

December
2000

SETTLEMENTS AT THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT

Contents

Fighting for a proper peace

Fears of the year

Democracy American
style *

When the penal state
excludes four million
voters

When business
"invests" four billion
dollars

When information
travels at "Internet
speed"

Farewell to the land of
the Little Red Book *

Not working

Should corporations
care? *

A global compact

Oil in the way of
development

Fighting for a proper
peace *

Failed compromise at
Camp David

Replaying the
pictures *

Democracy has many
faces *

The science behind
shopping *

Communication
breeds democracy *

Anarchist plans for
Spain *

The revolution on
film *

Three years of civil
war

For two months the intifada has shown little sign of abating, showing the Palestinians' determination to see an end to settlement and occupation once and for all. The Oslo accords provided for five-year interim period of autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza. That was up last year on 4 May. What is in question now is a definitive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But the negotiating rules are one-sided: Israel will not implement UN security council resolution 242, which calls for its withdrawal from the occupied territories and the US, far from being impartial, always "advises" the Palestinians to agree to Israeli proposals. So there is a need to redefine a legal framework based on international law and security council resolutions, with the participation of other players - such as the UN, Europe, Russia - alongside the US. This is the only way there can be real peace, based on coexistence between two sovereign states.

by ALAIN GRESH

There were plenty of warnings. Already on 15 May, to mark the date of the *nakba*, the "catastrophe" of 1948-49, thousands of Palestinians had besieged Netzarim in the Gaza Strip, and Negohot, Beit El and Pesagot in the West Bank. These Israeli settlements, planted in the heart of Palestinian territory, crystallise Palestinian exasperation. Day after day they gnaw away at their land. They receive special protection in the form of thousands of Israeli soldiers, endless checkpoints at which Palestinians are routinely humiliated, and bypass roads reserved for settlers. In short their very existence makes any idea of a viable, sovereign, independent state seem like pie in the sky.

At the sign of the
panicked cow*

search the site:

search

to receive our free
monthly
summaries, please
fill in your e-mail
address:

subscribe

(*) Star-marked
articles are restricted
to subscribers only.
See [subscription
information](#).

sky.

Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, like each of his predecessors, approved new housing - \$500m were earmarked for settlements in the 2001 budget - even as he was declaring his wish to sign a lasting peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. And in mid-May the housing minister was promising new perks for Jews moving into the settlement of Ariel. A brochure underlined the deals to be had: only \$4,600 for an apartment that can be paid off in monthly instalments of just \$390 (1).

These settlements - all within territory which, in international law, is unquestionably Palestinian - encapsulate the most explosive points of friction of the new intifada. For its first message is clear: Israel must choose between peace and settlements - settlements that the International Criminal Court statutes, adopted in Rome in July 1998, qualified as a war crime. From that point of view, the Palestinian uprising has already scored one success by making the settlers' daily lives more precarious and their defence more costly. As one resident from Netzer Hazani in Gaza complains, "the shooting is not effective, but it is slowly killing the people. They fire off one round and drive the whole settlement crazy. They make the alert squad jump, they make the residents jump and they make the whole area jump. Not to mention the women and children. That's the worst" (2).

Are Israelis beginning to wake up to all this? Do they want to die for Netzarim? Writer David Grossman, like the Peace Now movement, says the settlements should be disbanded (3). Yossi Sarid, a member of Knesset for the leftwing Meretz party, concedes that "the settlements that are currently in the eye of the storm endanger first and foremost their own residents, but also endanger soldiers. We think that these settlements, despite the discomfort, need to be uprooted immediately" (4).

The new intifada marks the ineluctable end to the last ten years of negotiations. Palestinian analyst Ghassan Khatib recalls that it was largely United States' advice that persuaded "the Palestinian leadership that the best way to achieve its objectives was to completely drop violence as an option, and to stick to demands that are justified and legitimised by international law, in particular, the only security council resolution that enjoys the support of Israel, resolution 242". Despite these concessions and the acceptance of all Israeli security demands (there were almost no terrorist attacks between September 1997 and September 2000), continued Khatib, Israel not only went on confiscating land but said, at the Camp David summit that "in the final deal the settlements should remain part of Israel and that, in Jerusalem, what it has taken should remain its own" (5).

These unacceptable demands (6) (see map), together with Hizbollah's successful armed struggle in south Lebanon, provided the fuel for this Palestinian uprising. Its aim is to change the rules of the game in order to reach a just peace based on the coexistence of two states.

Like the previous intifada that broke out in 1987 (and lasted until 1993), this is a popular and spontaneous revolt - not something that was summoned up to order. But, as journalist Graham Usher points out (7), it has characteristics of its own: Fatah, Yasser Arafat's own organisation, which had been somewhat marginalised by the Palestinian Authority (PA), has taken a leading role, as have the middle ranking "graduates" of the first intifada. All the national and Islamist factions, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, have joined together within a common leadership - not the case in 1987 - and they recognise the weight of Fatah. The use of violence, including armed violence, against the presence of Israelis in the occupied territories - whether as soldiers or settlers - marks the specific nature of the new movement.

What is Arafat's role in all this? It is hard to establish with any degree of precision. The PA, set up in 1994, has certainly been discredited by its corruption as well as its negotiating methods. And the protests are indirectly against the PA. But at the same time, Arafat himself remains a symbol of the national struggle and this time - unlike in 1987 when he was exiled in Tunisia - he is present on Palestinian soil. And once again he has shown himself in tune with his people's aspirations.

242 - no more, no less

At all events, the political objectives of the Palestinian leadership and the intifada are one and the same: the return of all the land seized in June 1967, including East Jerusalem. No more, no less (8). The Palestinians say that they have made a historic compromise by giving up 78% of historic Palestine, and they refuse to give up more. So they are invoking international law - United Nations security council resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 and recognition of the right of return of the Palestinian refugees - and a new mechanism for negotiations. A Marwan Barghouti, one of the key figures in the present uprising, explains, there is a need to end the US monopoly of the talks and to hold a "semi-international conference", mainly under UN auspices, in which the major powers and Israel, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon would all take part (9).

Palestinian organisations and insurgents alike make one and the same answer to Israeli demands to put an end to violence: there can be no return to the situation prior to 28 September, when the clashes began, because it was precisely that situation that created the conditions of the present explosion.

The ability to rally Arab and Muslim opinion to their side is one of the Palestinians' main cards. This has been helped by the new Arab satellite TV channels, led by Qatar's famous Jazeera station, which are beaming out images of uprising and repression. During the first intifada - and the Gulf war - events in the Middle East were relayed by CNN and the rest of the Western media, but now - from

Palestinian refugee camps to the back streets of Cairo or Casablanca - people are seeing Arab images of the conflict. And the large demonstrations being shown - from Amman to Tunis to Kuwait - are forcing the Arab regimes to show solidarity with the Palestinians.

The Arab summit in Cairo on 21-22 October, joined for the first time in 10 years by the Iraqi regime, followed by the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO) summit in Doha (Qatar) on 12-13 November, resulted in substantial material aid for the Palestinians and the PA, and also the suspension of normalisation with Israel. Morocco, Tunisia and Oman shut down Israeli delegations. Qatar, reluctant to follow suit, was forced into line when the Saudis threatened to boycott the ICO summit. And on 21 November Egypt said it was recalling its ambassador to Tel Aviv, while Jordan grounded its own ambassador in Amman.

Saudi crown prince Abdullah took a harsh line from the start of the crisis. At the ICO summit he issued a warning to Muslim countries that had relations with Israel: "We expect these countries to downgrade their ties with Israel to the minimum level possible or completely suspend them, and link any future dealings with Israel with real progress in the peace process, not just on the Palestinian track but on all tracks involved." He also gave Washington a big warning, threatening "to affirm the suspension of diplomatic ties with any country that transfers its embassy to occupied Jerusalem" (10) - Congress having voted countless times in favour of such a measure.

Accelerated by the crisis, a rapprochement between Baghdad and the Arab world took shape. Direct flight between Baghdad and regional capitals became routine. Egypt and Iraq resumed diplomatic relations broken 10 years earlier. At the ICO summit there were even signs of détente between Iraq and Kuwait. The section of the final resolution dealing with relations between the two had its traditional title "Consequences of the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait" toned down to "The situation between Iraq and Kuwait". The emir of Qatar, president of the ICO for the next three years, was formally asked to conduct a goodwill mission between the two countries. The final resolution also condemned the "illegal" acts to which Iraq has been subjected "outside the framework of United Nations resolutions" - a clear reference to the US-British bombing raids on Iraq.

Baghdad back on the scene

Once again Baghdad is displaying its solidarity with the Palestinians. Vice prime minister Tareq Aziz warned that "a major conflict in the Middle East is possible. Confrontations are likely to extend beyond Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. Iraq has a role to play in future developments. [It] cannot stand idly by while Israel commits aggression against the Arabs" (11).

The US' Middle East strategy, forged in the aftermath of the fine allied victory against Baghdad in spring 1991, is looking increasingly shaky. Its twin premises were a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the isolation of rogue states - at the head of which came Iraq and Iran. Paralysed by the goings-on in Florida, the White House is witnessing the erosion of the anti-Iraq consensus and the reappearance of an Arab front - still fragile, but with Baghdad now part of it.

Anti-American feeling, already high, is growing and the State Department is increasing warnings to Americans travelling in the region. The murderous attack on the destroyer Col on 12 October in Aden shows the vulnerability of the US military presence. Israel's integration into the region has not just been stopped short, but put back to where it was in 1994 when it signed its peace treaty with Jordan. US attempts to enrol the Gulf states in a regional defence initiative have come to nothing (12). Bill Clinton's successor will have a job to redefine the whole of US policy in a region once more stirred by sounds of conflict.

So where is the Middle East heading? Several US and Israeli officials are talking of the risk of conflict spreading to Lebanon and Syria, or of a destabilising of existing regimes, such as in Jordan. Israel's brutal repression was premeditated: "For two years we have been preparing for this sort of fighting," said Israeli chief of staff General Shaul Mofaz. Amnesty International said at the end of October that it could constitute a war crime. However, as most Israeli military analysts confirm, repression will resolve nothing.

Mobilising reservists can only increase lassitude in Israel where a section of public opinion has now found its voice and is calling for an end to the settlements. Stifling the Palestinian territories economically, sending in tanks and helicopters, and attacks inside Israel itself will all widen the chasm separating the two peoples - peoples who by and large, to judge by mid-November's polls, are stubbornly still supporting peace (13).

In an open letter to Barak entitled "One minute before the next war", Professor Shaul Mishal, a political scientist at Tel Aviv university, wrote: "When the dust settles on the next Israeli-Palestinian or Israeli-Arab war, we will most certainly be the victors. And you, Mr Prime Minister, will suddenly emerge from the smoky edges of the battlefield to deliver the finest of eulogies along the fresh graves. You might even persuade many people that this was the most justified Jewish war that ever was. It will be a war in which we win every battle, but these victories will lead us nowhere but back to square one. Who better than you knows that when the last battle is over and we are forced to sit down to negotiate with the Palestinians and representatives of the Arab states, with American, European and perhaps also international participation, we will have to discuss the same painful territorial issues, and Jerusalem, and the refugee's right to return" (14).

- 1.
 2. *Report on Israeli Settlement in the occupied territories*, Washington, September-October 2000.
 2. Daniel Ben Simon, "Road to hell", *Haaretz*, 17 November 2000.
 3. *Libération*, 8 November 2000.
 4. See *International Herald Tribune*, Paris, 15 November 2000.
 5. *Palestine Report*, Jerusalem, 15 November 2000.
 6. Read Akram Haniyye's account of the talks, "Ce qui s'est réellement passé à Camp David", *Revue d'études palestiniennes*, Paris, n°25, autumn 2000.
 7. See Graham Usher, "The Intifada this time", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Cairo, 2-8 November 2000.
 8. The Palestinian negotiators at Camp David did however accept the idea of an exchange of territories. If Israel wished to annex lands with the highest concentration of settlers, they should cede an equivalent amount to the Palestinian state.
 9. Interview with *Al Zaman*, London, 27 October 2000, reproduced by *Summary of World Broadcasts* (SWB), BBC, London, 30 October 2000.
 10. *Summary of World Broadcasts* (SWB), BBC, London, 14 November 2000.
 11. Interview with *Al Safir*, Beirut, 20 November 2000, reproduced by *Mideast Mirror*, London, 20 November 2000.
 12. See Geoffrey Aronson, "Armed peace in the Middle East", *Le Monde diplomatique*, English edition, July 2000.
 13. For Israeli opinion, see *Maariv*, Tel Aviv, 17 November 2000, and for Palestinian opinion, Bir Zeit university website: www.birzeit.edu/dsp/surv2/index.html
- (14) *Mideast Mirror*, 17 November 2000.

Translated by Wendy Kristianasen