should be noted that the US opposition to diplomacy is not unusual. Southeast Asian and Central American conflicts provide examples familiar to those who have escaped the doctrinal system. The same has been true, quite often, of disarmament and many other issues, and US isolation at the UN extends far beyond the Middle East. These are natural concomitants of the role of global enforcer, committed to policies with little appeal to targeted populations but with ample force at the ready.

The basic terms of the international consensus on the Arab-Israel conflict were expressed in a resolution brought to the Security Council in January 1976, calling for a settlement on the pre-June 1967 borders (the Green Line) with “appropriate arrangements...to guarantee...the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all states in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries,” including Israel and a new Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The resolution was backed by Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and the PLO — in fact “prepared” by the PLO according to Israel’s UN Ambassador Haim Herzog, now President. It was strenuously opposed by Israel and vetoed by the United States, once again in 1980.

These events are — automatically — out of history, along with other facts unacceptable to US power, including repeated PLO initiatives through the 1980s calling for negotiations with Israel leading to mutual recognition. The facts have been distorted beyond recognition, often barred outright, particularly by the New York Times. Its Pulitzer prize-winning correspondent Thomas Friedman has shown particular dedication to the task, an achievement appreciated by the journal, which promoted him to chief diplomatic correspondent in recognition of his accomplishments.

⁷ BG, Oct. 20, 1991.

It is an interesting case, because he knows enough to understand exactly what he is doing. This stellar performance permits Friedman to spin wondrous tales about “the birth of a new pragmatism among the Palestinians” from the late 1980s, now raised “another important notch” through Baker’s benign influence at Madrid. Until Madrid, Friedman continues, “both sides have hidden behind [the] argument...that there is no one on the other side with whom to negotiate” — Timespeak for the fact that the PLO has for years been calling on Israel to negotiate, but the US and Israel refuse, claiming there is no one with whom to negotiate, while Friedman loyally reports as truths the US-Israel propaganda which he knows perfectly well to be pure fabrication. The Palestinians admitted by the US to the Madrid conference called “explicitly for a two-state solution,” Friedman writes admiringly — so different from the despised PLO, which supported (or perhaps “prepared”) the UN resolution calling for a two-state solution 15 years ago.⁸

The meaning of these shenanigans — one of the more impressive achievements of modern propaganda — is that the State Department and its spokesman believe that US-Israeli violence may at last have succeeded in bringing the Palestinians to heel. In the preferred rhetoric, the great achievement of Madrid was “the Palestinian self-adjustment to the real world,” Palestinian acceptance of “a period of autonomy under continued Israeli domination,” during which Israel can build the facts of its permanent domination with US aid. This willingness to follow US orders — the real world — has “tossed the negative stereotypes out the window,” Times journalist Clyde Haberman observes approvingly. The “autonomy” offered at Madrid had been described two weeks earlier in Ha’aretz by Danny Rubinstein, one of the most acute observers of the occupied territories for many years: it is “autonomy as in a prisoner-of-war camp, where the prisoners autonomous’ to cook their meals without interference and to organize cultural events.”⁹

The most outspoken critic of US Middle East policy, Anthony Lewis, offered a new proof of the brilliance of Bush-Baker diplomacy. Their “singular achievement” at Madrid “was quickly measured” by an election in Gaza in which moderates won a resounding victory over the fundamentalist extremists, sending “the message that Palestinians are ready to negotiate.” This message is “of profound significance to Israelis,” Lewis continues, telling the many doubters “that there are reasonable Palestinians, people ready to make peace, people not so different from themselves.” In the past, “the ordinary Palestinians, with familiar aspirations for a decent life and a national identity, were drowned out by Palestinian terrorists,” and “the Palestinian political leadership” was “reluctant to say plainly that it was ready to live in peace alongside of Israel.” But now the dread PLO is no longer feared and the moderates can raise their heads, as shown by the Gaza elections in which the PLO won 13 of 16 seats contested.¹⁰

The internal contradiction is easily resolved. We need only recall the real world, in which the PLO had been calling for negotiations and a peaceful settlement with Israel for many years, while the US and Israel never countered with any “reasonable people ready to make peace,” just as they do not today, and Israel supported the fundamentalist extremists in its efforts to fend off the PLO moderation that it has always feared. But that solution is unacceptable. In a well-run ideological system, internal contradiction is far preferable to politically incorrect reality.

Over the years, the US has continued to implement its rejectionist program without interference from meddling outsiders. The current circumstances afford an opportunity to carry the

⁸ Friedman, NYT, Nov. 4, 1991. On Friedman’s intriguing record, see my *Necessary Illusions* (South End, 1989), particularly appendix 5, sec. 4.

⁹ Haberman, NYT, Nov. 10; Rubinstein, Ha’aretz, Oct. 24, 1991.

¹⁰ Lewis, NYT, Nov. 8, 1991.

process further, with a diplomatic process run solely by the United States in accord with the principle that “What we say goes.” Gorbachev’s presence at Madrid was intended to provide a thin disguise for unilateral US control; in reality, he is acceptable as the powerless leader of a country that scarcely exists. The “peace process” is structured in accordance with US intentions. Palestinians are not permitted to select their own representatives, and those who pass US-Israel inspection are part of a Jordanian delegation. The US alone dictates the terms. I will turn to details and background directly, but the basic facts are surely clear enough.

The standard picture is, again, rather different. Few have been so critical of US Middle East policy as New York Times correspondent Anthony Lewis, who lauds the President for having had “the vision and the courage to commit himself to this conference,” in which “Israel will meet face-to-face with each of its Arab neighbors — and with representative Palestinians” — namely, those acceptable to the US and Israel, whatever Palestinians might prefer. Diplomatic correspondent R. W. Apple expands in a typical paean to our leader’s “vision of the future” as he made use of “the historic window of opportunity.” He identifies two factors that have made it possible for Bush “to dream such great dreams” about Israel-Arab peace: First, there is now no fear that “regional tensions” might lead to superpower confrontation; Second, “no longer must the United States contend with countries whose cantankerousness was reinforced by Moscow’s interest in continuing unrest.”¹¹

Both of Apple’s points are correct, though translation is again required. The truth that lies behind his first point is that the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the world scene has made it easier for the US to resort to force to gain its ends, a fact that has led to fear and desperation among the traditional victims throughout the Third World. One reason why the US insisted on war in the Gulf, deflecting the danger of a peaceful diplomatic settlement, was to demonstrate that it is now able to use extremes of violence against defenseless enemies without concern over the Soviet deterrent. As noted, the familiar lessons are again being taught in the postwar period.

To interpret Apple’s second point, we must recall that the “cantankerous” agents of Soviet disruption include the US European allies, the major Arab states, the nonaligned countries, in fact, essentially the world, apart from Israel. Apple’s formulation reflects the standard doctrinal assumption that the US position on any issue is necessarily RIGHT, as a matter of logic, so those who stand in our way are “cantankerous,” probably Comsymps to boot.

There is an intriguing sidelight to the US-Israeli insistence that the political representatives of the Palestinians be excluded from negotiations. The official reason is that the PLO is a terrorist organization. Under Israeli law, anyone who has any dealings with it is subject to criminal penalties under the Law for the Prevention of Terror. The prime targets are Palestinians, but the law has also been used to punish Jews for contacts with the PLO, most recently, the courageous Abie Nathan, jailed once again.¹² The background for the law was reviewed by one of Israel’s leading legal commentators, Moshe Negbi, discussing a recent academic study of Lehi (the “Stern gang”), published on its 50th anniversary. Negbi’s article is entitled “The Law to Prevent Meetings with the Head of State.” As he explains, the Law for the Prevention of Terror was instituted on the initiative of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion six days after the assassination of UN Ambassador Folke Bernadotte. Ben-Gurion’s goal was to break up Lehi, known at once to be responsible

¹¹ Lewis, NYT, Oct. 21, 1991; Apple, NYT Week in Review, Sept. 22, 1991.

¹² Clyde Haberman, “Israel Jails Abie Nathan for New Arafat Contact,” NYT, Oct. 7, 1991. A few days later, another Israeli peace activist, David Ish-Shalom, was sentenced under the same law for discussions with the PLO on bringing back people whom Israel had (illegally) deported from the occupied territories.

for the assassination. One of the three commanders of Lehi was Yitzhak Shamir. The law not only barred any contact with Shamir, but was also applied against Menahem Begin's terrorist Irgun Zvai Leumi (Etsel), impelling Begin to dismantle his Jerusalem organization. It was also used to jail religious extremists, including Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, currently chief Rabbi. It was bitterly denounced as a "Nazi law, dictatorial, immoral" and hence illegal, by Menahem Begin and other civil libertarians. Despite efforts to have it modified under Labor governments, it remained in force, formally directed against Shamir and his Lehi associates, until 1977, when Begin was elected Prime Minister. Today the "Nazi law" still remains in force, but only to bar contacts with the PLO and to justify the US-Israeli refusal to permit Palestinians to select their own representatives for negotiations.¹³

Those who think that Shamir might have renounced his past enthusiasm for terrorism — which reached quite interesting levels — might usefully turn to his comments on the occasion of the anniversary of Lehi on September 4, 1991: "We believed in what we said, discussed and wrote," he said: "Therefore, it was correct." "From the moral point of view, there is no difference between personal terror and collective terror. Here and there blood is spilled, here and there people are killed. One must look and judge it from the point of view of the utility of that means, the use of personal terror, in leading to the goal."¹⁴

A US Policy Shift?

Let us now turn to the standard assumption that Bush-Baker diplomacy represents a considerable departure from traditional US policies. One argument offered to explain this alleged fact is that the end of the Cold War reduces Israel's role as a "strategic asset." Anthony Lewis and other doves also argue that "the gulf war showed that U.S. armed forces could act in the Middle East without Israel." The upbeat analyses of the doves are also much influenced by the conflicts that have arisen between the Bush and Shamir governments, which are taken to show that "a more detached relationship is developing in which America will more freely weigh its own values and interests," not just follow the Israeli lead (Lewis).¹⁵ None of these arguments is very persuasive.

The first rests on the general assumption that US policies towards the Third World have been motivated by concern over the Soviet threat. This is official doctrine for obvious propaganda reasons, but it is hardly sustainable, often the reverse of the truth, for reasons extensively documented elsewhere.. With regard to the Middle East, even before the Soviet pretext was lost serious analysts recognized that "radical nationalism" was the prime target of US intervention capacity (e.g., Robert Komer, the architect of President Carter's Rapid Deployment Force, in congressional testimony). By now it is conceded that the "threats to our interests" in that region "could not be laid at the Kremlin's door" (White House National Security Strategy report to Congress, March 1990).¹⁶ As for the lessons of the Gulf, surely no one ever doubted that the US could act without Israel, and in some circumstances would choose to do so. This has little bearing on Israel's perceived role as a strategic asset, particularly since the 1960s, when it was

¹³ Negbi, *Hadashot*, Sept. 13, 1991.

¹⁴ Reuters, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, Sept. 5, 1991. On Shamir's thoughts and actions in the 1940s, see my article in Alexander George, *Western State Terrorism* (Polity press, London, 1991).

¹⁵ Lewis, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ See my *Deterring Democracy* (Verso, 1991), 29.

regarded by the US as a major barrier to Arab nationalist pressures against Saudi Arabia, led by Egypt's President Nasser.

The third point is based on a correct observation: there are conflicts between Bush and Shamir. But as noted, there is no reason to believe that these are any different from the ones that have arisen for many years, reflecting different approaches to a rejectionist settlement. Failure to sort out these matters properly has led to much confusion about what is happening.

Let us begin with the situation within Israel. There are two major political groupings, Likud and Labor, each a coalition. The position of Likud, now governing, has always been that Israel should extend its sovereignty over the occupied territories. Its central component, Prime Minister Shamir's Herut party, has never abandoned its claim to Jordan, regularly reiterated in its electoral programs. That was also the traditional position of a central component of the Labor coalition, based on the largest kibbutz movement, TAKAM (Ahdut Avodah, historically extremely expansionist), a position never officially abandoned, to my knowledge.

The logic of the Likud position has recently been outlined by Defense Minister Moshe Arens, by no means an extremist. "In the final analysis," he said in a recent interview, "the existence of the State rests on the principle that we have a right to be here. We are not here by kindness in a land that is foreign to us.... Any agreement, even conditional, that this right is limited — touches on the essence of our existence here." Therefore, "the very existence of Israel depends on the settlements" in the occupied territories, and Israel's right to establish them at will.¹⁷ Scarcely concealed is the premise that the US taxpayer has the duty to pay the costs for Israel's "rights."

In conformity with this reasoning, "Since Mr. Baker launched his postwar peace mission in early March [1991], Israel has confiscated more than 18,000 acres of Arab-owned land as part of its continuing effort to develop the territories for Jews," the Wall Street Journal reports, and now has taken title to about 68% of West Bank land by various forms of legalistic chicanery.¹⁸ The Journal draws no conclusions about what this might imply concerning the nature and intent of "Mr. Baker's peace mission." The operative assumption of objective journalism is that the US stands by, a helpless victim, pouring in funds for activities that it is unable to influence.

The Labor coalition, which governed until 1977 and intermittently since, has preferred a different version of rejectionism. Its position, which has varied in details over the years, is based on the "Allon plan" adopted in 1968. It calls for Israel to take what it wants in the occupied territories: the resources, particularly West Bank water, on which Israel heavily relies; the usable land, including the area around a vastly expanded Jerusalem, now favored residential areas for the urban centers of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; the Jordan valley; etc. Similarly, Israel must control the Golan Heights, in particular, its valuable water resources, now estimated to supply 25% of Israel's needs¹⁹; with regard to the Golan Heights, Labor is more hawkish than Likud. Earlier versions also called for Israeli control over Eastern and Northeastern Sinai. But Israel should not take responsibility for the Arab population concentrations, which are to remain stateless or administered by Jordan under effective Israeli control. The reason is "the demographic problem," the burden of dealing with too many Arabs in what is, by law, "the sovereign State of the Jewish people" in Israel and the diaspora, not the State of its citizens. A commitment to deprive too many citizens of rights carries costs that Labor considers too high. The prevailing assumption has been

¹⁷ Ron Ben-Yishai, interview with Arens, Yediot Ahronot, Sept. 17, 1991.

¹⁸ Peter Waldman, WSJ, May 10, 1991.

¹⁹ Peter Waldman, Wall St. Journal, Oct. ??, 1991.

that if only a minority, less than 20%, are second-class citizens by law, the costs will be tolerable, and Western commentators will be able to marvel over Israeli democracy. But problems increase if the numbers rise high enough to evoke images of South Africa.

The US has tended to support the more rational Labor party form of rejectionism, a fact that brings it into occasional conflict with the government of Israel, as in the past few months. From the point of view of the Palestinians, there is little to choose between these two positions. Many Palestinians and Israeli doves regard the Likud version as potentially more hopeful; and in fact, Likud occupation policies have often been less harsh than those of the Labor party, contrary to the standard depiction of Labor doves versus Likud hawks.

The US has also objected to the defiant and brazen settlement programs of Likud, preferring Labor's technique of quietly "building facts" that will determine the shape of the final outcome. In this connection, the disagreements are more about method than goal, as we see when we take a closer look at the actual policies and the thinking that lies behind them.

The traditional Labor party doctrine was expressed by Prime Minister Golda Meir in addressing new Soviet immigrants in a meeting on the Golan Heights in September 1971: "the borders are determined by where Jews live, not where there is a line on a map." The guiding views were elaborated by her Minister of Defense, the influential planner Moshe Dayan, often considered something of a dove. He repeatedly emphasized that the settlements are "permanent," the basis for "permanent rule" by Israel over the territories: "the settlements are forever, and the future borders will include these settlements as part of Israel."

The leading figure of the Labor party, David Ben-Gurion, held essentially the same view during the period of his political influence. Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk observed 20 years ago that "every child in Israel knows one of the most famous expressions of the founder of the Jewish state, David Ben-Gurion: It is not important what the Gentiles say, what matters is what the Jews do." Ben-Gurion's conception, clearly articulated in internal documents and sometimes in public, was that "a Jewish state...will serve as an important and decisive stage in the realization of Zionism," but only a *stage*: the borders of the state "will not be fixed for eternity," but will expand either by agreement with the Arabs "or by some other way," once "we have force at our disposal" in a Jewish State. His long-term vision included Jordan and beyond, sometimes even "the Land of Israel" from the Nile to the Euphrates.

During the 1948 war, Ben-Gurion's view was that "To the Arabs of the Land of Israel only one function remains — to run away." The words reflected traditional Zionist attitudes. Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel and the most revered Zionist figure, observed casually that the British had informed him that in Palestine "there are a few hundred thousand Negroes, but that is a matter of no significance." Weizmann had in turn informed Lord Balfour after World War I that "the issue known as the Arab problem in Palestine will be of merely local character and, in effect, anyone cognizant of the situation does not consider it a highly significant factor." Hence displacement of the Arabs and expansion of the Jewish settlement can be pursued with no moral qualms, merely tactical concerns.²⁰

²⁰ Kapeliouk, *Israel: la fin des mythes* (Albin Michel, 1975), 21, 29, 220. This important study, a translation from the original Hebrew, could find no American publisher. Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (Oxford, 1985), 187f., and Benny Morris, review of Teveth, *Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 11, 1985; Teveth is the highly sympathetic biographer of Ben-Gurion. See also my *Fateful Triangle* (South End, 1983), 161f. Weizmann, Yosef Heller, *Bama'avak Lamdina* (The Struggle for the State: Zionist Diplomacy of the years 1936–48, Jerusalem 1985), Jewish Agency protocols; Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs* (Oxford, 1985), 110.

The preferred image among cultivated US commentators is that Ben-Gurion was “a decisive man, steeped in classical culture, straightforward,” “a man strong enough to compromise for the good of his people,” in dramatic contrast to Yasser Arafat, who is “wily, certainly persistent and stubborn, gleefully adept at evasion” (much-respected New York Times columnist Flora Lewis).²¹ The reality, fully clear in the documentary record, is that Lewis’s description of Arafat applies no less to Ben-Gurion. And of course, Lewis need not be concerned about Arafat’s support for the 1976 UN resolution, his repeated calls for negotiations with Israel leading to mutual recognition through the 1980s, etc., all successfully effaced from history.

The prevailing attitudes of the founders informed the internal policy planning of the 1967–77 Labor government. The matter is well worth understanding, because it is the Labor programs that the US government and more dovish elements in respectable US circles have tended to support. There is a revealing and well-documented review of cabinet discussions and decisions by Yossi Beilin, a high-level Labor party functionary close to Shimon Peres, now the official dove in US propaganda.²² Israel’s first policy decision was on June 19, 1967, when a divided (11–10) cabinet proposed a settlement on the Green Line with Syria and Egypt (with Israel keeping Gaza), but no mention of Jordan and the West Bank. This proposal is described by Israeli diplomat Abba Eban in his retrospective account as “the most dramatic initiative that the government of Israel ever took before or since.” Given the strong opposition to the proposal, it was kept secret, though it was secretly transmitted to Washington, to be passed on to Arab states.

As noted, Moshe Dayan was a leading Labor party planner, and West Bank Arabs look back with some nostalgia to the days of his rule, because of his recognition of the justice of the Palestinian cause (which, however, must disappear into the ashcan of history, he held) and his belief that the authorities should keep out of the personal affairs of their Palestinian subjects. Dayan’s first proposals, described by Beilin as “moderate,” were presented to the cabinet on June 13, 1967. He proposed that Israel should annex the Gaza strip and “undertake negotiations with the Americans — but only them — about the transfer of Arabs [from the Gaza strip] to the West Bank” so that Israel would not have to absorb a million Arabs into the State. If Hussein agrees to accept “autonomy” for the West Bank, then Israel should allow him formally to take it over while Israel “rules to the Jordan river” in matters of security and foreign affairs, arrangements that would enable Israel to “build facts” quietly in the traditional fashion. As noted, the cabinet did not accept his views, keeping the West Bank and Jordan out of their secret proposal entirely.

Along with Shimon Peres, Dayan was part of Rafi, the most hawkish sector of the Labor coalition apart from Ahdut Avodah (the main kibbutz movement). At a Rafi meeting of September 1967, there was a dispute between Peres and Dayan after Dayan explained more fully his position with regard to the Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories: “Let us approach them and say that we have no solution, that you shall continue to live like dogs, and whoever wants to can leave — and we will see where this process leads.” After they have lived “like dogs” under Israeli military occupation, Dayan continued, “It is possible that in five years we will have 200,000 less people — and that is a matter of enormous importance.” Peres objected to Dayan’s advice that Israel become “like Rhodesia,” arguing that these measures would harm Israel’s international image and prospects for immigration. For these tactical reasons, he argued, it is necessary to preserve Israel’s “moral stand.” Dayan’s response was: “Ben-Gurion said that anyone who ap-

²¹ Flora Lewis, NYT, Nov. 2, 1991.

²² Beilin, *Mehiro shel Ihud*, Revivim, 1985.

proaches the Zionist problem from a moral aspect, he is not a Zionist.” He continued to advocate the Rhodesian solution.

In the same September 1967 meeting, Rafi established its settlement policy, then implemented. It was written by Peres. He observed that “Israel’s new map will be determined by its policies of settlement and new land-taking,” and therefore called for “urgent efforts” to establish settlements not only in East Jerusalem, but also “to the north, south and east,” including Hebron, Gush-Etzion, etc.; the Jordan valley; “the central region of the mountains of Shechem [Nablus]”; the Golan Heights, the El-Arish region in the Sinai and the Red Sea access. The Labor coalition policies were even more extreme, notably the Galili protocols of 1973 and the policies implementing them, including the expulsion of thousands of Beduins into the desert, their homes, mosques and graveyards destroyed to clear the lands for the all-Jewish city of Yamit in northern Sinai, steps that led directly to the 1973 war.

Much is made in US propaganda about Israel’s eagerness to make peace after the 1967 war, if the Arabs could only bring themselves to make a simple telephone call. In a BBC interview on June 13, 1967, Dayan indeed said that Israel awaits a telephone call from the Arabs: “For our part, we will do nothing,” he added. “We are quite happy with the current situation. If anything troubles the Arabs, they know where to find us.”²³ Hardly a passionate plea for peace, particularly when seen in context.

A month before the Rafi meeting, in August 1967, Yigal Allon had advanced his “Allon plan,” which became official policy a year later. Israel’s position after cancellation of the secret 1967 proposal was presented to the UN by Abba Eban on September 8, 1968. Since then, the Labor coalition has adopted one or another version of the Allon plan. Its precise terms have never been clearly established, at least in the public record. But the basic content, sketched above, has been made reasonably clear along with occasional variations as circumstances change.

No other Israeli initiatives are known. The general policy for which there is any documentation, to my knowledge, follows the guidelines expressed by President Haim Herzog in 1972: “I do not deny the Palestinians any place or stand or opinion on every matter. But certainly I am not prepared to consider them as partners in any respect in a land that has been consecrated in the hands of our nation for thousands of years. For the Jews of this land there cannot be any partner.” Note that Herzog’s attitudes are well within the mainstream of liberal Zionism, including Chaim Weizmann and others.

Given the prevailing assumptions, it is not at all surprising that Dayan agreed with the policy of blocking all political activities on the West Bank, including pro-Jordanian activities. True, he was not as extreme as Prime Minister Golda Meir. Thus in 1972, Dayan at first was willing to permit a pro-Jordanian political conference in the West Bank, but he raised no objection when Meir ordered Minister of Police Shlomo Hillel to prevent it. Labor party policies are described by former Chief of Israeli intelligence Shlomo Gazit, a senior official of the military administration from 1967 to 1973. The basic principle, he observes, was “that it is necessary to prevent the inhabitants of the territories from participating in shaping the political future of the territory and they must not be seen as a partner for dealings with Israel”; hence “the absolute prohibition of any political organization, for it was clearly understood by everyone that if political activism and organization were permitted, its leaders would become potential participants in political affairs.” The same considerations require “the destruction of all initiative and every effort on the

²³ Kapeliouk, *op. cit.*, 282, retranslated from French.

part of the inhabitants of the territories to serve as a pipeline for negotiations, to be a channel to the Palestinian Arab leadership of the territories.” Israel’s policy is a “success story,” Gazit wrote in 1985, because these goals had been achieved, with continued US support and to much applause from left-liberal opinion in the United States.²⁴

The Labor coalition began to speak of “territorial compromise only after the Yom Kippur war” of 1973, Beilin records, and expressed its willingness to consider “territorial compromise” in the West Bank “only at the end of February 1977,” after “a severe dispute” internally. The terms “territorial compromise” and “land for peace” are used to refer to one or another version of the Allon plan, always rejecting entirely the Palestinian right to self-determination. The term “interim agreement” has a broader propaganda usage, incorporating either the Labor or the Likud form of rejectionism. These terms are blandly adopted by US commentators, either deceived by the rhetoric or engaged in deception themselves.

As noted, the US has favored the Labor variety of rejectionism, more rational, and better attuned to the norms of Western hypocrisy. These more devious methods are easier to conceal than Likud expansionism, though the eventual outcome may not be greatly different. These are the primary issues that have separated the US and Israel from virtually the entire world. It is for that reason that the US has been compelled to block the peace process in the manner briefly reviewed.

Bush-Baker Diplomacy

Until 1988, the US and Israel were more or less satisfied with the status quo, and were content merely to rebuff Arab and other efforts towards a peaceful diplomatic settlement while Israel extended its control over the territories. Problems arose, however, with the outbreak of the Intifada and the severe Israeli repression, which created negative images and other unwanted costs. Furthermore, PLO insistence on a political settlement, though not fundamentally different from earlier years, was becoming more difficult to suppress. The problem of diverting diplomacy was becoming serious by late 1988, when the US refused to permit Yasser Arafat to address the United Nations in New York, causing the UN to move its meeting to Geneva. By then, Secretary of State George Schultz and domestic commentators were becoming an international laughing stock with their increasingly desperate pretense that Arafat had failed to say the “magic words” dictated to him by Washington. The wise decision was made to resort to a familiar diplomatic trick, the “Trollope ploy”: to pretend that Arafat had accepted US demands, welcome his invented capitulation, then impose upon him the US terms that Washington attributed to him. It was assumed correctly that the media and intellectual opinion would adopt Washington’s claims without inspection, ignoring the fact — transparent to any literate person — that Arafat’s positions remained as far from Washington’s as before, and that no Palestinian spokesperson could possibly accept the US terms. The farce was played perfectly, and now has entered history, the facts being consigned to the memory hole in the usual manner of a well-run modern society.

The PLO’s reward for its invented capitulation was a low-level “dialogue” to divert world attention while Israel turned to harsher measures of repression to suppress the Intifada. Predictably, the PLO leadership played along, contributing to the success of the repression. The US-Israeli agreement was explained by Labor’s Defense Secretary, Yitzhak Rabin, who informed Peace Now

²⁴ Gazit, Hamakel Vehagezer (Tel Aviv, 1985), quoted in Al Hamishmar, Nov. 7, 1985.

leaders in February 1989 that he welcomed the meaningless “dialogue,” which would offer Israel a year or more to employ “harsh military and economic pressure.” “In the end,” Rabin explained, “they will be broken,” and will accept Israel’s terms. These plans were implemented, with much success.²⁵

Meanwhile, Israel and the US initiated their own unilateral diplomatic track, to deflect the danger of an authentic peace process. A Likud-Labor coalition government proposed the so-called “Shamir Plan” in May 1989, more accurately the Shamir-Peres Plan.²⁶ The plan’s “Basic Premises” are: (1) there can be no “additional Palestinian state in the Gaza district and in the area between Israel and Jordan”; (2) “Israel will not conduct negotiations with the PLO”; (3) “There will be no change in the status of Judea, Samaria and Gaza other than in accordance with the basic guidelines of the Government” of Israel, which reject Palestinian self-determination in any meaningful form. The phrase “additional Palestinian state” reflects the consensus view that there already is a Palestinian state, namely, Jordan, so that the issue of self-determination for the Palestinians does not arise, contrary to what Jordanians, Palestinians, and the rest of the world mistakenly believe. The “Basic Premises” incorporate the “Four No’s” of the official Labor party program: No return to the 1967 borders, No removal of settlements, No negotiations with the PLO, No Palestinian state. The coalition plan then calls for a peace treaty with Jordan and “free and democratic elections” under Israeli military occupation with the PLO excluded and much of the Palestinian leadership interned without charges in Israeli prison camps.

The US quickly endorsed this forthcoming proposal. James Baker explained that “Our goal all along has been to try to assist in the implementation of the Shamir initiative. There is no other proposal or initiative that we are working with.” On December 6, 1989, the Department of State released the Baker Plan, which spelled out five points for the “peace process,” referring to an Egypt-Israel-Palestinian “dialogue” in Cairo. The Baker Plan stipulated that Israel would attend “only after a satisfactory list of Palestinians has been worked out,” and that any Palestinians allowed by the US and Israel to attend would be restricted to discussion of implementation of the Shamir Plan.

Recall that all of this was long before the Gulf War, and while the US-PLO “dialogue” was spinning along in its intentionally pointless way. Standard doctrine on the exclusion of the PLO is utterly without merit, as mere inspection of dates and documents clearly demonstrates – for example, the claim that Arafat lost his place at the table “as a result of his support for Iraq in the gulf war” (Thomas Friedman), and that “the principal causes of the PLO’s weakness” today are PLO support for Saddam Hussein and failure to expel the perpetrators of a thwarted terrorist action in May 1990, which led the US to suspend the dialogue, no longer of any tactical utility (editorial, Boston Globe). Even if we adopt the version of what happened put forth by the propaganda system, it merely offers new pretexts for old policies, always supported by the same organs prior to the alleged crimes. The performance may be dismissed as childish, but given the guaranteed unanimity of voices, it is effective.²⁷

²⁵ For an ongoing account and references, see my articles in Z magazine, March 1989, Jan. 1990, and Necessary Illusions.

²⁶ Israeli Government Election Plan, Jerusalem, 14 May 1989, official text distributed by the Embassy of Israel in Washington.

²⁷ Baker, Thomas Friedman, NYT, Oct. 19, 1989; Baker Plan, U.S. Department of State press release, Dec 6, 1989. Friedman, NYT, Nov. 4; BG, Oct. 6, 1991.

The Gulf conflict did, however, accelerate the US pursuit of its rejectionist diplomacy, for reasons already discussed. That brings us to Madrid. Here too some historical background is useful to interpret what is happening, and to decode its portrayal.

The Evolution of US Policy

The Madrid conference and its aftermath are concerned with the situation that arose in the wake of the June 1967 war, which left Israel in control of Egypt's Sinai peninsula, the Syrian Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip (administered by Egypt), and the West Bank (administered by Jordan, its status unrecognized internationally). Other issues are not under consideration. To mention only the most obvious, while the status of the West Bank is a topic of debate, Israel's incorporation of the other half of the Palestinian state proposed in the original UN partition resolution of 1947 is a settled issue. Jordan's illegitimate occupation of the West Bank figures prominently in US-Israeli propaganda; the fact that the Palestinian state was, in effect, partitioned between Jordan and Israel, with no small amount of collusion, and that Egypt fought in the 1948 war in part to counter the ambitions of Britain's Jordanian client, is left to scholarly monographs.²⁸

Another settled issue is that the conference is based on UN resolution 242, adopted by the Security Council in November 1967. This resolution keeps to inter-state relations, avoiding the Palestinian issue, and is therefore acceptable to the US and Israel, as distinct from many other UN resolutions dating back to December 1948 that endorse Palestinian rights of varying sorts that the US does not acknowledge (though in some cases, the US voted for the resolutions). UN 242 is also acceptable because of its ambiguity. Crucially *not* settled is what the resolution means; it was left intentionally vague to assure at least formal acceptance by the states of the region.

The resolution opens by "emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security." It calls for "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," "termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries...."

With regard to the meaning of these provisions, two crucial questions arise. First, what is the meaning of the phrase "from territories occupied"? Second, what is to be the status of the indigenous population of the former Palestine, the Palestinians, who are not a "State" and therefore do not fall under the resolution?

Both questions reached the Security Council in January 1976, in the resolution discussed earlier, incorporating the basic wording of UN 242 but extending it to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The resolution answered the first question by calling for a settlement on the Green Line. It answered the second by calling for a Palestinian state in the territories from which Israel would withdraw. As noted, it was vetoed by the United States, effectively terminating any UN role in the peace process, apart from gestures. Given US opposition, all such proposals, however vague, are off the agenda, out of the historical record, not part of public discussion. The two basic questions concerning UN 242 therefore remain unresolved. To be more precise, they will be settled by force, that is, by the United States, in international isolation. A different approach to

²⁸ See particularly Avi Shlaim, *Collusion over Jordan* (Columbia, 1988). Also Rabinovitch, *The Road Not Taken* (Oxford, 1991), 171.

the two questions left unsettled in UN 242 had been formulated by UN mediator Gunnar Jarring, who proposed a plan calling for a full peace treaty on the Green Line. This proposal was accepted by President Sadat of Egypt in February 1971. Israel recognized it as a genuine peace offer, but rejected it; the Labor party was committed to broader territorial gains from the 1967 war. Note that the Jarring-Sadat proposal offered nothing to the Palestinians. The basic problem is not Palestinian rights per se, but rather the fact that recognizing them would bar Israeli control over the occupied territories.

At the insistence of National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, the US backed Israel's rejection of the Sadat offer, adopting Kissinger's policy of "stalemate." As usual, the US decision to back Israel's rejection of the Jarring-Sadat peace proposal removed the events from history and public discussion, at least in the United States. In Israel, in contrast, even conservative Middle East specialists recognize that Israel may have "missed a historic opportunity" in 1971 (Itamar Rabinovitch, asking whether Israel also missed such an opportunity when a Syrian proposal was rejected in 1949).²⁹

The Jarring-Sadat proposal was virtually identical to official US policy, formulated in the State Department plan of December 1969 (the Rogers Plan). It also conformed to the general interpretation of UN 242 outside of Israel. The Rogers plan suggests that this was also the US interpretation at the time, a conclusion supported by other evidence. In an important article in a British Middle East journal, Donald Neff, a well-known US journalist and historian specializing on Middle East affairs, reviews a State Department study based on records of the 1967 negotiations.³⁰ This study, leaked to Neff, has been kept secret "so as not to embarrass Israel," Neff concludes. The study quotes the chief American negotiator, Arthur Goldberg, who was strongly pro-Israel. Goldberg informed King Hussein of Jordan that the US "could not guarantee that everything would be returned to Jordan; some territorial adjustments would be required," but there must be "a mutuality in adjustments." Secretary of State Dean Rusk confirmed to Hussein that the US "would use its influence to obtain compensation to Jordan for any territory it was required to give up," citing examples. Goldberg informed officials of other Arab states "that the United States did not conceive of any substantial redrawing of the map." Israel's withdrawal would be "total except for minor adjustments," Goldberg assured the Arabs, with compensation to Jordan for any such adjustments. His assurances led them to agree to UN 242. In a private communication to Neff, Dean Rusk recently affirmed that "We never contemplated any significant grant of territory to Israel as a result of the June 1967 war." The US interpretation of UN 242 contemplated "minor adjustments in the western frontier of the West Bank," "demilitarization measures in the Sinai and Golan Heights," and "a fresh look" at the status of Jerusalem. "Resolution 242 never contemplated the movement of any significant territories to Israel," Rusk concluded.

Advocates of Israeli policies in the United States commonly claim that this interpretation of UN 242 is contrary to the stand taken by Arthur Goldberg and the US government generally. Thus the news columns of the New York Times inform us that the Israeli version of UN 242, which permits Israel to incorporate unspecified parts of the conquered territories, is "supported by Arthur J. Goldberg," citing later comments of his in which he did indeed support the Israeli version.³¹

²⁹ Rabinovitch, *op. cit.*, 108.

³⁰ Noring and Smith, *The Withdrawal Clause in UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967*, Feb. 1978; Neff, *Middle East International*, 13 Sept. 1991.

³¹ Sabra Chatrand, "The 'The' that Brought Mideast Rivals to Table," *NYT*, Oct. 29, 1991.

One of the more extreme apologists, Yale Law professor and former government official Eugene Rostow, claims that he “helped produce” UN 242, and has repeatedly argued that it authorizes continued Israeli control over the territories. In response to his claims, David Korn, former State Department office director for Israel and Arab-Israeli affairs, wrote in November 1991 that helped produce’ Resolution 242, but in fact he had little if anything to do with it.” He was an “onlooker,” like “many others who have claimed a hand in it.” “It was U.S. policy at the time and for several years afterward,” Korn continues, “that [any border] changes would be no more than minor.” Korn confirms that “Both Mr. Goldberg and Secretary of State Dean Rusk told King Hussein that the United States would use its influence to obtain territorial compensation from Israel for any West Bank lands ceded by Jordan to Israel,” and that Jordan’s acquiescence was based on these promises. Rostow’s pathetic and evasive response contests none of these statements.³²

The available evidence leads us to conclude that the US kept to the international consensus until February 1971, when it rejected the Jarring-Sadat initiative. US isolation increased in the mid-1970s as the international consensus shifted to recognition of a Palestinian right of self-determination. Since February 1971, the US has been essentially alone in blocking the “peace process.” The standard version here is quite different, of course.

Kissinger’s support for Israeli intransigence led directly to the 1973 war. Sadat’s repeated warnings that he would go to war if the US and Israel continued to block any diplomatic initiatives were dismissed during this period of extreme US-Israeli triumphalism, on the assumption that Israel’s power was overwhelming and “war is not the Arab’s game,” as explained by Israeli Arabist and director of military intelligence General Yehoshaphat Harkabi (now a dove), in a statement less extreme than many. General Ariel Sharon’s ravings were particularly noteworthy.³³ On the same assumptions, the US rebuffed Sadat’s offers to drop Soviet patronage and transform Egypt to a US client state.

The 1973 war shattered these illusions. It turned out to be a near thing, and Henry Kissinger, no great genius but able to recognize the mailed fist, realized that policy must shift. The US then turned to the natural fall-back position. Since Egypt could not simply be dismissed as a basket case, the obvious strategy was to accept it as a US client state and remove it from the conflict. This was the goal of Kissinger’s “step-by-step” diplomacy, a process accelerated by Sadat’s 1977 trip to Jerusalem and finally consummated at Camp David, over the strong objections of leading elements of the (by then, opposition) Labor party, because the treaty required that Israel abandon the northeastern Sinai settlements that Labor had established.

The import of the Camp David settlement was obvious at once. With the major Arab deterrent removed from the conflict and a huge increase in US aid, Israel would be free to accelerate its takeover of the occupied territories and to invade Lebanon, which it had subjected to devastating bombardment and occasional terrorist attack for years, as part of its interaction with the PLO in southern Lebanon. In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon, killing several thousand people, driving out hundreds of thousands more, and placing the southern zone under the rule of a murderous client force. Israel still remains in defiance of UN Security Council resolution 425 (March 1978) ordering it to withdraw from Lebanon unconditionally and immediately. In 1982 Israel invaded again after a year of Israeli terror attacks intended (in vain) to elicit some PLO response that would serve as a pretext for its plan to destroy the PLO as a political force, thus ensuring Israeli control over the

³² Rostow, Korn, *New Republic*, Oct. 21, Nov. 18, , Nov. 25, 1991.

³³ Kapeliouk, *op. cit.*, 281. See *my Peace in the Middle East?* (Pantheon, 1974), chap. 4.

occupied territories while placing Lebanon under Israeli suzerainty. The 1982 invasion was far more devastating, with over 20,000 killed, mostly civilians. Integration of the occupied territories meanwhile continued apace.

The obvious import of Camp David is by now sometimes acknowledged, in Israel, quite frankly. Israeli strategic analyst Avner Yaniv writes that the effect of the Camp David agreement, removing Egypt from the conflict, was that “Israel would be free to sustain military operations against the PLO in Lebanon as well as settlement activity on the West Bank.” Expressing a widely-held consensus among Israeli experts and political figures, he adds that the 1982 invasion of Lebanon was intended to “undermine the position of the moderates within [the peace offensive]” and “to halt [the PLO’s] rise to political respectability.” It should be called “the war to safeguard the occupation of the West Bank,” General Harkabi observes, having been motivated by Begin’s “fear of the momentum of the peace process.” The US backed the Israeli invasion, presumably for the same reasons, well-known at the time, unless we are willing to attribute to US intelligence and planners an extraordinary level of ignorance and stupidity.³⁴

The Camp David accords offered the Palestinians limited “autonomy” under Israeli rule for an interim period. Israel and Egypt agreed on specifics by 1980, according to US mediator Sol Linowitz, who regards the Palestinian rejection of this offer as a tragic error on their part, noting accurately that the 1980 proposal is the most they can expect from the US and Israel today. Palestinians rejected it at the time, Linowitz notes, on the grounds that it would preclude authentic self-government in an independent state, and they also objected to the exclusion of their political representatives, the PLO, a stand that Linowitz regards as completely unreasonable — for Palestinians, not Jews. Reporting Linowitz’s views, New York Times correspondent Sabra Chatrand adds that Likud Prime Minister Menahem Begin favored the autonomy proposal “because the idea seemed to resolve the Palestinian issue while leaving Israel in fundamental control of West Bank and Gaza” — precisely the point at the time, and still today.

Neither Chatrand nor Linowitz see any merit in the Palestinian unwillingness to “leave Israel in fundamental control of West Bank and Gaza.” On the rejectionist assumptions that are an entry ticket to polite society in the United States, Palestinian unhappiness with such an outcome merely reveals that Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity, in a standard formula. The racist undertones also provide more than a little insight into the prevailing intellectual culture here. Particularly noteworthy is the praise lavished upon Palestinian negotiators who don’t simply hang from trees and brandish submachine guns but speak “poetically” (as Thomas Friedman puts it) and “pragmatically,” adapting to US terms while deferring their “unrealistic” demands for the rights granted as a matter of course to the Jewish immigrants who displaced them — not that they have much of a choice, given the monopoly of violence in the hands of the United States and its Israeli client, and the monolithic system for transforming the real world into images suitable for the needs of domestic power.

Chatrand observes further that “after years of conflict with Israel, uncounted deaths, and even more hardship, Palestinians have abandoned their earlier conditions” — not the first demonstration of what John Quincy Adams called the “salutary efficacy” of terror. Observing the conventions, Chatrand also reports that the United States, a helpless victim as always, “tried and failed to get Israel to stop building Jewish settlements in the occupied territories,” while vastly increas-

³⁴ For these and references, see *Necessary Illusions*, 174f., 276. For discussion at the time and immediately after, see *Fateful Triangle* and *my Pirates and Emperors* (Claremont, 1986; Amana, 1988).

ing US aid for their construction.³⁵ It could be argued that the Palestinians should have accepted the proposal that left Israel “in fundamental control” of the occupied territories, but it is unlikely that the outcome would have been any different. Those with the guns and the money determine the meaning of the words, and there is little reason to suppose that the US would have chosen not to lend its decisive and active support to Israel’s expansion into the territories and attacks on Lebanon had Palestinians agreed to accept Israeli-run “autonomy.”

Sadat’s 1977 peace initiative was less acceptable from the US-Israeli perspective than his 1971 proposal, because it called for Palestinian self-determination, in accord with the changing international consensus. Nevertheless, Sadat is hailed as one of the grand figures of the modern age for his 1977 efforts, while the 1971 proposal has been removed from history. The reasons are those just reviewed. In 1971, the US backed Israel’s rejection of his peace proposal, though it offered nothing to the Palestinians and scarcely deviated from official US policy. Such facts are politically incorrect, therefore banned from history by the guardians of Truth. By 1977, US policy had shifted for the reasons noted, and the US had accepted Egypt as a client state within its regional system. Though of course the US dismissed at once the terms that Sadat proposed in Jerusalem, it could proceed with its own rejectionist project, with Sadat playing his assigned role, therefore achieving heroic stature. As always, history is established by the powerful.

The Camp David agreement is regarded in the US as a great triumph of US diplomacy, and the model for what should come next. That too is understandable, given the actual record.

The Prospects

Let us return finally to the three original questions: What is the reason for the timing of the Bush-Baker initiative? Does it signify a departure from the traditional US stand? What is the meaning of the conflicts between the US and Israel?

The most plausible answers seem to be that the initiative is badly needed for domestic and regional political reasons, but otherwise simply extends traditional US goals. The conflicts with Israel remain focussed on the issues that have always been in dispute: the modalities of rejectionism.

The underlying US government thinking has been discussed before in these pages. To review briefly, US diplomacy is guided by a strategic conception that has changed very little over the years. The primary concern is the energy resources of the region, which are to be managed by the “Arab Facade,” under the effective control of the US and its British ally. The family dictatorships must be protected from indigenous nationalism by regional enforcers: Turkey, Israel, Iran (under the Shah), Pakistan, etc., the “periphery pact” of Ben-Gurion’s hopes and strategy. U.S.-British force lies in reserve. Regional actors are granted rights insofar as they contribute to “stability,” a term of art referring to the establishment and enforcement of this system. The Gulf tyrannies naturally have rights, as did Saddam Hussein before he committed the crime of disobedience, the only one that matters, on August 2, 1990. Israel has been regarded as a major component of this system from the 1960s. It has also served US interests worldwide, carrying out tasks that the US had to delegate to others because of domestic opposition or for other reasons, and cooperating in intelligence matters and weapons production and testing. The Palestinians, in contrast, offer

³⁵ Chartrand, NYT, Nov. 5, 1991.

neither wealth nor power. Accordingly, they have no rights, by the most elementary principles of statecraft.

The US stance can be traced back to 1948, when the Pentagon, impressed by Israel's victories, recognized it to be the major regional power after Turkey and a potential base for US power. As for the Palestinians, US planners had no reason to question the assessment of Israeli government specialists that the Palestinian refugees "would be crushed": "some of them would die and most of them would turn into human dust and the waste of society, and join the most impoverished classes in the Arab countries." As noted, this was the traditional position of liberal Zionism, and the wording is repeated by such Labor party leaders as Yitzhak Rabin until today. On these assumptions, there has been no need for any concern over the fate of the indigenous population of the former Palestine.

The operative principles were well expressed by New Republic editor Martin Peretz, one of the more extreme anti-Arab racists and apologists for Israeli atrocities, just before Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, when he advised Israel to administer to the PLO a "lasting military defeat" that "will clarify to the Palestinians in the West Bank that their struggle for an independent state has suffered a setback of many years," the essential purpose of the invasion. 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.³⁶ His timing may have been off, but basic principles are resilient in states with unchallenged power. Peretz's attitude towards the Kurds also captures US policy succinctly, as we have recently seen once again.

Control over Middle East energy resources provides important leverage in world affairs and guarantees a badly needed flow of capital to the economies of the United States and Britain. The system of regional management has changed in detail, but the operative principles have not. The course of diplomacy is understandable in these terms.

From the US perspective, a preferred outcome of the current diplomatic maneuvers would be: First, an "interim agreement" between Israel and the Palestinians, which would enable Israel to extend its control over the territories within the framework of Labor Party rejectionism; Second, steps toward commercial and diplomatic relations between Israel and the Gulf rulers, thus extending and making somewhat more overt the tacit alliance of the past several decades; Third, arrangements for the Golan Heights that would ensure Israeli control of the crucial water resources while satisfying Syrian nationalist goals, at least symbolically. If the US rejectionist program is not advanced in these ways, the US will easily win a valuable propaganda victory by placing the blame on Middle East fanatics who have disrupted Washington's noble intentions. It is reasonable to expect that the policies of the past years will then be pursued in other ways.

If US interests are reassessed and Washington decides to press Israel beyond what its leadership would accept, Israel does have certain options, despite its extreme dependency on the United States. The nature of these options has been the topic of considerable discussion within Israel. Writing about the matter almost 10 years ago, I quoted Aryeh (Lova) Eliav, one of Israel's best-known doves, who deplored the attitude of "those who brought Samson complex' here, according to which we shall kill and bury all the Gentiles around us while we ourselves shall die with them." Others too regarded the greatest danger facing Israel as the "collective version" of Samson's

³⁶ Interview in Ha'aretz, June 4, 1982; see *Fateful Triangle*, 199. On the racist effusions of Peretz and others, see *Necessary Illusions*, 315.

revenge against the Philistines, recalling Prime Minister Moshe Sharett's diary entries from the 1950s, in which he recorded the "preaching" of high-level Labor party officials "in favor of acts of madness" and "the diabolical lesson of how to set the Middle East on fire" with "acts of despair and suicide" that will terrify the world as "we go crazy," if crossed. Israel's nuclear power, well-known to US authorities for many years, renders such thinking more than empty threats. Writing in 1982, three Israeli strategic analysts observed that Israel's nuclear capacity included missiles able to reach "many targets in southern USSR," a threat — real or pretended — that may well be aimed primarily at the United States, putting US planners on notice that pressures on Israel to accede to an unwanted political settlement could lead to an international conflagration. The reasoning was explained further in the Labor party journal *Davar*, reporting Israel's reaction to the Saudi peace plan of August 1981, with the "signs of open-mindedness and moderation" that the government of Israel regarded as a serious threat. Israel's response was to send military jets over the oil fields, a warning to the West of Israel's capacity to cause immense destruction to the world's major energy reserves if pressed towards an unwanted peace, *Davar* reported.³⁷ The world has changed since, but Israel's "Samson option," as Seymour Hersh calls it in a recent book, remains alive.

Serious Israeli analysts today express considerable concern over what may lie ahead. One of Israel's leading military commentators, Lieutenant-Colonel Ron Ben-Yishai, was interviewed recently on the Bush-Baker initiatives. "This might be the last chance we have to make peace," he said. He expected the current diplomatic efforts to fail. This failure will lead to a war, which should last "a minimum of three to four weeks," a "conventional war" with some surface-to-surface missiles but mostly a ground war, with uncertain prospects and surely grim consequences.³⁸ There has been a rash of similar predictions, referring to a war with Syria that Israel might initiate with a preemptive strike. The US will surely do what it can to prevent that, but even US power reaches only so far. If the US keeps to its rejectionist stand, Israel will continue to integrate the territories, the core local conflict will remain unresolved, turbulence and antagonisms will fester and intermittently explode, and a stable regional settlement — let alone a just one — is most unlikely.

³⁷ See my *Fateful Triangle* (South End, 1983), 464ff.

³⁸ "Elazar," *Jerusalem Post Magazine*. Oct. 4, 1991.

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