

ARTICLES.

■ OSLO I TO OSLO II

The Mirage Of Peace

EDWARD W. SAID

Under pressure from the Palestinian residents of Hebron not to sign an agreement that would give 450 Israeli settlers encamped in the center of town separate rights and an army to guard them, Yasir Arafat theatrically pulled out of his eleventh-hour meeting with Shimon Peres "We are not slaves!" Arafat shouted. Moments later he was reached on the telephone by Dennis Ross, the State Department's "coordinator" in charge of the Middle East peace process. "If you don't sign now," Ross was reported to have said, "you don't get the \$100 million"—a reference to America's yearly pledge toward Palestinian development projects in the West Bank. Arafat signed, and the protests in Hebron continued.

As a negotiating turn, this was not unusual. Without maps of their own, without the requisite detailed knowledge of the facts or figures possessed by the Israelis, without a firm commitment to principle, the Palestinian negotiators have consistently yielded to Israeli and American pressures. What Palestinians have got in the latest agreement, initialed in Taba, Egypt, is a series of municipal responsibilities in bantustans dominated from the outside by Israel. What Israel has got is official Palestinian consent to continued occupation.

What's astonishing is that this agreement—popularly known as Oslo II—is now being celebrated in the West as an Israeli "withdrawal" from the occupied territories, as an honorable and serious move toward peace, when in fact there is neither occasion nor cause to justify such hand-clapping. Signed and saluted on the White House Lawn on September 28, almost two years to the day after the "historic handshake" that sealed Oslo I, the agreement enjoins Israel merely to redeploy its troops from the center of the main West Bank towns (excluding Hebron) to their outskirts. In this redeployment, Israel will establish sixty-two new military bases in the West Bank. As Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has put it, "The problem is not [the army's] permanent presence but its freedom of action." Israel will thus retain control of exits and entries to the towns, as it will control all roads on the West Bank.

Palestinians will have municipal authority over the towns and some 400 villages within the Israeli cordon, but they will have no real security responsibility, no right to resources or land outside the populated centers and no authority at all over Israeli settlers, police and army. Israel will continue to hold fifty or sixty Palestinian villages. The settlements will be untouched and a system of roads will connect them to one

another, making it possible for settlers, like whites in the old South Africa, to avoid or even see the people of the bantustans, and making it impossible for Palestinians to rule over any contiguous territory.

In numerical terms, the Palestinians will have civil control—without sovereignty—of about 5 percent of the West Bank. Israel will have exclusive control of 8 percent (the settlements, *not counting* those around illegally annexed East Jerusalem), plus effective control—security, water, land, air space and airwaves, roads, borders, etc.—of the whole.

Politically and economically this is disastrous, and I think it is absolutely legitimate to suggest that no negotiations, and no agreement, would be better than what has so far been determined. Oslo II gives the Palestinian Authority the appurtenances of rule without the reality—a kingdom of illusions, with Israel firmly in command. Any West Bank town, under the new agreement, can be closed at will by the Israelis, as was Jericho during the last days of August, and Gaza in September. All commercial traffic between Gaza and the West Bank autonomy zones is in Israeli hands. Thus, a truck carrying tomatoes from Gaza to the West Bank town of Nablus must stop at the border, unload onto an Israeli truck, then reload the produce onto a Palestinian truck upon entering Nablus. This takes three days, with the fruit rotting in the meantime and the costs going so high as to make such transactions prohibitive. (In the West Bank it is cheaper to import tomatoes from Spain than from Gaza.)

The idea, of course, is to impress upon Palestinians, in as humiliating a way as possible, that Israel controls their economy. Likewise, their future political process. The Legislative Council of eighty-two people is to be elected next spring, al-

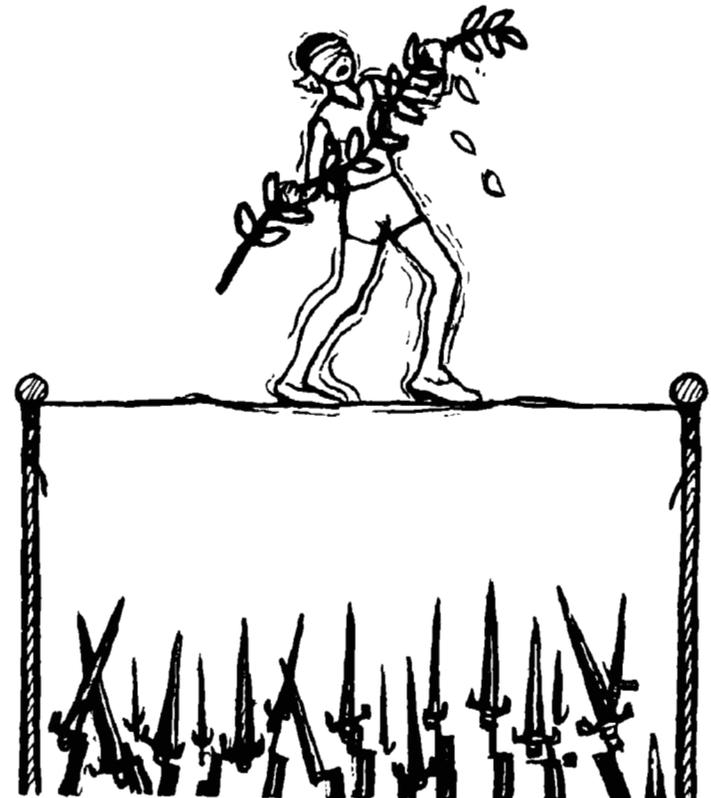


ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL MARCUS

Edward W. Said's latest book, *Peace & Its Discontents*, just out in London from Vintage, will be published here in January.

though candidates have to be approved by the Israelis. "Racists" and "terrorists" will be barred. (There is no parallel proscription on the Israeli side, where, for instance, Rafael Eitan, war criminal of the 1982 Lebanon invasion and a man who has referred to Palestinians as "cockroaches," sits in the Knesset.) Israel may veto any piece of legislation enacted by the Council, which has no jurisdiction over or representatives from East Jerusalem. Arafat, in any case, has won for himself the privilege of being called chairman/president, although the Israelis insisted that he name a vice president/chairman. He seems to have refused, insisting that anyone inferior to him must be known only as *mutahaddith*, or spokesman.

Much of what Oslo II prescribes so disadvantageously for Palestinians—and, in the long run, for Israelis as well—was set in motion by Oslo I. You wouldn't know this from conventional "expert" opinion in the West. The prevailing belief underlying most analysis—from such dubious authorities as Bernard Lewis, Judith Miller, Steven Emerson, Daniel Pipes and others—has been that now the only serious obstacles to peace are Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. In this, the experts have followed the politicians. The British journalist Robert Fisk, writing in *The Independent* on October 30, 1994, noted how frequently President Clinton used the words "terrorism" and "violence" while on a trip through the Middle East:

The use of that one corrosive word "terror" crept through every speech the President made. He lectured King Hussein on "the face of terror and extremism"; he talked in Damascus of "terrorist infiltration" and "of murderous acts of terror"; he spoke in the Knesset of "the merchants of terror", linking them in his Israeli speech with what he called "the plague of anti-Semitism."

That the "peace" under which so many Palestinians have lost hope of any real freedom might be an undesirable state, that it might drive some people to suicidal violence, is a matter almost never looked at, much less debated and admitted.

Consider the situation in the two years since Oslo I was signed. Gaza's unemployment stands at almost 60 percent. Israel continues to control about 40 percent of Gazan land. It also unilaterally controls the border with Gaza, which is now closed to all but 8,000 Gazans, who must have a pass card showing that they work in Israel. In pre-Oslo 1993, 30,000 people were allowed to cross; in 1987, 80,000. Sara Roy, who more than anyone else in America has chronicled Israel's systematic de-development of Gaza, wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor* this past April 12:

Israel will not allow any raw materials into the Gaza Strip. At present, for example, there is no cement in Gaza. Hence, \$40 million in donor aid sitting in Gazan banks cannot be spent because needed project material cannot be transported into the strip.

Israel now allows only certain foodstuffs and consumer goods to enter Gaza, including benzene, cooking gas, and sand. Of the 2,000 trucks in the Gaza Strip, only 10 have permits to enter Israel.

Arafat himself still cannot enter Gaza without a permit; nor is there any free passage between Gaza and Jericho. One thousand one hundred military laws still pertain in "autonomous"

Gaza; 1,400 in the West Bank. A system of fifty-eight roadblocks prevents Palestinians from going from north to south in the West Bank, especially as the "Judaization" of Jerusalem (imagine the outcry if Jews were forced to endure "Arabization"!) prohibits Arabs from entering the now greatly distended boundaries of the city. Four hundred Gazan students of Bir Zeit University and twelve professors were unable to go to school for about three months. Not only is East Jerusalem cut off from the West Bank and Gaza, which is closed to the outside world like an enormous prison, but Arab life in the Old City is being choked off. People there are being forced out of their houses, and residents of outlying areas like Beit Hanina, Shoufat and Silwan watch powerless as settler housing projects rear their grossly out-of-proportion dimensions, ruining the city's natural contours, its air and its environment. This year has seen a boom in such construction outside East Jerusalem: 1,126 units in the first quarter of 1995, as against 324 in the whole of 1994. All of this occurs with practically nothing being done to resist or prevent the deliberate transformation of an Arab city into a Jewish one.

Will Palestinians now demand reparations for all the land that has been illegally taken by Israel?

The wonder of it—given twenty-eight years of military occupation, the deliberate wrecking of the economy and infrastructure, the active humiliation of an entire people, the enormous number of murdered Palestinians (more than 2,000 during the *intifada* alone, 18,000–20,000 during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon)—is not that there is terrorism but that there isn't more of it.

The Israeli novelist David Grossman, writing in *Ha'aretz* on April 4, chastised the Jewish left for its shallowness of understanding and "almost complete paralysis" since Oslo I:

Does our very silence constitute a dereliction of historical proportions which will have bitter consequences for Israel for generations to come? . . . I would suggest that we not despise the anxieties of the Palestinians, with whom I have talked. Perhaps they are able to feel on their skins, long before we can, what is actually happening on the ground: it may be that the "entity" that Rabin is willing to "grant" them will in fact be a weird hybrid between autonomy and confederation, criss-crossed by "Israeli" roads and fences, and spotted with numerous settlements at strategic points, in a way which will perpetuate the settlements. An as-if state.

Now with Oslo II, this "as if" status has been certified. Yet every leader responsible for its creation—whether Israeli, Palestinian or American—as well as their intellectual adjuncts, insists publicly that a series of fractured cantons is really a governable "entity," and subservience is self-determination. The dishonesty of it all is breathtaking.

Israel's settlement policy, for instance, is not discussed; like the question of Jerusalem, it has been placed behind a screen

pending final status negotiations, supposed to begin in May of 1996. Yet it is intimately tied to the fate of the "autonomous" areas, as Hebron illustrates. There, the presence of 450 settlers occupying Arab buildings in the center of town has resulted in mass punishment—curfews (one lasting three months), killings, housing demolitions, imprisonments—of the town's 100,000 Palestinian residents. Elsewhere the situation may be less dramatic, but the pattern of land seizure through expropriation, defoliation, uprooting of trees, refusal of permits to build or enhance existing Palestinian structures, will continue to shape Palestinian life.

If one includes the area around East Jerusalem, Israel has stolen and asserted a presence upon roughly 70 percent of the land of the occupied territories. The settler population now stands at about 320,000. There were ninety-six recorded confiscations and assaults on Palestinian land between October 1993 and January 1995, and there have been more, unrecorded, since. On April 28, 1995, *The New York Times* reported the confiscation of 135 acres of land in the East Jerusalem sections of Beit Safafa and Beit Hanina but characteristically failed to report what the Arab press and the *Monitor* reported: that those 135 acres were part of a bigger projected land grab of almost 450 acres. According to the Washington-based *Report on Israeli Settlements*, the authoritative non-Israeli source on these matters, Rabin has continued building and adding to settlements *as a matter of policy*.

His government's "exceptions committee," headed by Nach Kinarti, a senior official in the Defense Ministry, "has permitted housing construction in every settlement," according to the *Report's* Geoffrey Aronson, who states further:

The massive construction occurring under the auspices of the Rabin government is being undertaken by private contractors, working on the basis of proposals put out for bid by the Ministry of Housing. Most of the residential construction in greater Jerusalem and in settlements along the Green Line is being executed in this manner. In Ma'ale Adumim, for example, "the Ministry of Housing is pushing the city's development with all its ability," according to a report in the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharanot*.

The construction proceeds on the basis of a decision in principle made by the minister of housing or by the prime minister himself. The exceptions committee later approves formal plans along with the settlements' planning committee. The government then allocates "state land" for construction. . . . [and] assists with the development of infrastructure.

In a settlement just outside Jenin, one of the towns covered by Oslo II, Israel recently approved an expansion project for five new factories, with land provided free to investors, who also got substantial tax breaks. Will this industrial zone ultimately revert to Palestine? Will it be annexed by Israel, its managers simultaneously taking advantage of cheap Palestinian labor? Will Palestinians demand reparations for this and all the land illegally appropriated by the Israeli occupiers? Reparations, a fairly common element in other international peace agreements, have never been raised as an issue for Palestine.

The Clinton Administration, meanwhile, has said or done nothing to oppose these policies, even though U.S. taxpayers are still providing about \$5 billion a year to Israel, no strings attached, plus \$10 billion in loan guarantees. U.S. Ambassa-

dor Martin Indyk, former AIPAC lobbyist, former head of the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy, was asked during his confirmation hearings this year whether there was any U.S. policy vis-à-vis Israeli settlement activity. He said only that he thought the settlements "complicated" the negotiations, though "terrorism has a much more complicating impact." A few moments later, when asked whether the Rabin government had added to the settlements or permitted new ones since 1993, he said "No," an outright falsehood.

As Peres said in January, 'We will build, but without declaring it in public. . . .'

At Congressional hearings in 1993, Secretary of State Warren Christopher refused even to characterize the territories as occupied. A year later his department's deputy press secretary, Christine Shelley, when asked by reporters if there was a "clear statement of policy on settlements," replied:

It certainly comes up from time to time in the context of, you know, testimony and other things. We do—the briefers also from time to time get those questions as well. As to—you know, nothing has changed on that in terms of our position and, you know, I think it's—you know, I can refer you to, you know, to probably to previous statements by officials on that. But I don't have anything—you know, I mean, you know, our—I think—I don't have—you know, I—we—usually we try to have, you know, a little bit of something on that. I'm not sure that it's going to be, you know, specifically what you're looking for. You know, generally speaking, our position that on settlements that it's the Palestinians and Israelis have agreed that the final status negotiations will cover these issues and, you know, that's—that's also our view.

There is a causal relationship between this sort of talk and Israel's emboldened land expropriation. Indeed, silence and the wanton murder of language evident in the phrase "peace process" are central to the Israeli (and American) project. As Peres said in January of this year, "We will build, but without declaring it in public. . . . The Labour Party always knew how to do things quietly . . . but today, everybody announces everything they do in public." Thus, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics estimated in 1993 a net increase of 10,900 in the settler population; in October 1994 the settler's council claimed a larger figure (23,600 more than the C.B.S.'s) for the total settler population in the territories, excluding Jerusalem. Israel's Peace Now reported that there was an increase of 70 percent in government and private investment in settlements in the year following the famous handshake.

In Washington, no one paid attention. Indeed, in the wake of Oslo II, an Arab journalist in the capital told me it is virtually impossible to get any direct answer on U.S. policy positions regarding the occupied territories.

Where Washington has been busiest is in the enfeeblement and marginalization of the United Nations, historically a

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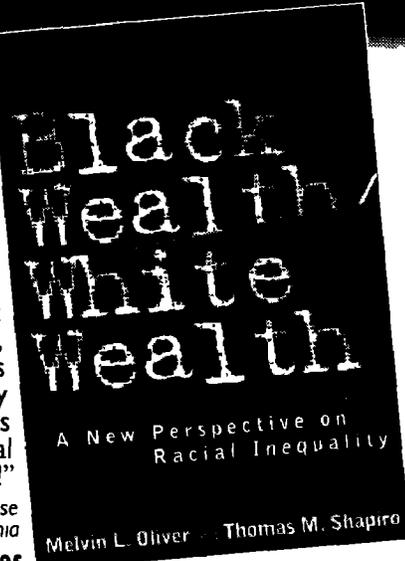
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forum for Palestinian protest, from these proceedings. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Madeleine Albright has importuned member states to rescind, modify or otherwise ignore resolutions that might prejudice or in any way affect bilateral negotiations between Israel and Yasir Arafat. All of these resolutions either urged consideration of Palestinian claims for self-determination or denounced unlawful Israeli occupation practices (most of them in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention or of U.N. principles forbidding the annexation of war gains). Although these were paper resolutions, for Palestinians as a people they represented the only international guarantee that their claims would not be ignored.

Remember that over half the dispossessed Palestinian population—about 3.5 million people—does not reside in the West Bank or Gaza, and according to the peace process, these people have little hope of repatriation or compensation for what they have lost or suffered. Many are stateless refugees eking out a below-subsistence existence in camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, without the right to work or leave. (That they have no place to go is now being painfully illustrated: 35,000 Palestinians just expelled from Libya were barred from Gaza by Israel and wander homeless, rebuffed by Lebanon as well.) It is argued that Oslo left the fate of these people to final status negotiations, but the damage has already been done. After laboriously constructing the unity of Palestinians everywhere, bringing together the Diaspora and the 800,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as the residents of the occupied territories, the P.L.O. by a stroke of the pen split the three components apart, accepting the Israeli designation of Palestinians as only the encaged residents of the territories. No other liberation movement in the twentieth century got so little—roughly 5 percent of its territory. And no other leaders of a liberation movement accepted what in effect is permanent subordination of their people.

Although it now seems that many Palestinians have been demoralized by what faces them in reality, I believe the Palestinian people will continue to want their rights to be equal with those of their neighbors, the Israeli Jewish people. The emergence of Hamas and Islamic Jihad are part of the continuing protest and should be understood as that. Their suicide missions, bomb throwing and provocative slogans are acts of defiance principally, refusals to accept the crippling conditions of Israeli occupation and Palestinian collaboration. No matter how much secular people like myself lament their methods and their vision (such as it is), there is no doubting the truth that for many Palestinians these people express a furious protest against the humiliations, demeanments and denials imposed on all Palestinians as a people. It is ironic that Hamas, having been encouraged by Israel in the 1980s as a tool for breaking the P.L.O. and the *intifada*, should now be elevated to the rank of superdevil.

Of course, the best response to terrorism is justice, not more repression. The deep tragedy of Palestine is that a whole people, their history and aspirations have been under such comprehensive assault—not only by Israel (with its patron and collaborator the United States) but also by the Arab governments and, since Oslo, by the P.L.O. under Arafat.

It is necessary here to try to describe the complicated mix of emotions and actualities that govern Palestinian life in the occupied territories today. True, Arafat's entry into Gaza on July 1, 1994, gave people there the sense that they are no longer as confined as they once were. They can go to the beaches, they do not have to be indoors after sundown, and they enjoy some rapport with a Palestinian (not an Egyptian or Israeli) police force. In every other respect life has become worse. There is a cynical Israeli policy of letting Arafat become as much a petty dictator as is consistent with their interests. Thus, the tolerance for his inflated police force and intelligence services, totaling about 19,000 (Oslo I and a subsequent Cairo agreement limited him to 9,000).

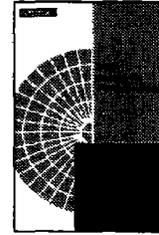
Arafat and his Palestinian Authority have become a sort of Vichy government for the Palestinians.

Arafat's political arm is his party, Fatah, which now plays the role of enforcer, armed by him throughout the territories. He himself governs unilaterally, in the absence of real laws or constitution. At the urging of Israel and the United States, he has instituted military courts that can arrest, detain and sentence people without due process. (When Warren Christopher and Al Gore visited the autonomy zones in March they commended Arafat's decision to establish these courts.) Raji Sourani, the brilliant Gaza lawyer who has spent his whole life defending Palestinians against Israeli measures of this kind, protested Arafat's fiat, and was arrested and detained for a short period without trial in February. He was recently stripped of the chairmanship of his own human rights group, with the connivance of Arafat's Palestinian Authority (P.A.).

Having effectively dismembered the P.L.O.—the only organization that Palestinians throughout the Diaspora have had to represent their national aspirations—Arafat now surrounds himself with a formidable network of hangers-on, sycophants, commission agents, spies and informers. All of his appointments to his Cabinet of eighteen ministers (seventeen of them men) are beholden to him for their budgets, and indeed for their political existence. In some ministries, whose work and authority exist mainly on paper, he continues to appoint deputies (plus about 750 "director-generals" without any known jobs to perform). The total number of people employed directly by Arafat for the P.A. is estimated at 48,000; this includes the 19,000 police plus about 29,000 members of the civil administration. Whatever money Arafat gets from donors (about \$10 million a month), local taxes and taxes collected for him by the Israelis (a total of nearly \$30 million a month) is all he has to spend. Little is left over for improving sewage, health services or employment

With all the Palestinian competence in economics and engineering available, Arafat instead consistently engages the services of shady figures like the Moroccan Gabriel Banon and

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the Lebanese Pierre Rizk, former Phalangist contact for the Mossad in Lebanon, or one Khalid Slam (*a k a* Mohammed Rashid), a Kurd of uncertain background notoriously skilled at arranging quick deals. These are his fixers and advisers, along with a new group of American business consultants, who supposedly function as his economic counselors.

There is, moreover, no system of financial accountability. According to David Hirst, writing in *The Guardian* for April 15, Arafat's attorney general is "a man whom Fatah once sentenced to death for stealing funds destined for the intifada." Arafat does what he pleases, spends as he likes, disposes how he feels his interests might be served. Above all, as Julian Ozanne wrote in *The Financial Times*, his pact with Israel "keeps the Palestinian economy largely within Israel's broad macroeconomic trade and taxation policy, recognising the dependence of the territories on their neighbouring economic giant for the foreseeable future." All petroleum and petroleum products used by Palestinians come exclusively from the Israeli petroleum authority. Local Palestinians pay an excise tax, the net amount of which is held in Arafat's name in an Israel bank account. Only he can get to it, and only he can spend it. At a donors' meeting in Paris this past April an I.M.F. observer told me that the group voted \$18.5 million to the Palestinian people: \$18 million was paid directly to Arafat; \$500,000 was put in the public treasury. How it shall be disbursed is at Arafat's discretion alone.

A group of wealthy Palestinian businessmen (most of whom made their fortunes in the Persian Gulf) have claimed to be fed up with Arafat's methods and have devised a series of projects for electricity, telecommunications and the like. These are financed through what they call "public" stock offerings, though the actual public is far too poor to invest in such schemes. These men (who additionally invest in, and profit from, real estate) nevertheless also deal directly with Arafat. They meet with him secretly and are not beholden to anything like a national planning or regulatory authority. They build the way they want, responsible only to themselves.

Given such activity, Arafat is lucky that the international media have largely spared him their investigations. This comes after dozens of books and articles before Oslo on the P.L.O.'s finances, its support of terrorism, etc. At home, meanwhile, the Palestinian press is not free. Very little that is critical of Arafat appears there. On May 5, *al-Hayat* reported that the

offices of *al-Ummah*, an opposition paper in Jerusalem, were deliberately burned; the paper's owner blamed Palestinian police. The opinions of opponents are severely curtailed. Hanan Ashrawi, by now internationally known, cannot be read or seen or read about in the semi-official Palestinian daily *al-Quds* because she is considered too independent.

Arafat and his Palestinian Authority have become a sort of Vichy government for Palestinians. Those of us who fought for Palestine before Oslo fought for a cause that we believed would spur the emergence of a just order. Never has this ideal been further from realization than today. Arafat is corrupt. Hamas and Islamic Jihad are no alternative. And most Palestinian intellectuals have been too anxious to bolster their own case, following Arafat and his lieutenants in the abandonment of their principles and history just to be recognized by the West, to be invited to the Brookings Institution and to appear on U.S. television.

I do not pretend to have any quick solutions for the situation now referred to as "the peace process," but I do know that for the vast majority of Palestinian refugees, day laborers, peasants and town and camp dwellers, those who cannot make a quick deal and those whose voices are never heard, for them the process has made matters far worse. Above all, they may have lost hope. And that is also true of the Palestinian political consciousness in general.

At a time when people are suffering and shabby leaders are reaping Nobel Prizes that only enable more exploitation, it is crucial to bear witness to the truth. As Palestinians we must ask whether our century of struggle should conclude not with a state and not with a democracy but with an awful caricature of both, extracted by a country that alone in the world has no officially declared borders and manipulated by a man whose methods and patrons resemble those of Saddam Hussein.

I have been particularly disheartened by the role played in all this by liberal Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Silence is not a response, and neither is some fairly tepid endorsement of a Palestinian state, with Israeli settlements and the army more or less still there, still in charge. The peace process must be demystified and spoken about plainly. Palestine/Israel is no ordinary bit of geography; it is more saturated in religious, historical and cultural significance than any place on earth. It is also now the place where two peoples, whether they like it or not, live together tied by history, war, daily contact and suffering. To speak only in geopolitical clichés (as the Clinton Administration does) or to speak about "separating" them (as Rabin does) is to call forth more violence and degradation.

These two communities must be seen as equal to each other in rights and expectations; only from such a beginning can justice then proceed. This is not where Oslo I or Oslo II began; nor will they lead to a just settlement. The peace process as now understood is a process with no true peace at all. In its present form, I am convinced, it will not stand the test of time; it must be completely rethought and put on a fairer course. I urge fellow Palestinians, Arabs, Israelis, Europeans and Americans not to flinch from the unpalatable truth and to demand a reckoning from the unscrupulous leaders who have lied about the facts and tampered with the lives of far too many decent people.

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