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This time in Washington, honest brokerage is not going to be enough

Avi Shlaim, *The Guardian*, 7 September 2010

<http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2010-09-07/this-time-in-washington-honest-brokerage-is-not-going-to-be-enough/>

The pope, according to a no doubt apocryphal story, maintains that there are two possible solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict – the realistic and the miraculous. The realistic solution involves divine intervention; the miraculous solution involves a voluntary agreement between the parties themselves. The American-sponsored peace talks that got under way in Washington last week may be viewed in this light. It will take nothing less than a miracle to produce a peaceful settlement of the century-old conflict between Jews and Arabs over the Holy Land.

The obstacles to peace are formidable. All previous attempts to clear them have ended in failure, most notably the Camp David summit of July 2000. An American-sponsored peace process of some sort has been going on intermittently since the Madrid conference of 1991, the mother of all Middle East peace conferences. So direct peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, with or without American peace processors, are nothing new. In the words of one American, it is *de'ja vu* all over again.

The current negotiators will have to find solutions to all the deeply sensitive issues that lie at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the so-called permanent status issues. These include the right of return of the 1948 Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, the future of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank, and the borders of the Palestinian entity.

But there is an immediate stumbling block: settlements. A partial and temporary Israeli freeze on their expansion on the West Bank is due to expire at the end of the month and, if it is not renewed, the Palestinian negotiators have said they will walk out. And who can blame them? If Israel persists in its bad old Zionist ways of "creating facts on the ground", the peace talks will become a charade. It would be like two men negotiating the division of a pizza with one of them continuing to swallow chunks of it.

The prospects for reaching a permanent status agreement are poor because the Israelis are too strong, the Palestinians are too weak, and the Americans mediators are utterly ineffectual. The sheer asymmetry of power between the two parties militates against a voluntary agreement. To get Israelis and Palestinians round a conference table and to tell them to hammer out an agreement is like putting a lion and a lamb in a cage and asking them to sort out their own differences.

Third party intervention is clearly indispensable. To put it more simply, there can be no settlement unless America pushes Israel into a settlement. Playing the honest broker will not do the trick. In the first place, most Arabs regard the US as a dishonest broker on account of its palpable partisanship on behalf of Israel. Moreover, honest brokerage is not enough. In order to bridge the huge gap separating the two sides, America must first redress the balance of power by putting most of its weight on the side of the weaker party.

The negotiations in Washington will be face to face but they will also be back to back, with each leader constantly watching his domestic constituency. President Mahmoud Abbas, popularly known as Abu Mazen, is the most moderate partner for peace Israel could hope for. But his domestic position is rather precarious. He is the leader of the mainstream party Fatah, a democratically elected president, and the head of the Palestinian Authority. But he faces a formidable rival in Hamas, the Islamic resistance movement, and other splinter groups like Islamic Jihad.

Hamas won a free and fair election in January 2006; it moderated its rejectionist stand once in power, and formed a national unity government with Fatah in March 2007. In June of that same year, however, it seized power violently in Gaza to pre-empt a Fatah coup. Since then Gaza has become an open-air prison camp because of the brutal and illegal Israeli blockade.

Today the Palestinian camp is deeply divided between the West Bank, ruled by the Fatah-dominated PA, and the Gaza Strip, ruled by Hamas. Hamas is vociferously and violently opposed to the peace talks with the Jewish state. It maintains that Abbas has no mandate to represent the Palestinians. Its military wing reinforced the message by killing four Jewish settlers in Hebron on the eve of the talks. Hamas's capacity to play the spoiler should not be under-estimated. Even in the highly unlikely event of Abbas reaching a peace agreement with Israel, it is difficult to see how he would impose it on Palestinians in the teeth of such strong opposition.

Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister and leader of the Likud party, enjoys a more solid power base at home but he, too, is subject to severe constraints on his freedom of action. His coalition partners are the Labour party, Yisrael Beitenu, and Shas. Together they command a comfortable majority of 66 seats in the 120-member Knesset, Israel's parliament.

Confronted with painful choices over the future of the West Bank, however, the coalition is likely to fall apart. Likud used to regard Judea and Samaria, the Biblical names for the West Bank, as an integral part of the land of Israel. Yisrael Beitenu and Shas still do. Labour, with only 11 seats in the Knesset, carries little weight. This is the most rightwing, chauvinistic and racist government in Israel's history. The ideological makeup of the government militates against a peace deal with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu is not a dove who has fallen among hawks. On the contrary, he is a rightwing nationalist, a believer in Greater Israel and a proponent of the strategy of the iron wall, of dealing with the Palestinians from a position of unassailable military strength. He grew up in a nationalistic Jewish home. His father, Ben-Zion Netanyahu, who at 100 years old is still a force to be reckoned with, was the secretary of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the spiritual father of the Israeli right. Netanyahu junior belongs to the hawkish wing of the Likud. He denounced the 1993 Oslo Accord between Israel and the PLO as incompatible either with Israel's security or with the historic right of the Jewish people to the whole land of Israel. The policy guidelines of his first government, when the Likud came to power in 1996, amounted to a declaration of war on the peace process. Netanyahu spent his three years as prime minister in a largely successful attempt to destroy the foundations for peace with the Palestinians that his Labour predecessors had built.

To his second term as prime minister Netanyahu brings the same old ideological baggage and the same dogged determination to deny the Palestinian people the same right to national self-determination that Israel exercised back in 1948. His rhetoric has changed, but his policy can still be summed up in one ominous word: politicide - to deny the Palestinian people any independent political existence in Palestine. This world view identifies him not as a genuine partner to President Abbas on the road to peace but as the proponent of permanent conflict.

Yet the possibility of a change of heart cannot be entirely ruled out. Maybe Netanyahu will surprise us all by moving on from the relentless rejectionism of the past to become a peacemaker. And maybe the pope will start smoking pot.

Funding Palestinian incitement

Matthew Sinclair and Raheem Kassam, The Wall Street Journal, 9 September 2010

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703995104575388754261573556.html>

It is easy to understand why many Westerners are bewildered by the conflict in Israel-Palestine. Confrontations like the springtime flotilla crisis make it easy for people to see the situation as too complex, ugly, and hopeless, and they switch off. But we can't ignore what goes on in Israel and the Palestinian territories, if for no reason other than we're affecting it: Our money is supporting indoctrination in the territories that is sowing the seeds of future conflict for decades to come. We have a responsibility to take that incredibly seriously.

In 2007, the European Union provided €420 million to the Palestinian territories, while member states also provided extensive bilateral aid: Germany provided €55 million, France €67 million, and the United Kingdom put in £63.6 million. Many countries have increased their donations since then, with the EU and USA pledging the lion's share of \$7.7 billion for the period 2008-2010, with a focus on reconstruction after last year's Gaza conflict.

Some donor countries have recently taken steps to try to prevent their funds being used to terrorize Israelis. Germany, eg, has worked to outlaw the Turkish-German NGO, Internationale Humanitaere Hilfsorganisation, which has delivered more than \$8.3 million in funding to groups linked to Hamas.

But such moves only address part of the larger responsibility that donations create. Millions in Western taxpayers' pounds, euros, and dollars, now fund all the actions of the Palestinian Authority. Much of that money comes through direct budget support, which means unconditional checks to the Authority, or paying off its debts. In that way our governments support everything, good and bad, that the PA does.

Even when donations are carefully earmarked, they still can't be separated. It is well accepted in other areas of aid policy that donations don't just finance what the donor wants them to. Organizations like the PA have a budget just like a family does and even

payments for specifics, like the salaries of government workers, free up room for other expenditures.

This is particularly troubling as one thing the PA does with its budget is run official media and print schoolbooks that radicalize Palestinians and crucially, Palestinian children. There are endless examples.

Ahmed Dughmush, a Fatah leader, promised the official Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) that to "Jerusalem march millions of martyrs" in January 2008. Najat Abu-Bakr, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, told the PBC's audience in August 2008 that the Palestinians "were created on this land in order to liberate it, to live on it, to continue as people of Ribat [religious war]."

More recently, the European Union funded a television quiz show from Nov. 2009 through Jan. 2010 entitled "The Stars," which told its viewers that the size of "Palestine" is 27,000 kilometers - an area that includes all of Israel. The show also described Nazareth as a "Palestinian city." The European Union funded the entire first season of "The Stars" - the flag of the European Union was proudly displayed behind the host throughout the broadcasts.

Now consider such propaganda in the context of Israeli and Palestinian leaders' first direct talks in three years. Recall Annapolis, 2007: During those peace talks, the PBC was running graphics showing all of Israel-Palestine draped in the Palestinian flag. While the Palestinian leadership was sitting at the negotiating table supposedly working for a two-state solution, their TV channel continued to encourage the ideas that peaceful compromise and two states weren't the way forward; that the proper objective was to conquer all of Israel-Palestine. Which helped bring us to the ongoing need for peace talks today.

Now, as new peace talks proceed, such contraventions and contradictions go on, with PBC broadcasts from March and July this year praising, for instance, 18-year-old female suicide bomber Ayyat al-Akhras, who in 2002 detonated explosives strapped to her body, killing a security guard and a 17-year-old girl in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, a school textbook issued by the Palestinian Authority, "History of the Arabs and the World in the 20th Century," calls the insurgency in Iraq a "brave resistance." Another schoolbook, "Reading and Texts," tells students that "your enemies seek life while you seek death."

All this is particularly worrying given the demographics of the Palestinian population - some 42% are under 15 years old. The choices that young population makes will determine the future of the region. Western governments may not be able to stop Hamas or the regime in Tehran from calling on Palestinians to keep fighting. Nor can our countries eliminate the history and reasons for animosity between Israelis and Palestinians. But there is no reason we have to subsidize actions intended to deepen these wounds.

Peace depends on Palestinians rejecting the idea that only an impossible, violent victory and the destruction of Israel is an acceptable outcome. That repudiation of war will get harder and harder if the official media - supported by Western donations - continues to promote hatred and undermine any possible spirit of compromise.

John F. Kennedy said that "peace does not rest in the charters and covenants alone. It lies in the hearts and minds of all people." Donor countries can put pressure on the Palestinian Authority, but right now they are focused on the behavior of the Authority at the negotiating table. More attention needs to be paid to their actions at home, foremost the radicalization of the Palestinian people.

Why Hamas is holding its fire

Boaz Ganor, GLOBES: Israel's Business Arena, 12 September 2010,

<http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=1000587879&fid=1724>

We should not be misled by the official Israeli and Palestinian spokesmen - nobody involved in the renewed direct negotiations is really interested in holding them.

The heads of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad, are perhaps the first Palestinian leaders to understand fully that terror attacks do not promote, and even endanger, the Palestinians' national interests. They have not become Zionists, Heaven forbid, but they are also not conducting a double strategy, as Arafat did during the Oslo process in the 90's, when he condemned terrorism but, in actual fact, did nothing to prevent the attacks, and in certain cases even covertly supported them.

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad does not hide his operational plan. He proclaims it day and night. Fayyad has, for several years, worked on building the necessary infrastructure (economic, administrative, political, and defense) for the establishment of a Palestinian state. This activity, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011, is being executed with massive European and American support, with Israel turning a blind eye, and even giving tacit support.

Fayyad has wisely stated that he does not intend to declare a Palestinian state unilaterally, which would embarrass Israel, but that he is only acting to prepare the groundwork for the establishment of a state and to ensure its existence, after the sides come to an agreement. (Whether he adheres to this promise is yet to be seen).

From the point of view of the heads of the Palestinian Authority, holding direct negotiations with Israel is an obstacle to their strategy, and even puts it at risk. This is because, until now, they have been working to achieve their strategic goals with wall-to-wall support (to a certain degree even with the support of Hamas), without being asked to pay any price to Israel without signing any agreements, without recognizing Israel's right to exist, and without renouncing "the right of return", etc. Any significant progress in the direct negotiations with Israel will necessarily result in sharp criticism within the Palestinian arena and their position will be weakened.

On the other side, there is Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of a right leaning government. Even if he wishes to give these negotiations practical content, it is clear to all that by so doing, he will endanger his government and even the continuation of his regime. Bibi is not one to commit political suicide. He was happy to assist Salam Fayyad in establishing the infrastructure of a Palestinian state in secret. However, he is not

interested in overt significant progress in the direct talks with the Palestinians, because of the heavy political price he will pay.

The third player in the arena, the Hamas, is also fearful of the renewal of direct negotiations. The Hamas leadership is striving for legitimacy in the eyes of the world, and for the removal of the blockade on Gaza. Wide-scale terror attacks have not served the immediate interests of Hamas up to now. The Hamas leadership is examining Fayyad's activities in building the infrastructure for a Palestinian state, and instead of openly confronting Fatah in the West Bank, it chooses to prepare its forces there for the time when they will take on Fatah and win, and will pluck the infrastructure already prepared by the Palestinian Authority, like a ripe fruit. So long as Abu Mazen and Fayyad do not pay Israel a political price and do not sign any agreements with it, the Hamas does not wish to violate the status quo.

However, the White House is in a hurry. President Obama wants to produce a political achievement, if possible, before Congress elections in November 2010. He is therefore coercing the sides to conduct direct negotiations. Israel and the Palestinians are obeying, despite themselves. Their only desire is to gain enough points to serve them in the propaganda campaign that will follow the collapse of the talks.

The Hamas leadership is not interested at this stage in "breaking the rules" by initiating a wave of suicide attacks. It is anxiously following the opening of the negotiations, and is supporting terror attacks on a limited scale, particularly in the West Bank. These attacks, whether they are initiated by the leadership or are a result of local initiative, serve Hamas's goals and send a warning message of displeasure to the leadership of Fatah, not to deviate from the procedural mandate.

However, if the process that started in Washington appears to be bearing fruit, then the Hamas leadership will remove all impediments and will renew the waves of suicide attacks inside Israel. If that happens, the scope of terrorism will depend on the Israeli and Palestinian security services' ability to locate and thwart the attackers.

Why do we hate them now? Anti-Islamic feelings nine years after 9/11

Roger Friedland, The Huffington Post, 11 September 2010

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/roger-friedland/why-do-we-hate-them-now-a_b_712351.html

Why is there so much anti-Muslim sentiment just now, nine years after September 11?

(I was asked this by a Brazilian journalist, Manuela Franceschini, who writes for *Veja*, a Brazilian magazine. I have been working on politicized religion for many years. This is how I answered her.)

I cannot know for sure because I have not seen any survey data, but I suspect there are a number of reasons. Most importantly, I think there is a perception that large numbers of Muslims hate America and wish to do us harm. We perceive ourselves as a country

that has sought to liberate Muslims from brutal dictatorship in Iraq, to counter and undermine a repressive theocracy in Iran, to broker peace between Israel and Palestine, to save the Albanian Muslims of Kosovo and feed them in Somalia, to liberate Afghanistan from the radical Islamism of the Taliban. The endless attacks abroad, and more recently the two attacks by Muslims on Americans in Times Square and at Fort Hood have made many Americans hateful, condemning an entire religion based on the actions of its jihadist and radical stream.

We are just now drawing down our troops from Iraq. In Iraq we expected that the Iraqis would receive us as the Europeans did with the defeat of the Nazis. That so many Iraqis treat America as an occupying force after so many American soldiers have given their lives for their country is deeply offensive. In Pakistan, that we have poured resources into the state hoping to help build democracy and protect it against radical Islam and they for so long refused to vigorously pursue Talibani and Qaeda forces, and indeed publicly could not acknowledge our contribution, has been deeply offensive to Americans. There are hundreds of thousands of American troops who have returned from these military theaters with their stories, their frustrations, their angers, their sense of, "What was it all for in the end?"

American foreign policy is in part built around the universal mission of bringing liberty to the world. Crippled and distorted as that mission has been by corporate and geo-political interests, particularly regarding oil, this has been a critical vector. That our efforts are failing, that the people themselves we are seeking to help have not risen to the challenge with American backing, is understood as a repudiation of our mission, of ungratefulness and of an incapacity and unwillingness to reach for freedom. Americans look for a reason, and many of them conclude that Islam must be the explanation. *They do not want us there, so why should we welcome them here? And why should we allow them to build a mosque so close to the site of our collective wound, the place where we learned that a few of their angry men infused with a sense of divine mission could attack the very centers of our land?* I can understand the rage, but from my point of view, the building of a mosque dedicated to liberal Islam and inter-religious dialogue would be a testament to the best that America represents, a defiant realization of what al-Qaeda and the Islamist movements around the world are fighting against.

Is there a problem in how the US government is conducting itself?

Yes, there is a problem, and that is our sense that we can most effectively counter these movements with massive military force. Much of the Islamic world understands these interventions as humiliations in which they see us as killing large numbers of Muslims. Remember that Saudi Arabia expelled Americans from bases on their soil in the lead up to the Gulf War. We have allowed a theater of terrorism to become a theater of war with disastrous results. We must operate with arms and aid, intelligence and targeted undercover operations. We must learn the lessons of Afghanistan when the mujahadeen pushed the Soviet forces from their land. Only people willing to die for their land, for their principles, for their lives, can realize political change. Many of our allies are willing to die for their people, but not for our principles.

And then there is the question of Israel and Palestine, in which the USA is not understood in the Islamic world as an honest broker. The relentless attacks by the Hamas regime in Gaza finally lured Israel into a disastrous and brutal war, which has undercut the legitimacy of Israel in the world, and, by implication, our legitimacy. The

enemies of peace -- radical religious Muslim among the Palestinians and radical religious Jews among the Israeli settlers -- have been allowed to win. But rather than put the pressure on both parties, particularly Israel, the USA backed away under President Bush. Our government allowed Israel to continue to expand its settlement of the West Bank. If the USA does not intervene more forcefully, the West Bank may become another Gaza. Both Israel and Palestine, and importantly America, will be tested in these coming months.

What is your sense of the future of this intolerance?

If Islamist radicals continue to attack America on its own soil, I am very worried about our capacity to withstand the forces of exclusion and hatred. But I also think you need to put the hostility to Islam in context. This is the same year in which we elected a Muslim woman as Miss America, in which there are two Muslims sitting in Congress. There are pockets of hate and intolerance. They are real and dangerous, but there are also millions of cordial, generous and intimate encounters that go on all the time. Hopefully we will be able to build on those. It is a very dangerous time, in part because we are living through the eclipse of American hegemony, when Americans feel the limits of our power, our wealth, the capacity of our vision to animate the world. There is a way in which Osama bin-Laden has won, weakening our country more than military battalions ever could. We have been drawn into his war on his terms. And we cannot even find him. That sense of helplessness is crippling a giant who is capable of great things in this post-Cold-War period.

Bits and Pieces
elsewhere

Clips from media in the Middle East and

Imra.org, 14 September 2010: On Monday (Sept. 13) IDF's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (CoGAT) transferred 250 tons of construction materials into the Gaza Strip. These materials were brought in as part of a project to upgrade the sewage treatment plant in the neighborhood of Sheikh Ajlin, which is in the central Gaza Strip. In addition to regular maintenance and water treatment, this project will significantly reduce runoff into the Mediterranean Sea. The Sheikh Ajlin sewage treatment plant project has been sponsored by the German government and its KfW Bankengruppe government-owned development bank, and was approved two months ago by Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and German Ambassador to Israel Dr. Harald Kindermann.

ICEJ News, 13 September 2010: IAEA chief warns Iran over nuclear inspectors: International Atomic Energy Agency chief Yukiya Amano warned a board meeting of the 35 nation IAEA on Monday that he is unable to confirm Iran's claim that its renegade nuclear program is designed for peaceful purposes because Teheran has not cooperated with IAEA inspectors.