



Centre for Mediterranean,  
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# Middle East Bulletin

A GREEK REVIEW OF MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS

## *The Arab-Israeli conflict: Escape from hope?*

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# Gaza's "Groundhog Day"

**Marina Eleftheriadou**

*The recent escalation in Gaza reminded the world that the conditions that brought about the Gaza war are still present and a resumption of hostilities is always possible. At the moment, for various reasons, both parts have showed restraint. However, the dynamics of the conflict pave the way for a Gaza War II, III, IV ...and so forth.*

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An increase of the rockets fired into Israel (causing the death of a Thai worker) and a skirmish at the border that resulted in the death of two Israeli soldiers and two Palestinian fighters prompted an immediate press flood with 'announcements' of the second round of the Gaza war. Israel's Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz spoke of the need to "liquidate" Hamas and the deputy prime minister Silvan Shalom warned that a new offensive was imminent unless the rockets were halted. Gabi Ashkenazi, IDF's Chief of Staff, was more sober stating that "we shall review our steps according to the operational assessment", adding that "at the moment things are calm but we are closely monitoring events". In the end, Israel's response was far from last year's massive incursion and was limited to air strikes. In the meantime in Gaza, under the auspices of Hamas, all Palestinian factions (except from Fatah who issued a last minute cancellation stating "urgent reasons") held a meeting where a halt to rocket firing was decided in order to prevent giving Israel a pretext to attack. The escalation pattern seemed identical to the one that led to the Cast Lead operation; nevertheless, both sides backed away.

In light of the stated goals during Operation Cast Lead (to free Gilad Shalit and stop the rockets) and since the negotiations to exchange Shalit with Palestinian prisoners has been frozen, rocket-firing has resumed and weapons-smuggling continues unabated, it would seem logical that Israel would exploit the opportunity to launch a new offensive. However, this line of reasoning overlooks few pivotal parameters. First, it misreads Israel's strategic understanding of the threats it faces. Tel Aviv considers itself in a permanent state of war. There are no wars to end all wars, just wars that can successfully boost its deterrence and delay the next round of confrontations. Towards actors like Hamas and the other Gaza factions who can challenge Israel in the field of the so-called 'high trajectory weapons', this means that the deterrence achieved through an all out war is supported by 'touch up operations' to remind the adversary of the high cost of its 'misconduct' and military innovations that limit the impact of its weapons until the deterrence fails again and the circle starts over. Such 'props' of deterrence were the recent Israeli air strikes as well as the various surveillance and weapons systems that are constantly being tested and upgraded, such as the new Iron Dome rocket shield system that was tested in January and expected to be deployed in May. Israel considered Hamas's refraining to escalate as a sign that the deterrence was still strong. In short, *ceteris paribus* a large ground operation in Gaza will take place, but at a later time (and possibly not sooner than the two-year estimate after Cast Lead given by Ashkenazi and the former chief of staff Moshe Yaalon).

There are a few additional reasons that explain Israel's restraint. On the level of petty politics, Ashkenazi, who will stay in office until February 2011, doesn't want to jeopardize his future political career with an adventure in Gaza (which is a usual path to follow for successful Israeli Chiefs of Staff) that may not unfold as smoothly as Cast Lead. For opposite reasons the Southern Command chief, Yoav Gallant who is one of the leading candidates for the post, took a tough line during the crisis. Moreover the negative -for Israel- international climate (after the Goldstone Report, the European passports' falsification in the assassination of Mahmud al-Mabhuh and the crisis with the United States that erupted after the announcement of new settlements in East Jerusalem during the visit of the US Vice President Joe Biden) is not favorable for a large-scale operation. In any case, it would also divert the

national and international attention from the vital -for Israel- threat of Iran. The Iranian issue together with the status quo in Gaza offers the Netanyahu government an advantage on the Palestinian issue too. Netanyahu policy rests on buying time to implement his plans regarding the settlements in West Bank and the de facto annexation of Jerusalem. With Gaza considered a separate entity (physically and politically in the absence of a unified Palestinian government) and Abbas on 'life support equipment' walking on the rope between negotiations and collaboration, Netanyahu can prosecute a simmering peace process while in fact substituting it with "economic peace" (the notion of bringing economic prosperity and relative ease of movement to West Bank) and establishing the reality of a "three state solution". In the meantime, until Fatah is able to retake Gaza, Israel is content with a Hamas rule (provided they don't 'misbehave') because Hamas can control the other factions acting as a de facto border-guard force and its semi-statist status makes it more susceptible to deterrence and containment. Since a military solution to uprooting Hamas is unpractical because it would require an indefinite redeployment of troops, Israel prefers to wait for the contradictions of governance to take effect on Hamas under the economic and occasional military pressure, hoping that Fatah won't be irreversibly discredited (boosted by the limited prosperity in the West Bank) to take over the Pandora's box (including jihadists) that will follow a Hamas collapse.

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Ironically, Hamas is practicing the same waiting game, hoping, as one commentator said that "the other forces will blink before it does". Having survived the Cast Lead operation with minimal consequences to its organizational infrastructure and its ability to govern, Hamas managed to rebuild an effective administration under harsh conditions and limited resources (the 2010 budget of the Haniyeh government is US \$540 million while the Fayyad government's is US \$2.78 billion). The burgeoning tunnel economy alleviates the hardships of local population of which 70% live below the poverty line and 50% are unemployed, according to UN estimates. Hamas is not shy about the tunnels and is confident enough to allow BBC footage to show how entire cars are smuggled through. The mayor of Rafah (the town on the Gaza-Egypt border) has admitted that nearly 400 tunnels are operated (according to some estimates the actual number might be over a thousand), employing 15,000 people and carrying in US \$1 million in goods daily. It is believed that 80% of the civilian imports and 60% of the economy is based on the tunnels. Hamas has turned tunnel-smuggling into a semi-official economy demanding the registration of every tunnel at the Ministry of Local Affairs and establishing the Tunnels Authority to monitor their operation and collect the taxes tallied for every tunnel (estimated to total US \$150-200 million for 2009). The reality of the tunnels renders less pressing the imperative to tone down its positions regarding Israel and to speed up the reconciliation with Fatah which has stalled since autumn due to Hamas's refusal to sign the Egyptian reconciliation paper because of alleged changes it hasn't agreed to. Hamas has every reason to believe that Egypt's succession crisis, the embarrassment of the international activists who choose the easy path to "Free Gaza" through Cairo and the internal challenges of the Muslim Brothers and the Sinai Bedouins will slow down the construction of the underground steel wall that Cairo has been building since November. Al-Azhar's 'halal-ization' of the project

won't change this reality. In any case, even if completed, Hamas can have faith in the ingenuity of the human mind to bypass technological conundrums.

However, the situation is not all that rosy for Hamas. Although neither the population dissatisfaction nor the often-discussed issue of disunity amongst its leaders pose a serious threat to its rule, Hamas has to walk a thin line between the requirements of resistance and governance. Adding the 'resistance prefix' in front of every political, economic and cultural activity won't withhold the vexation of the most militant parts in Gaza's society and Hamas itself who see the "Islamic Resistance Movement" lose its resistance and Islamic credentials. Until now, Hamas has managed to contain this phenomenon by crushing the most outspoken ones (the latest example in August 2009 against the Jund Ansar Allah), by subtly Islamizing the institutions to diffuse the criticism and by occasionally launching attacks. It is under this prism that the border incident for which Hamas took also responsibility should be seen. After the assassination of Mahbuh, Hamas had to answer, yet in a controlled fashion.

In sum, although at the moment the conditions are not ripe, the determinism of the Gaza front points to the repetition of conflict. Small alterations won't prevent the dawn of Gaza's "*Groundhog Day*". The reconciliation between the two Palestinian factions is not in sight as both assume they are better off with the status quo. At some point Hamas will feel impelled to intensify the 'resistance' and Israel will feel that deterrence has to be re-established. It is too naive and idealistic to believe that, as Bill Murray in the homonymous movie *Groundhog Day* shows, the involving parts will give up their selfishness. Since the peace process is slowly dying (if not dead already) and Obama's new Middle East outlook has been stuck in the mud-sand, only a change in the rules of the game will bring a breakthrough; perhaps a new Intifada or military innovations by militant groups such as the recent - unsuccessful - floating bombs or infiltrations from the extended and more penetrable Israel-Egypt border that will bring the conflict back into Israel's proper. ■



# The *implications* of a nuclear Iran for the Palestinian issue

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**Anna Apostolidou**

*Last year, the Obama administration tried to link the two most generally acknowledged 'burning issues' in the Middle East: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iranian nuclear file. The core of this linkage theory was that progress in the Palestinian issue would enfeeble Iran and as a result Tehran would be more willing to suppress its uranium enrichment programme.*

**H**owever, now, as more and more American academics and think tanks are examining the possibility of Washington accepting - under certain conditions - the enrichment activities of Tehran, it is interesting to look at the implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Does the road to Jerusalem lead through Tehran?

In February 2010, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, following successful uranium enrichment up to 20%, announced that the Islamic Republic "is now a nuclear state". This announcement automatically triggered the West's reaction, which was already discussing imposing a fourth round of UN sanctions on Tehran. A few days later, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in his visit to Moscow, attempted to persuade the Russian leadership to concede to sanctions against Iran, offering in return Tel Aviv's participation in any Russian-sponsored initiative for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. This "bargain" is indicative of the Israeli Middle East agenda: Iran rather than the Palestinian issue is the region-

al priority. In Netanyahu's words, Palestine will become a violent Iranian outpost if it becomes independent while Iran maintains its nuclear capacities. Furthermore, Tehran has to be stopped by any means necessary, including a possible pre-emptive strike to its nuclear facilities, not only in order to eliminate the threat against the very existence of the state of Israel, but also so as to lose leverage over its regional allies, such as Syria, Hamas and Hizbollah.

Netanyahu has repeatedly attempted to convince the Obama administration of the urgency to take drastic measures against Iran; nonetheless, Washington seems unwilling to open a new front in the Middle East. It is noteworthy that people from academic as well as military circles, such as Colin Powell, underline the futility of imposing new sanctions on Iran and instead propose engaging in negotiations. In addition, Robert Kaplan argues for the US acceptance of Iran's enrichment programme according to the NPT Additional Protocol, while Leverett and Leverett propose a "Grand Bargain" similar to the Nixon-Mao rapprochement.

Although an eventual acceptance of Iran as a regional nuclear power will be mostly driven by regional security concerns over Iraq or Afghanistan rather than the conviction that it would contribute to the Palestinian issue, it is almost certain that the US would set the following condition: ceasing Iranian support to organisations listed as terrorist, such as Hamas. At this point, it would be interesting to see whether the Islamic Republic, which in the last decades has exhibited a remarkable wavering between pragmatism and ideology, would lean towards accommodation and escape from isolation or would refuse to discontinue its role as the true fiduciary of Islam. Nevertheless, it is mostly unlikely to cut off its ties with Hamas; after all, regional powers more often than not escalate their intervention in their neighbours' domestic affairs rather than abandon it. Apart from the alleged arms sale military

training, Tehran has expanded its financial aid to the Palestinian territories since the Hamas election: part of the Iranian grants is destined towards civil servants' and security forces' wages, as well as to the construction of camps and compensations to Palestinian families. Tehran was also accused of helping Hamas in taking over Gaza in June 2007. Speculations or not, Hamas leader and disputed Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority, Ismail Haniyeh, has lent a strategic dimension to his ties with Tehran, claiming that Iran constitutes "strategic depth for the Palestinians".

In the worst-case scenario, in which Iran will become an internationally accepted nuclear power and will continue supporting Hamas, the Hamas-Fatah conflict will escalate causing turmoil in the region and stalling any peace negotiations. In the best-case scenario, Iran would agree



to urge Hamas reconcile with Fatah in order to form a mutually accepted Palestinian leadership to negotiate with Tel Aviv; but even then there is no guarantee that Hamas will defer to Tehran's pressures. A more overt Iranian role in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, similar to Egypt, Jordan or even Saudi Arabia through the Arab League, is rather out of the question: Firstly, the Arab countries, already uneasy with Iran's regional aspirations and nuclear programme, would never allow Tehran's official involvement and potential patronage of the Palestinian issue. Secondly, Tehran could never accept to negotiate with Tel Aviv, since it would signify indirect recognition of the state of Israel, which would constitute a major contradiction to Iran's image as 'Islam's guardian' upon which it has built since the Islamic Revolution. A declaration of war, nuclear or not, against Israel in favour of the Palestinians is also to be excluded, not only because Tehran acknowledges that Israel has the capacity of reciprocating but also because it would lead directly to international isolation and punishment.

Even so, the upgrading of Iran's regional status as a result of its international recognition as a nuclear power will ignite a chain of reactions in Israel as well as Iran's Arab neighbours. Unless its regional policy is reoriented, Tel Aviv will almost certainly become more rigid and raise more red lines in the negotiation process, partly because of fears of expanding Iranian influence in the Gaza strip, and partly because it will not allow another defeat in the international arena. Washington, on the other hand, will probably avoid infuriating further the Israelis, diminishing whichever pressure to accept Palestinian demands in the final settlement. In fact, it would not be surprising to watch Tel Aviv postponing any peace negotiations, under the pretext that the situation in the Palestinian territories is too turbulent for rational peace talks to be held.

In addition, an American fallback on Iran's nuclear programme has already alarmed the Arab countries, and its competitors for regional power in particular, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Their concerns are not raised as much regarding the Palestinian issue, but as to the implications

for the regional balance of power and the empowerment of the Shi'ite communities. However, their defensive attitude towards Tehran will undoubtedly affect their stance vis-a-vis Israel, and in consequence the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Theories that the Arab countries desire to incorporate Israel as a regional power to contain Iran have been supported by various acts, such as the Bahraini Foreign Minister's proposal (2008) for the establishment of a regional organisation that would include the Arab countries plus Turkey and Israel, but also Iran (even though the latter's refusal to participate was a priori anticipated). In general, during the last decade we have witnessed moves that demonstrate the Arab world's turn from the Three No's to the prospect of normalising ties with Israel. The Saudi Peace Plan (2002) and its several re-adoptions in Arab League meetings, with the Riyadh Summit in 2007 as the most recent example, proposes the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the normalisation of diplomatic ties between Israel and all the Arab states in the region in exchange with the return to the pro-1967 borders and a "just settlement" for the Palestinian issue. In 2009, the London-based Al-Quds al-Arabi and the Tel Aviv-based Haaretz reported that after Obama's request, the Arab League agreed to confer over amendments on the Palestinian "right of return". Though no official decision was released, it is indicative that Jordan and Egypt, whose leaders played a leading part in this reported revision of the Saudi plan, seem to have become more flexible towards the Israeli demands, partly because of the menace of a nuclear Iran and partly because of weariness for the perpetuity of the Palestinian problem.

The road to Jerusalem does not necessarily lead through Tehran, and some Israeli think tanks who argue for the "de-linkage" of the two issues are right saying that Iran's nuclear programme is not related to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. However, Iran's acquiring the status of a nuclear power will challenge the regional balance and thus might trigger essential developments in the, suffering from chronic stalemate, Palestinian issue. ■



# PALESTINIAN SOCIETY: Economics, Democracy and the Peace Process

**Menelaos Agaloglou**

*The Arab-Israeli conflict has its core in the question of a future Palestinian state. The purpose of this article is to try to deal exclusively with the Palestinian society (focusing on the West Bank) its demographics, economy and its perceptions about 'local' politics and the peace process. The views and needs of the Palestinian people are not only crucial but central to any possible future peace agreement since the Palestinian Authority is operating in a democratic way (at least formally) and is obliged to take into consideration the views of its people.*

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**T**he dynamics of the Palestinian population growth are vital to the socio-economic development of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as well as for a future solution in the conflict. Currently, the population is 3,761,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. According to different estimations, concluded by FAFO (a research foundation focusing on social welfare and trade policy, transnational security and development issues), the minimum future population will be 4.1 million and the maximum 4.6 million by 2015. This population increase means that the Palestinian National Authority (PA) will have to satisfy the growing local needs. Taking into

consideration that in the West Bank unemployment reached 19% in 2009, one of the most crucial needs of the population is the creation of jobs. In addition to the fact that the creation of jobs will serve primary needs, it will also safeguard the 'street credibility' which the PA desires. With 47% of Palestinians in the West Bank living below the official poverty line of US \$2.1 per day and in a context of economic crisis and political instability the econo-

my can ill afford the erosion of its human capital. Provision of health, education and other social services is vital for ensuring some stability in the territories that the PA controls.

The relationship between the Palestinian people and the Palestinian authorities is ambiguous. According to FAFO findings in 2006, only 4% had a great deal of confidence in the government. Many Palestinians see the government as corrupt and unable to manage the funds in a transparent and proficient manner. Moreover some claim that the current PA government in the West Bank, led by Abbas and his appointed Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, was not established under democratic procedures. The elections in 2006 were won by Hamas, so many people perceive the Fatah-led government holding no constitutional democratic legitimacy whatsoever. Some Palestinians disapprove of what they perceive as a 'hijacking' of their government by anti-democratic figures serving US and Israeli agendas. There are also some more extreme voices that see the Palestinian Authority as nothing more than the extended hands of Israel in Palestinian territories. According to a poll conducted in 2009 by Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC), only 12.1 of the Palestinian population showed confidence to President Abbas whereas the confidence for Prime Minister Fayyad increased to 4.5% from a 2.1% in 2008. In relation to the new US administration headed by President Obama and its dealing with Middle Eastern problems, 57.7% thought that there has been no change in the US policies towards the region. Furthermore, half of the population in a 2006 FAFO poll agreed with the statement that 'suicide attacks against Israeli civilians are necessary to force Israel to make political concessions' and in 2009, 48% disagreed with the continuation of peace talks with Israel (Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC) poll, 2009). Researchers have observed that support for violence increases when the peace negotiations seem to be failing.

At present, the peace process seems to fail and that makes conditions in the ground uncertain. The announcement of an approval for the construction of 1,600 dwellings in East Jerusalem's settlement of Ramat Shlomo for approximately 10,000 new residents in a fast growing ultra-orthodox neighborhood not only sparked Palestinian protest, but also international condemnation from the UN, the EU and even the United States. Mahmoud Abbas is refusing to negotiate with Israel, besides US pressure for the opposite, in the absence of a commitment by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to 'freeze' the construction of new buildings in the settlements of East Jerusalem and in the West Bank in general. Actions of Israeli expansion are perceived, at the least, as 'provocative' by the Palestinians and the more possible outcome is that they are going to reinforce the stance of the more hard line political elements. During conflicts it has been observed that when people understand that the political process has failed to secure their demands, the only option is a violent struggle against the perceived oppressor. Already, local calls for a third Intifada are worrying a wide spectrum of people. It is not solely the Palestinian Authority's fear that it will lose the control of its population, but even US-CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus claimed that the Israeli new building proposal is threatening the safety of US forces and interests in the region.

On the other hand, if violence was to escalate to the level of a new Intifada, it is certain that much will be lost. First of all, the 40,000 Palestinians who daily enter Israel in order to work will not be allowed to do so and they will lose their income. After the start of the second Intifada, Israel did not allow Palestinian workers to enter Israel and replaced them with migrants from Thailand and Romania. At the moment although the peace process seems to

be stuck and even though Israel's illegal expansion continues, some important progress has been achieved in the economic and security field since June 2007. The GDP growth rate for 2009 was 7% (which is higher than Israel's) and the Fayyad government has implemented a successful campaign of institutional and economic reforms. New business initiatives and tourist attractions are flaring up in the West Bank, as can be seen in Bethlehem, where tourism reached 1.5 million visitors. New shopping malls in Jenin and Nablus and the increased purchase of imported cars are signs of the creation of a middle class in Palestine. Palestinian developers are planning the modern city of Rawabi that will provide jobs and self-developing opportunities for 40,000 Palestinians. The two biggest barriers for further and more sustainable growth remain the lack of access to land and resources in Israeli controlled areas and the Israeli-controlled borders (along with the strict monitoring of all imports and exports) as well as the Egyptian-Gaza border which is controlled by the Egyptians. Even if all Israeli checkpoints were removed in the Palestinian Territories the most important obstacle will remain; taking control of the borders is vital for the Palestinians in order to create a healthy economy.

The current Palestinian economy is totally dependent upon Israel and the foreign aid it receives from various donors. There is not much private investment in the West Bank due to fear that the investment will not pay-off. Serious criticism exists that the Fayyad government is normalizing life under occupation and that instead of trying to create an indigenous sustainable economy, he continues the dependency on Israel and on foreign aid. Many Palestinians view Marwan Barghouti as the politician who can unite the different political parties and lead Palestine to the creation of its state. Barghouti, currently in an Israeli prison, is Fatah's politician of the 'young guard' who, in contrast to Abbas, has won the respect of Hamas. This respect can be seen in that Barghouti is in a top list of Palestinian prisoners that Hamas wants to see released in order for them to free Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier who has been captured by Hamas since 2006.

To conclude, although the peace process seems to be falling apart at the moment, the escalation of violence seems unlikely since the economic losses will be greater than the political gains. This remains true for today's situation, but it is hard to foresee how far the Israeli government is ready to go for this time. West Bank's citizens feel more secure and more well off in economic terms than they used to be, and these are feelings that the majority will jeopardize only in an extreme case. The recent war in Gaza in 2008 which left 50,000 homeless, 500,000 without water, almost one million without electricity and severely damaged hospitals are sad facts that Palestinians don't want to see repeated. Nervously, the period of Fayyad's two-year plan for the creation of a state will come to an end in 2011, and the government in the West Bank will have to declare the de-facto independence it has promised. From that point onward it will be in the international community's hands to support their 'man' in Palestine, because if the West will not support him - it is sure that the Palestinian people will not accept another disappointment, especially from a government that they did not vote for. ■

# Palestinian Diaspora: *reminiscence of the 'right of return'*

**Zakia Aqra**

*David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel has stated: "The old will die and the young will forget". 60 years later the old have died but the young have not forgotten. The Palestinian Diaspora remains committed to the 'right of return'. However, its diminishing influence and the hurdles of the peace process jeopardize the return 'back home'.*

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**P**LO was formed and based on the Diaspora (for thirty years). Its primary constituency was the refugee community and its basic tenet was the 'right of return'. After the Oslo agreement, the PLO leadership – and ever since the Palestinian National Authority (PA) expanded their political activity from the periphery to the centre (from Tunisia to the West Bank in Ramallah) they unavoidably transferred their priorities to the building of an independent-state within the 67' borderline, making the Palestinian refugee issue a secondary one. D. C. Kurtzer, former US ambassador in both Israel and Egypt and now advisor to the Obama administration, says that all American governments have resisted dealing with what he calls the most sensitive issue of the conflict, the normalization of the status of the Palestinians, through a right of return to Palestine or the attainment of citizenship in other countries. "The refugees hold the key to this conflict's settlement," he says, "and nobody knows what to do with them."

Approximately 5.2 million Palestinians are living in the Diaspora in a total of almost 11 million Palestinians in the world. A significant section of the Diaspora is composed of refugees and it is the largest and the longest-standing refugee population in the world since 1948, numbering around 7 million. They are mainly divided into two categories: the "1948 refugees" and the "displaced persons of 1967". In 1948, approximately 726,000 Palestinians had to flee from their homes, known as *Al-Nakba* (catastrophe) due

to the establishment of the Israeli state. Out of the near-7 million, 5.5 million are the refugees and their descendents from the 1948 war (4.7 million are registered in the UNRWA, the rest are not). The war launched by Israel in 1967 (*Al-Naksa*), which ended with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, has added another 950,000 displaced persons (with their descendents) and 350,000 internally displaced Palestinians in Israel. Until the 1970s the great majority of the refugees lived in neighboring Arab states. Since then, many have immigrated towards the West due to the civil war in Lebanon and especially in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of 1982, the expulsion of the PLO and the massacres which followed.

It should also be noted that the decades that have passed since the creation of the refugee population have resulted in the differentiation of the status of the various segments of this population. This means that the Diaspora consists of the Diasporic Palestinians 'of the West' in Europe and North/South America, living away and outside of the 'Middle East proper' and the Diaspora within the Arab world, which can also be divided into those living in the camps (around 1.3 million) and those outside the camps. These different environments and, consequently, the integration of each group in their host countries plays an integral role on how each perceives the right of return, and simultaneously makes the refugee categorization issue an even more complicated problem.



The Palestinians in refugee camps are deprived of citizenship and basic civil rights, thus the right of return is a matter of survival. It is important to mention that the treatment of the Palestinian Diaspora in the Arab host societies does not reflect the foreign policy of the latter regarding the Palestinian issue; for example, while Syria is hosting Hamas leaders- in order for the latter to increase its influence for its own political benefit - Palestinians are segregated from the society. This treatment is also due to the fact that the Arab host countries consider these Palestinian communities as a threat for their internal stability and security. Another example is the Palestinian camps in southern Lebanon.

For the semi-integrated Palestinians in the Arab host countries, the right of return is not a matter of a viable future and survival as in the previous case but rather a main component of their identity. For example, Jordan has granted citizenship to the Palestinians, but there are always internal Jordanian policies which remind them of their status as 'Palestinians with Jordanian citizenship.' While the latter can be advisors to the royal court, there has only been one Palestinian Prime Minister who served for eight months. Moreover, Palestinians do not always have the same opportunities in the business field. Despite this discrimination, they have established a new life in the host environment and thus the question of how easily they would leave and restart their lives if granted the 'right of return' to Palestine is linked to the question of national identity versus economic well being.

Finally the Palestinian Diaspora in the West, which is largely integrated, portrays the 'right of return' from a moral perspective. This integration has granted the Western Diaspora a more active approach towards their cause. There have been many conferences regarding their demands on the 'right of return', including various organizations providing social, economic and humanitarian aid through development and relief organizations, research information bodies, community groups and solidarity organizations.

The Diaspora, however, despite differences in integration and well being levels and the different angles from which they receive the right of return can't nullify the centrality of the right of return axiom. However, the limited influ-



ence they have on the Palestinian political landscape, as a result of their disengagement from the Palestinian struggle after the creation of PA and the fact they are not granted the right to vote, renders their position on the peace process subject to the negotiating position of the internal leadership. This reality, in combination with the failing peace process, has made the Palestinian Diaspora increasingly supportive of a one-state solution (backed by important figures of the Diaspora such as Edward Said, Ghada Karami and Ali Abu-Nimah) which would make Israel's objection to the right of return irrelevant.

Nonetheless, while the Diaspora is in search of new constructive ideas, the fate of the right of return is not in their hands. Its importance to the peace process has been repeatedly stressed; Roger Hardy, BBC Middle Eastern analyst, has said: "An agreement that cancels the 'right of return' is politically unthinkable. It is the one thing all Palestinian political parties agree on, whether it is Hamas, Fatah or PFLP. However, because of Israel's persistence on the 'Jewish character' of the state, the question is: will it ever be possible to purge any of the three basic Palestinian demands (East Jerusalem, the 1967 border line, and the "right of return") just for the sake of an independent state?■

# Obama, Israel and the Palestinian Question

Ilias Tasopoulos

*American administrations understand the centrality of the Arab-Israeli dispute in regional politics, only after having reached a strategic dead-end. The potential announcement of a US Middle East plan by Barack Obama, while the vivid internal debate rages over US-Israeli relations, could be seen as the continuation of the final year of the Republican administration of George W. Bush.*

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Resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict has never been a top priority for a new American administration, as the US always seems to face a host of pressing problems. The Obama administration, for example, had to deal with a major recession unfolding in the Western world and, simultaneously, run the Afghanistan and the Iraq wars.

The Palestinian question, however, topped the agenda of the Obama administration from its very beginning. One month before Barack Obama assumed the presidency, Hamas, the Palestinian group in control of the Gaza Strip, refused to renew its six-month truce with Israel and the Israeli Defense Forces duly took the opportunity to deal militarily with their Gaza problems: Israel organized a military operation against Hamas targets and, along with massive air-strikes, destroyed much of the infrastructure in Gaza and caused the deaths of more than 1,200 people. Israel, unsure about the behavior of the next administration vis-a-vis Israel, attempted to settle its differences with Hamas while the Republican administration of George W. Bush was still in power. The Israeli ambassador in Washington and future deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, had already argued in 2008 that the then Democratic candidate, Barack Obama, was "not entirely forthright" regarding Israel during their two meetings. Barack Obama had not been enthusiastic about Israel's approach to its conflict with the Palestinians during his campaign to win the

Democratic Party primary elections; his competitor, Hillary Clinton, was actually carrying the Jewish vote. Although Obama visited Jewish political groups like AIPAC during his campaign, he did not wholeheartedly embrace Israeli goals but, on the contrary, had even stated that he would be willing to talk with Hamas, presumably to promote his image as a president more inclined to negotiations than to warfare.

The first foreign policy crisis that the new administration faced was defused with the appointment of Northern Ireland peacemaker, George Mitchell, as President Obama's envoy in the Middle East. Later, a clear condemnation of Israel's settlement activity was included in Obama's 2009 Cairo speech as a sign of his willingness to cooperate with the Arab states on the Palestinian question. Thereafter however, the Palestinian issue was absent from the US foreign policy agenda until April 2010. It seems as if the importance of the Palestinian question



had now grown, following the standoff between US and Israel about settlement expansion in Jerusalem.

In March 2010, Israel announced plans to build 1,600 homes in the largely Arab section of East Jerusalem during the official visit of US vice-president, Joe Biden, to Israel. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented it as a routine announcement, giving a clear sign that Israel was not willing to halt its settlement activity, even at the presence of the second in the state hierarchy of the world's greatest military power.

These events gave rise to a tense debate inside the Obama administration, revealing deep cleavages within its structure. Long-serving officials correlated the Arab-Israeli dispute with a host of problems in the American Middle Eastern policy, including the Iranian question, arguing that the prolongation of the dispute ruins the image of the US in the Middle East and results in severe security problems, like attacks on US bases. There was a feeling inside American foreign policy departments that the US and Israel might diverge in their approach to the Palestinians, and this might affect their relationship. In 2009, General David Petraeus had become the first top US official to describe Israel as a strategic burden to the US during his congressional testimony.

Other members of the Obama team have rejected these views outright, reiterating the benefits of the US-Israeli alignment and highlighting the importance of preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power. Washington had to be sensitive to Netanyahu's domestic political constraints over the issue of "building in East Jerusalem", the argument went, so as not to raise new Arab demands. Other officials, sharing George Mitchell's views, attempted to achieve a delicate balance by arguing that the Obama administration should maintain US credibility and hold firm in pressing Netanyahu to avoid provocations that imperil Israeli-Palestinian discussions.

Following these events, reports surfaced that officials, favorably disposed to resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute, have highlighted the need of a comprehensive peace plan dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, aiming to minimize security threats in the Middle East. Pro-Israel Obama advisers voiced reservations about this proposal, while George Mitchell

is said to have stated that that any plan now will unsettle his mediation effort and enrage both parties.

The real question, however, is whether Barack Obama is going to use his political clout to overcome domestic political obstacles in adopting an even-balanced US Middle East policy. Jews have been identified as a crucial constituency in the Democratic Party, which the Republicans are trying to win in the past years, without any success. Polls show that President Obama's overall approval rating has been higher with Jews than with Hispanics and the general public. Despite dire predictions, 78% of Jews voted for Obama in the 2008 Presidential elections, the best record since Bill Clinton's presidential candidacy. Obama's embracing Hillary Clinton and the selection of social conservative Sarah Palin as McCain's vice-president contributed to his success. In addition, the majority of American Jews think that the economy is the most important question in American politics. In a 2009 Gerstein-Agne poll, Israel was ranked as the sixth most important issue along with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If this administration chooses to pressure Israel, it will make the US Middle East policy an issue for the midterm election, scheduled for November. Presidents might be particularly vulnerable to political pressures, but the real danger will be on what is widely referred to as the Jewish lobby. The Jewish lobby, seen as a natural part of the American political system, has proven extremely skillful in formulating and waging effective campaigns to achieve its goals. Nevertheless, the emergence of support for Israel as a point of contention in various electoral races along the country could have severe consequences on the influence of the Jewish lobby. The foundation of Jewish influence in American foreign policy is the bipartisan support that Jewish political groups enjoy in the Congress and in the American political system. Political cleavages within the US system might result in the Jewish lobby not having the degree of impact that followed the years after 1967. It is unclear, however, whether this is going to happen sooner rather than later. ■

# Freedom cannot be bestowed it must be achieved

**Styliani Saliari**

*Verbal spats between Israel and Syria are a constant part of the Middle Eastern landscape. This ingrained and internalized behavior has reached a peak point in the last few months. Both countries exchanged heated words and the news that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has provided Hizbullah with Scud missiles make analysts wonder about its possible repercussions. In a region where everything is inextricably linked to each other the question arises whether this new round of threats will spark a regional war involving Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Iran.*

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It is definitely nothing surprising or even new that Israel's rightwing Foreign Minister Avigor Lieberman is someone who is not very careful with his words. However, he even managed to cause anger among his own people when he issued a stark warning to Syrian President al-Assad at the beginning of February. The Moldovan-born, former nightclub bouncer said at a business forum at Bar Ilan University that 'Assad should know that if he attacks, he will not only lose the war. Neither he nor his family will remain in power.' However, his most provoking remark was that Syria should forget



about ever getting back the Golan - challenging the official Israeli position that it will trade territory for peace. As a result, even Israel's most rightwing Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, tried to put oil on troubled waters by saying that he was 'ready to go anywhere in the world, at any time, to open peace talks with Syria without preconditions.' Nevertheless, the statement added that Israel would continue to act 'decisively' against any threats.

Lieberman's comments were a reply to Assad's accusations. The latter claimed during a meeting with Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, a day earlier, that 'Israel is not serious about achieving peace since all facts point out that Israel is pushing the



region towards war, not peace.' Nonetheless, Moratinos, who had returned from Israel recently, said that the Israeli state did not give the impression of wanting war. Syria's Foreign Minister Walid Moualem provoked the Israeli state even more during a subsequent news conference with Moratinos by saying that Israel 'was planting the seeds of the war atmosphere' ... 'Do not test the resolve of Syria, you Israelis, you know that war this time will reach your cities. Go back to your senses and seek the road of peace'. He also stressed that Syria would not just be a passive spectator in any coming war against Hizbullah; alluding to the 'July War' in 2006 when Syria avoided entering the war directly. Al-Assad and Moualem's statements were a direct response to a warning issued by Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who earlier that week said that 'in the absence of an arrangement with Syria, we are liable to enter a belligerent clash with it that could reach the point of an all-out, regional war.'

In addition to the February developments, the unexpected announcement by Ehud Barak from April 13, 2010 that President al-Assad provided Hizbullah with Scud missiles can be seen as one of the peak points in this psychological warfare. 'Much ink has been spilled over' since then, whether Israel is willing to enter a war with its neighbors and above all attack Hizbullah pre-emptively. Precisely, the question arises 'What will happen if Israel locates the Scuds?' Usually, its answer to this kind of danger is bombing Hizbullah's missile sites. However, the Syrian regime denied the validity of Barak's statement although it is well-known that Syria has provided Lebanon with weapons for decades.

Moreover, Israel and the U.S. claim that the last few months have shown that the 'sophistication of Hizbullah's weapons system' has increased. Therefore, some analysts argue that Syria's regime is assuming that the next war with Israel will affect Syrian soil as well. Thus, worried U.S. congressional leaders, senator John Kerry particularly, have visited Damascus over the last few weeks trying to conciliate al-Assad on the issue. The results of these encounters have not been published so far.

However, the main issue to discuss is neither whether Syria provided Hizbullah with improved equipment nor whether a multi-front war will break out. It is necessary to analyze the behavior of our macho posturing protagonists and to make clear that what is compulsory in order to resolve this long-lasting political impasse - as naive as it sounds - is the deconstruction of long-lasting narratives, and Israel's realization that its self-identification with the 'West' - while being geographically embedded in the Arab and Muslim world - has not been productive or beneficial at all.

The belief that only the strong can win is predominant in the Middle East and well-known by all its political players. Hence, this ongoing political warfare can be seen as the epitome of a deep-rooted behavior that does not allow any references to the long-lasting grievances and suffering of the region since this would be immediately considered as weakness. Thus, Syria as well as Israel want to look strong and present themselves as tough.

And since the 'Gaza War' in 2009 Syria looks strong and is growing strong. The fact that Hamas' top leader Khaled Meshaal has his base in Syria allows the country to be tougher in diplomatic negotiations. Also, Syria has gained popularity among the Arab public due to its support for Hamas and Hizbullah. Not to mention Assad's meetings with the Prime Minister of Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Spain and France which have led to a change in the way Syria is perceived internationally. Marwan Kabalan, a Syrian political analyst, argues that in Gaza there was an oppressed people, and Syria took their

side, so necessarily it will reap the popular and regional gains ... For now, he concludes that 'everyone on the side of the 'resistance' has been strengthened ... and that it has become imperative to negotiate with Syria.'

All this allows Syria to show an 'iron fist' and to underline that Assad is not Sadat, desperate to become an ally of the US at almost any price. The Syrian President told the American journalist Seymour Hersh recently: 'If they say you can have the entire Golan back, we will have a peace treaty. But they cannot expect me to give them the peace they expect ... You start with the land; you do not start with peace.' Syria is unwilling to negotiate with Israel about Hamas and Hizbul-lah until after the Golan Heights are returned; something which is very difficult for Israel to accept.

Israel on the other hand has identified itself since its foundation with the 'West' and has adopted a hard-line stance towards its Arab and Muslim neighbors since the Israeli state has been dismissed by its neighbors right from the beginning. Precisely, the rationale is that by demonstrating to the Arabs that Israel is invincible the Arabs will eventually accept its existence. This theory can be traced back to Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism, who developed the doctrine of the "iron wall" which implies that negotiations with the Arabs must always be from a position of military strength. According to Avi Shlaim, professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford and one of the leading New Historians, this doctrine has become central to Israeli policy; it embodies Israel's defense philosophy which is based on imposing its will on its enemies and not on submitting "unilateral dictates" by them.

But Israel's 'hard' power politics has produced only more 'havoc' in an already troubled region. According to Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, lecturer of International Politics of West Asia at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, the Sayyed Hasan Nasrallahs and Ismail Haniyyas of this world have been produced and are perpetuated by Israel. Their popularity can mainly be explained by their vehement opposition to Israel and the U.S. and provides the movements with their very raison d'etre. This means that Israel must realize that its us-versus-them dichotomy and exclusionary mindset is the biggest obstacle to its existence. It has to stop seeing and presenting itself in opposition to the region it belongs to; otherwise it will continue to exist behind 'walls' and with the help of checkpoints and wars.

Sustainable peace in the Middle East can only be achieved by deconstructing long-lasting narratives, by addressing the existing grievances of the conflict and by developing a critical mind without dismissing all this as weakness. In other words, it is not the final stage that is the problem but the inability to find a way to resolve this long-lasting political impasse - last but not least due to the consequences of the creation of facts on the ground and never-ending mistrust and suspicion which makes things so absolutely difficult and complicated. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said 'Freedom cannot be bestowed, it must be achieved.' ■

# Egyptian tales of diplomacy

**Alexia Liakounakou**

*Egypt's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict can be compared to the Nile River: it has always been important, it branches out towards many directions, it unites some people while dividing others, and it has been a regional symbol with powerful influence, while sometimes being dangerous to its immediate surroundings at times of overflowing and crisis.*

**N**onetheless, in the same way that the Nile is not a single entity but made up of flowing water and many different sub-rivers, Egypt's stance towards the Israeli-Palestinian question has not been a single response, but a multifaceted stance; not always clear and sometimes subservient to various outer, more powerful entities.

The Mubarak government, a successor to the flaming Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty in 1979, succeeded in forming a questionable stance both towards Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. Caught between its own interests, to withdraw from a state of war with Israel in order to gain all that the Camp David agreements had to offer, and its obligation towards the Arab-Palestinian cause, Egypt has become 'the mediator' and thus succeeded to be trusted completely by neither side. It has remained, unofficially, an 'enemy' of Israel albeit retaining diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, and has been for decades the country which lobbies most of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian factions of Hamas and Fatah, as well as mediating the talks between the two factions in order to reach an agreement about whether Palestinian governance can become unified between the West



Bank and Gaza. Moreover, being the premier recipient of US aid means abiding to certain 'rules' of good conduct and goodwill towards 'Western' nations, and thus compromises possible initiatives it could have taken if not under pressure from the outside. Egypt is considered to be an integral part of the Arab-Muslim world politically, as it shares borders with the Arabian peninsula and hosts the Arab League headquarters, and religiously, since Egyptians are by almost 90% Muslim. However, it has tried to maintain wishful neutrality

when it comes to the numerous Arab-Israeli problems, and has often tried to squeeze many eggs in one basket. And, because of this agenda of multitasking in diplomacy, some eggs fall out of the basket and problems occur in its interior and its borders. These require the government to either back down, or step up with a tighter fist in order to maintain some credibility - as it has chosen to do. Its current government has been in a longstanding confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters, and has enforced the economic embargo on Gaza since Hamas won the elections in 2006. Truly, Egypt has found itself in a rather curious and uneasy place.

President Mubarak and his government's tight grip of control on the Egyptian-Gaza border has been one of the largest recent accusations against him and his 'iron wall' (literally and metaphorically) towards the Palestinian people. The economic blockade of Gaza, moreover, whereby all exports are banned and imports are limited (in effect since the economic sanctions of 2006, imposed by the USA and Israel) has been reinforced by Egypt and numerous violent episodes involving the Egyptian border guards at the Rafah crossing all accentuate the idea that the Egyptian government "backstabbed" the Palestinians (to use Yassir Arafat's old words). Egypt responds to other Arab nations' accusations by saying it supports the Palestinian plight, while at the same time making sure to receive all that it needs from the US and Israel, winning support to keep the Muslim Brothers away from power. And, even though it acts as a mediator between Hamas and Fatah, Hosni Mubarak has widely supported Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas and resents Hamas and its 'hard-line'

stance, primarily because of its associations with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Nevertheless, as mentioned at the outset, Egypt is needed by the Arabs. More interestingly, even "Hamas needs Egypt", as Nathan J. Brown put it in 2008. Even if Egypt cooperates with other nations to eliminate Hamas, the dependence caused between Egypt and the Palestinian factions of both Fatah and Hamas makes their relationship a lasting one. Fatah hardly wishes to alienate Egypt, as it has supported Abbas's foothold in the West Bank. Fatah has been a recipient of economic aid by the 'West' and Israel, and since it is less polemical in its discussions and more willing to negotiate with Israel, it is also closer to Egypt in terms of stance. Nevertheless, Hamas also needs Egypt for its negotiating strength with Israel, USA and the rest of the world in order to maintain a ceasefire, and is well aware that Egypt is the only neighbor with the power to control the opening and closing of the Egypt-Gaza border. Therefore, Egypt has found itself in alternating positions of power and threat because of its geopolitical position and 'moderate' attitude.

However, this dual role in Egypt's general stance has not left the country unaffected, but rather the opposite. Its geographical position has made it a strategic spot for various underground networks to flourish between its borders with Gaza, and there have been many terrorist incidents involving Egyptians themselves who cooperate with Palestinian and other anti-Israeli groups. Although Egypt is considered to be on the side of the 'moderates' along with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (as opposed to Syria and Iran, for example), Jeremy Salt notes in the Palestinian Chroni-



cle that "Mubarak is not Egypt." Although, of course many Egyptians may support their government, some Egyptian people are not wholly represented by their government and its interior is not stable enough to support a unanimous voicing towards the issue of Israel and Palestine. In the terrorist attacks that hit the seaside resort towns of Sharm El-Shaykh, Taba and Dahab in 2005 and 2006, it was obvious to the Egyptian authorities that people within Egypt were resenting their nation's authority. The Crisis Group reported in 2009 that those terrorist actions were carried out by inhabitants of (mostly) the North Sinai region, who have close alliances with the Palestinians and whom may not consider themselves as 'Egyptian' as one would believe. Reasons for their 'outsider' status could involve their complex existence whereby many different tribes have managed to prolong a somehow independent lifestyle without relying too much on the state that seems to have forgotten them. Another point could be that, because they switched administrative status from the British to the Egyptians, then to the Israeli military and then finally given back to Egypt in 1982, their re-integration has not been successful. The Sinai governorates are among the poorest in the country, with aid being allocated mostly to tourist development initiatives and thus worsening the economic status of the ailing Bedouin and other tribes of the region.

In conclusion, even though Egypt tried to somehow distance itself from the problems of the Arab-Israeli issue, it cannot seem to avoid them and has recently cracked down on opposition to government decisions concerning movement of Palestinians, the border issue and the Wall's construction. Although it

tried to maintain its status as a peace broker in the past decades, it cannot seem to avoid the attacks on its foreign policy and on its soil neither from the blockaded Palestinians across the border nor from its interior. The Muslim Brothers are alive and kicking, and Palestinian-Egyptian networks are wide and deeply rooted. Therefore, although the government has implemented trained police guards, tried to lock down secret underground tunnels, used foreign intelligence and large amounts of money in securing its border, it cannot seem to rid itself of internal and external criticism on its tactics of strict control towards interior and foreign troubles that stretch far beyond the Palestinian issue. ■

# Europe's views on the Israeli-Palestinian issue

Elisavet Paraskeva- Gkizi

*EU's longstanding political "inertia" on the Israeli-Palestinian issue seems to change slowly and the EU is taking a more active role. This is part of the international, governmental and civic interest for a viable solution to the conflict: a goal which is actively supported by Europeans and especially European Muslims who, via numerous NGO's, struggle to offer the Palestinian people financial and humanitarian aid.*

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Europe's geographical proximity to the Middle East and its multi-dimensional bonds with the region (as, among others, the Middle East provides up to 40% of Europe's oil and is the place of origin of many European Muslims) contributes to Europe's taking a more energetic role in the region. Concerning the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the EU has been the largest provider of foreign aid to the Palestinian territories as was agreed at the Oslo accords in 1993, being an aid and state-building donor towards the Palestinian territories while the US focused on a political settlement. The pronounced \$2.4 billion of economic help was by 38% EU-derived aid.

Every year, the EU delivers 1 billion Euros to the Palestinian people, including support to Palestinian refugees through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and through other mechanisms such as the new PEGASE mechanism for support in the region. This 3-year mechanism is a new instrument to channel EU assistance to the building of the Palestinian state and a follow up to the current Temporary International Mechanism (TIM).

After the second Intifada in 2000, the EU started to be more politically active in the peace process and participated in the Sharm el Sheikh Summit (2000). During the 1990s there were policies initiated, such as the European Neighborhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which (now followed by the 'Union for the Mediterranean' under French president Sarkozy) attempted to create conditions for greater prosperity and cooperation in the Mediterranean area. Parts of these initiatives were also the agreements of 1995 and 1997 between the EU, Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization for the preferential treatment of products originating in the territories of Israel or in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. This association agreement, especially between the EU and Israel, was criticized by many Arab intellectuals and policymakers who accused Europe for financial generosity in order to overlap its political debility over the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Muslims, within and outside Europe, suggest that a total ban be placed on Israeli products by the EU as a pressure mechanism on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories.

The perception that the EU is not doing enough for the Arab-Israeli issue is widespread among Muslim populations, mainly in Europe, according to Tariq Ramadan. In an article in the *Guardian*, he describes the helplessness felt by Western Muslims about the Palestinians and their discontent for Europe's support to Israel. He also underlines the necessity of a "non-violent global resistance movement against the violent, extremist policy of the state of Israel" and he made an appeal towards this end through the "European Muslim Network", of which he is president.

In the past few years more and more NGOs across Europe participated in the global movement of the "Palestinian

Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel" that was launched in July 2005 with the initial endorsement of over 180 Palestinian organizations. The aim was to force Israel to respect international law and "to free Palestine from the crimes of Israeli Apartheid" starting with the demolition of the 'Apartheid Wall', the payment of reparations for damages caused to Palestinians by the Wall, and the return of all confiscated land.

The ongoing participation of people in these movements, individually and collectively (as is the example of "Israel Apartheid Week" with the participation of more than 40 cities all over the world and 'Palestinian Spring' in universities) indicates the forceful desire of Europe's citizens to act independently from governmental institutions for an end to the Arab/Israel conflict. Recently a civic initiative promoting international law as the core element of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, "The Russell Tribunal on Palestine" was organized after the appeal of over a hundred well-known international personalities. Moreover, the last session of the Barcelona Tribunal in March 2010 focused on EU's obligations and failings.

The massive response of Muslims in Europe toward initiatives about Palestine which are favored by the rapid growth of Muslim electronic networks (euro-islam.info, Islam Online, Eurislam.info etc) conduced to raise the awareness in the EU of the Palestinian cause in particular. Their ultimate goal, as Zaid Tayem, the head of the cultural division of the Union of Palestinian Minorities in Europe says, is to create a unified framework that brings all Muslims together and principally all Palestinians, by putting aside the rift between Hamas and Fatah, to act and to raise their voices from inside Europe.

Certainly, the humanitarian aid of many NGOs to Palestine is significant (the "Free Gaza Movement" from 2008 alone delivered several tons of medicines to Gaza) but, until now, there hasn't been a political result to their pressure on governmental policies for an end to the conflict. Nevertheless, their strong informative mobilization on Palestinians' rights and Israel's obligations is continuing with a massive and active response by the people through protest, demonstrations, forums and cultural activities.

The feebleness of the US to solve the problem as a moderator in combination with the pressure of public opinion for an end to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict guided the EU to enforce its role on the issue. The EU, in an attempt to imply stronger involvement in the peace process, proceeded to the "upgrading of relations with Israel" (18/06/2008) with many economic and social benefits for Israel but also many obligations concerning the violation of human rights and the reduction of settlement expansion. This initiative froze because of Israel's bloody incursion into Gaza last year and Europe warned the new Israeli Government that there would be consequences if it does not accept the formation of a Palestinian state. After the pressure of EU and US, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu announced on June 14th 2009 that he will back a Palestinian state -only if it is completely demilitarized. The EU is strongly willing to continue its efforts for a viable solution. In the ninth meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council (15/06/2009), the EU confirmed its last year's decision for the upgrade of relations with Israel persisting to the condition of the implementation of the two-state solution, but there has been no substantial progress yet.

Last March, Catherine Ashton (HR of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU) visited Gaza. This was one of the highest-level visits by a western official since Hamas took power. In addition, the European High Court ruled in February that products from Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are not included in Israel's trade agreement with the European Community for preferential trade treatment. This European alarm towards the Israeli government has been seen by many Muslims as a related fact to the action of all these NGOs and mainly to the "BDS movement" which functions in favor of the Palestinian side. Therefore, it is evident that there is a new push by the EU, in cooperation with the rest of the Quartet (the UN, the US and Russia) for the revival of the stalled Middle East peace talks, but it is certain that their proceedings are strongly dependent on the will of the Israeli and Palestinian governments to compromise. ■

# How are economic relations *between* Israel and Turkey shaping up?

**Aliki Merika**

*In an area where intra-regional trade has historically been largely politicized, Israel and Turkey are the two countries that have managed in the last two decades to form close economic ties, some would say, against all odds. Bilateral trade volume between Israeli and Turkish products is of the largest in the area, unequivocally linking the two countries in a delicate manner. Yet, whether politics drives economic ties or the opposite remains debatable since, despite the latest diplomatic incidents that cooled their political relations business has continued, to a large extent, as usual.*

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**T**urkey was the first Muslim country to recognize the Israeli state in 1949. After several decades, trade began to rise at significant levels greatly encouraged by the 1997 signing of a free trade deal, after a series of symbolic political meetings between Israeli and Turkish leaders. The 2002 election of the AKP in Turkey brought fears that the party's Islamic orientation and rhetoric could potentially create antipathy for Israel which could hurt economic relations. Yet, these fears were not projected in the actual intensity of economic transactions, which has remained stable through time. While in 2002 trade volume amounted to less than US \$2 billion, according to the Turkish foreign ministry trade was \$2.3 billion in 2005 and in 2008 the Turkish energy minister and the Israeli Ynet news agency claim it reached \$8 billion.

The Turkish free trade agreement with Israel has provoked high value military deals: water, energy and construction projects. The Israel Turkey Business School estimates that chemicals dominate Israeli

exports to Turkey, and amount to 45% of total exports. Other secondary-sector activities such as metals, machines and electric equipment and primary-sector projects in water and agriculture also score highly in the rank of economic exchanges. For example, in 2004 the Turkish Zorlu Group became a 20% shareholder of combined cycle energy generation gas plants in Israel by signing an \$800 million deal. Trade in services is also important: in 2007 the Turkish Positif bank was acquired by the Israeli Hapoalim bank which now holds more than 200 branches in Turkey, and the Israeli Red Data Communication Company has, through its presence in Turkey, gained a large clientele. In the energy sector, the 2007 meeting of Israel's National Infrastructure minister with Turkey's energy minister acted as the instigator for the Med Stream project, and thereafter encouraged talks of building up a pipeline linking the Red Sea with the Black Sea to transport oil, gas, water and fiber optic cables. Of great political importance are the ongoing military projects: these include the Israeli



modernization of Turkish F-4 Phantoms and F-5 aircrafts, the upgrading of Turkish tanks, sales of Popeye I and Popeye II, arrow and anti ballistic missiles. In early April 2010, the Turkish Defense Ministry, Israel Aircraft and Elbit Systems completed the upgrade of 170 Turkish tanks, a deal which was worth over \$700 million when it was signed in 2002. Turkey also recently bought ten heron drones from Israel.

However, during 2009, several incidents put at stake the Turkish-Israeli economic relationship. In the 2009 Davos conference, Tayyip Erdogan denounced the Israeli offensive in Gaza, and furiously confronted Israel's President Peres. The tension increased when a Turkish state television channel portrayed Israeli soldiers shooting Palestinian children in a popular show. Israel complained and requested an apology, only to get the Turkish reply that the government is not

involved with comedy shows. Israel's response came during the meeting of the Turkish ambassador with Israel's deputy foreign minister Danny Ayalon, when the ambassador was seated in a much lower chair than Ayalon, a fact that many in Turkey perceived as an insult and an effort to undermine the nation. In October 2009 the situation heated up when Turkey decided to exclude Israel from a joint air force military exercise and once cited Turkey's denunciation of the Gaza situation as the reason. Following these incidents, there were extreme cases where nationalist Turkish groups called for an embargo on Israeli products. The situation never reached such extremes but there were significant effects on tourism and on trade, since, the Moshe Dayan Center claims that Israeli exports to Turkey fell by 44% from January to September 2009.

The future of economic relations between Turkey and Israel may produce spillover effects in many areas. It is very difficult to determine whether it is politics that primarily drives economic relations or the opposite. The Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, speaking about Turkish strategy said that "We want to have an economic interdependency between Turkey and neighbors and between different countries in these regions. If you have an economic interdependency, this is the best way to prevent any crisis". Yet, despite the growing transactions between the two countries, political crises have not been prevented, as the 2009 events showed. Interestingly enough however, after the cooling of political relations, besides the decrease in the volume of Israeli



goods absorbed by Turkey, none of the ongoing large-scale investments or planned projects were affected. In fact, the Turkish purchase of millions of dollars worth of Israeli military equipment and the \$180 million purchase of an Israeli unmanned aircraft will most probably continue as planned. Data from the European Union Directorate for Trade indicate that Turkey is Israel's 7th largest trading partner globally, and is its largest trading partner within the Middle East, whereas Jordan is the next largest partner in the region, ranking only 20th, with a trade volume of just \$268 million in 2008. Therefore, Turkey is, and will remain in the foreseeable future, the largest trading partner of Israel in the region.

Yet, one needs to consider that even though Turkish-Israeli economic cooperation may seem impressive for the region, the relationship may not be strong enough to spill over to any other policy areas. In fact, according to *Insight Turkey*, historically and in economic terms there is no formal interdependence. This means that their bilateral trade is only a minor part of their economies, thus the current strength of economic relations may be totally unrelated to political ties. *Insight Turkey* adds that because trade has been so much dominated by military equipment and investment, it has failed to produce the social basis for a strong foundation of a long lasting Israeli tie with Turkey. This might be a reflection of the significantly different cultural mix of the two countries, which explains the dominance of investment and industrial product trade rather than commercial commodities. Trade is so far generated mostly by strategic moves by the two governments and private companies, rather than from the exchange and permeation of consump-

tion habits.

Increasing trade between Turkey and Israel stands out in a region where economic relations are largely politicized. This economic relationship has at times shown that neither political proximity necessarily leads to economic interdependence, nor economic cooperation requires political communion. Private business goes after profitable and open markets, thus, evidence of increasingly profitable operations in the two countries by one another could just be a positive sign for the future of this peculiar relationship. But in reality, the economic ties that developed between Israel and Turkey, which at first appeared to be relatively depoliticized within the regional context, have not reached a place where they are completely immune to politics. ■



# Arshin Adib-Moghaddam

## Iran in World Politics

Hurst & Company, London 2007

Olga Dalaka - Panayiotis Tsitsis

*In Iran in World Politics, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam proposes new ways to study Iran in a critical perspective. The book aims to present different possible theories that interpret Iran's image in world politics. Adib-Moghaddam's approach is to analyse instances of Iran's political image since the revolution.*

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As Adib-Moghaddam is interested in dissecting post-revolutionary Iran's attitude in foreign politics, he begins with examining the trends that the revolution carried into the present-day system, calling this influence 'Islamic utopian romanticism'. The Pahlavis' rule gave Iran a monarchic identity and emphasized the idea of Persianism. Iran was considered a superior Aryan nation, distant from both Arabs and Islam. Thus, the opposition to the Pahlavi state highlighted Shia-Islamic, anti-imperialist principles. Confronting Pahlavi ideals, intellectuals such as Shariati and Al-e Ahmad introduced these revolutionary ideas to the public. Shariati strongly opposed imperialism and dependency on the West. According to these ideas, Iran redefined its international role in the context of its new Muslim, revolutionary identity. These ideas acquired their own dynamism and foreign policy elites in Iran accepted them and institutionalized them. Through this process, Iran's contemporary identity and national interests were constructed.

As far as the consensus in Iranian politics is concerned, Adib-Moghaddam explains that the rapid transformations and policy changes should not be attributed to power struggles between pragmatic reformers and pan-Islamic conservatives. Different institutions may follow different agendas but the only true struggle is between progressive Islam and fundamentalist Islam. Nevertheless, one of the most essential principles is the preservation of the post-revolutionary Islamic identity of the Iranian system.

Considering the relations of Iran and post-Saddam Iraq to be of high importance, Adib-Moghaddam takes the chance to dispute several myths surrounding the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). The dominant perceptions on the causes of this war are an Arab-Iranian animosity with historic roots along with the Ba'athist state's insecurity towards the Iranian Revolution. From a realistic point of view, Saddam Hussein seized a suitable moment to pre-empt the newly established Iranian state. Adib-Moghaddam presents counterarguments to show that this war was not inevitable. To begin with, Adib-

Moghaddam argues that Iraq committed to the containment of Iran because of its self-perception as a regional Arab power. Moreover, it seems that Saddam Hussein was convinced that there would not be international objections to the invasion as the international community never opposed to this. Through a process which Adib-Moghaddam calls 'inventing reality', the Ba'athist leadership promoted the notion of a historical conflict between Arabs and Persians. The writer suggests that the conflict was not promoted just to validate the existing anti-Iranian perception, but was an outcome of growing Iraqi-Arab nationalism as well. Saddam was truly worried about the Iranian threat, but at the same time used the image of the Persian enemy to legitimize this war. The revisionist attitude of the Iranian revolution and its insistence on removing the Ba'athist regime was threatening the regional status quo and thus the Ba'athist party in Iraq needed to reassert its Sunni rule over the political ambitions of the Shia majority. Apart from Iraq's domestic concerns, the US and Israel were interested in weakening Khomeini's leadership and re-establishing previous cooperation with Iran. Adib-Moghaddam concludes his argument by rejecting the view that the Arab-Persian enmity and the Sunni-Shia divide condemn West Asia to permanent conflict.

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In the second half of the book the author emphasizes the connection between American neo-conservatism and Iran's image in today's international relations. American neo-conservatism, in recent years, managed to produce a "virtual" reality in which Iran is a pariah and a rogue state, ruled by fanatical Islamic fundamental tyrants who threaten international security with a possible nuclear assault.

The author analyzes how neo-conservatism in the USA gained critical access to the fields of national and international politics through its influence on the media and through the process of "institutionalization". Institutionalization is what Adib-Moghaddam calls the transformation of this ideology into a political line linking institutes, think tanks and other similar organizations. This procedure attempts and succeeds to lead the domestic and international audience to the conclusion that Iran's Islamic Republic is an arch-enemy of United States' culture, of United States' allies (such as Israel) and an enemy of the Western way of life.

In the fourth chapter he informs the reader about the future of Iranian democracy contrary to major Western misconceptions about the country. Iranian civil society, including Iranian Women Activists, students, intellectuals and reformists, is trying to find its own place in what we call the decision-making process. The new generations want to participate in politics by changing the ways of the past so that the Islamic Republic finds its true identity. Changes in the social and economic structures are important in order for reform to take place, and this is a view held not only by modern reformists, but by more conservative factions in Iranian society as well. And the key word in achieving such changes is, according to Adib-Moghaddam, pluralism.

Nevertheless, the writer admits that this so-called romantic impression of the Islamic Revolution created by the Satiati Al-e Ahamad group is far away from today's Iranian reality. However, as he rightly points out "the Iranian revolution did not emerge as an outcome of an armed insurgency" but as a result of non-violent action. "Such non-violent action against the state" he maintains "has a long history in Iraq". For much of the Iranian modern history, democracy and citizens' rights were not the most pressing priority of Iranian intelligentsia, being overshadowed by a long struggle against social and economic backwardness and injustice. Now, the struggle to attain democracy is gaining a pluralistic momentum. For the sake of this momentum Adib-Moghaddam's book is becoming central to any discussion about Iran. ■



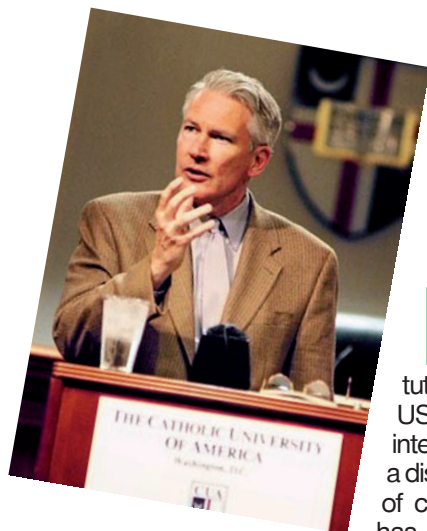
BOOK  
REVIEW

# Terror and Consent: The wars of the twenty-first century

Philip Bobbitt

New York: Knopf, 2008

Elena Chanioti - Elena Georgiadi - Christos Kiriakidis



*"Terror and Consent" is an interesting book and is written in a narrative way which distinguishes it from any common essay on international affairs. It maintains clarity throughout its analysis and allows the average reader to look inside the depth of terror mechanisms*

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Philip Bobbitt, one of the leading constitutional theorists in the USA and an expert in international security, is a distinguished professor of constitutional law. He has served in multiple government positions under the administrations of Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. The book's structure is based on three major parts. Each part is an attempt to introduce the reader into the history and the facts of war of the states against terror. His book is an extended analysis of the change in the constitutional order of the states, placing the question whether these changes will result in the triumph of 'states of consent' or if they will turn into 'states of terror'.

In the first part, the writer analyses the history of the war against terror. He insists on the fact that almost everything that we currently know and have been taught about terrorism 'must be thoroughly rethought'. He therefore proposes a redefinition of the terms 'warfare', 'terrorism' and 'victory'. He then underlines the importance of understanding that war on global terrorism and the actions needed to be taken in order to achieve victory are different from past conflicts. Moreover he focuses on the insufficiency of current interna-

tional law to cope with the challenges that arise from global terrorism, and the way it can be reformed in order to provide indispensable assistance in this war of terror.

Meanwhile, Bobbitt states that one of the most important issues one should take into consideration is how the WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) become a commodity. In the twenty-first century the rise of market states urged the emergence of a networked terrorism and the potential for arming these terrorist networks with WMD. According to Bobbitt's syllogism the growth of terrorism and the emerging availability of Weapons of Mass Destruction through clandestine markets are both a consequence of the change in the international constitutional order, and a serious challenge to it. This constitutional change is what he described as the shift from the nation-state to the "market-state." The state of terror is itself, bizarrely, a "market state," with no centralized bureaucracy, no official armed forces, and no geographical heartland - only an endlessly flexible and mobile fighting force, able to construct high-damage, low and high-cost "weapons" calculated for maximal civilian damage, and is also able to display in the global theatre of electronic communication a series of carefully staged atrocities to individuals.

The second part focuses on the gaps of international law and especially on the inadequate legal framework concerning violation of state sovereignty. Therefore he suggests



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methods by which international law may be reformulated and improved, and proposes possible actions that could be taken in order to preserve the sovereignty of the states. The central problem raised in the book is how far the state can and should go in order to defeat its enemies. According to Bobbitt's analysis, it is not the military forces that should be improved by obtaining better technology and effective weaponry in order to secure and to protect our nations. It is our knowledge on the Wars of Terror that must be reconsidered. Reformation of the International and Constitutional Order is needed, thus stronger bonds of union between law and strategy concerning intergovernmental policies so as to create a strong community of consent have to be created. Finally, Bobbitt analyses the three dimensions of the wars against terror which are acts of terrorism, proliferation of WMD and human catastrophe. To be more accurate, his argument focuses on the fact that global terror makes the old model of state sovereignty increasingly useless, being also subject to the transnational impact of natural disaster and epidemic. These factors can be as destabilizing as terror itself and can be exploited by terrorists; they can destroy infrastructure and civil society and so undermine the possibility of a 'politics of consent'. Thus a state that, for example, ignores a major epidemiological crisis becomes liable to international police response to the same extent as a state which perpetrates systematic human rights abuses. According to the writer, existing terror will continue to threaten the sovereignty of the states. Governments must understand the danger of terror and decide to act in favor of minimizing catastrophic consequences, undertaking drastic initiatives towards reform.

In conclusion, the writer's main point is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the threats provoked from the wars against terror, the largest phenomenon of the twenty-first century. Bobbitt's message is an effective response to the upcoming threats that will require the reinforcement of legal and institutional capacities which will fill the gap between homeland and international security. The book's thrust sources from an immensely powerful argument for a new regime of international law and an effective system of democratic alliances in sharing intelligence, peacekeeping and reconstructive resources. ■

