

Lawrence Davidson

Orwell and Kafka in Israel-Palestine

by
Lawrence Davidson

In the last two years I have made three trips to Israel and Occupied Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip). Each trip represents a journey into an approximation of the literary nightmares of George Orwell and Franz Kafka. To a certain extent we are all subject to the Orwellian version of these nightmares. It was Orwell's conviction that "political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectful." Here in the United States we ought to recognize the truth of this maxim for we have once again been drawn into deadly foreign adventures based on lies and exaggeration. However, in Israel the influence of "political language" has reached a unique level of intensity. Increasingly, many Israelis live in a "closed information environment" wherein an insidious Orwellian "newspeak" (a language of propaganda aimed at creating ideologically determined boundaries for thought), shapes thinking and perception relative to the



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Palestinians. This is just not true of your average citizen manipulated by mendacious politicians and a censored press. In Israel, as in Orwell's novel *1984*, society's leaders are as shaped by the prevailing "political language" as those they rule. Thus, descriptions of Palestinians by Israeli leaders range from "there are no such things as Palestinians" (Prime Minister Golda Maier, June 15, 1969), to "beasts walking on two legs" (Prime Minister Menahim Begin, June 25, 1982), to "drugged cockroaches in a bottle" (Raphael Eitan, Chief of Staff, April 14, 1983), to "people who do not belong to our continent, to our world, but actually belong to a different galaxy (Israeli President Moshe Katsav, May 10, 2001). For a man like Prime Minister Ariel

Sharon, “peace” for Israel comes through dominating and controlling “the enemies of humanity” (January 5, 2004). *Oppression and war-making becomes peace-making* in the land of Zion.

With the Palestinians, on the other hand, the use of language is much more descriptive of their reality. Just about every Palestinian has been negatively impacted by the Israeli occupation, and thus no propaganda can hide the truth from them. Any politician, of whatever nationality, who tries to tell the Palestinians that the Israelis have their best interests at heart and are in “Judea and Samaria” to raise Arab standards of living, introduce progress, and otherwise help the Palestinians into the modern world (all claims made by Zionists in the last 50 years) would be laughed at and thoroughly despised. Thus, deceptive language that substitutes for reality, *is not* what defines the world of those in Occupied Palestine. Instead, the particular nightmare of the Palestinians is best described in the pages of Franz Kafka. In Kafka’s world the prevailing theme is uncertainty and unpredictability. There are no set rules for behavior and the orders given by authorities seem arbitrary and even contradictory. You do not know what the laws are. The “authorities” in Kafka’s work sit in their fortresses and periodically intrude upon the lives of the confused and apparently helpless protagonists.

This Kafkaesque situation describes life in Occupied Palestine. Israeli authorities suddenly intrude themselves into the lives of the Palestinian population, and do so in an unpredictable and arbitrary manner. They also destroy in an arbitrary manner. Israel’s message to the Palestinians reflects one of Kafka’s more depressing maxim’s, “why build knowing destruction is inevitable?” A Palestinian might be safe one moment and in danger the next. You cannot predict if you will make it to work, the grocer, or school, or for that matter back again. As a result many Palestinians could identify with Kafka’s character Joseph K in the novel *The Trial* who, “without having done anything wrong was arrested one fine morning.”

Israel

Israel has entered into an Orwellian world of inbred perceptions and unanalyzed assumptions. These appear to make sense from inside Israeli society (and the Zionist community worldwide as well), but from the outside seem to be out of touch with reality. The inside “reality” is dominated by the obsessive concept of *fortress Israel*—that is Israel against the world. This mental

paradigm, which ascribes all criticism of Israeli behavior to eternal anti-Semitism, is assimilated from childhood, taught to you by your family and your teachers at school. It is a belief commonly shared, and thus reinforced, by your neighbors, your coworkers, the newspapers, television and radio, and those with whom you do your military service (some of the army induction ceremonies are held at site of the 73 BCE mass suicide of Jewish Zealots at Masada). It is a constant part of your consciousness and defines patriotic thought.

Nonetheless, the belief in fortress Israel is fraught with Orwellian contradictions. Here are some of the things this paradigm teaches (*as against what reality looks like from outside of Israel and the Zionist perspective*): the Palestinian Arabs are eternal enemies and want to push the Jews into the sea (*even though it is the Palestinians who are being slowly but surely pushed into bantustans behind a ghetto like "separation" wall*). Given half a chance the Palestinians can accomplish this new holocaust with the help of allied Arab hordes (*even though Israel is among the strongest military powers on the globe, is allied to the world's only superpower, and has never lost a war*). The Palestinians, both inside and outside Israel proper, are ersatz Nazis (*even though, for hundreds of years before the rise of Zionism, they lived peacefully with their Jewish neighbors and only turned hostile when the Zionists started appropriating Palestine under the protection of British imperialism*). Arafat is the devil incarnate and also as Prime Minister Sharon likes to put it, "the greatest obstacle to peace" (*even though, since 1988, he has tried repeatedly to make peace with the Jewish state. All these efforts have been replaced in the Israeli collective memory by Arafat's refusal to accept the treaty offered at Camp David II. Israeli rejection of all previous Palestinian efforts at peace have been forgotten*). Israel is just a little place with "fragile" borders (*which since 1947 have repeatedly expanded just as David Ben Gurion, speaking at the time of the founding of Israel, predicted they would*). Only war can bring Israel peace (*Which characterizes the thinking and policies of the present Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, a man who is generally recognized outside of Israel and the U.S. to be a war criminal.*)

These beliefs approach the strength of a religious doctrine in Israel. They also restrict the range of thought, and narrow the possibilities for action for many Israelis and other Zionists. Most have also shown an inability to critically examine Israel's behavior and how it has evolved from this siege mentality. They have held fast to a selective use of history in order to support the fortress Israel paradigm and its corollaries. As a consequence of this closed mindedness, those who, for a variety of reasons, do break free of the

nationally sanctified blinkers and publicly contradict accepted doctrine are seen as heretics or traitors and risk social isolation and the ruination of their careers, and sometimes worse. One can see this clearly in the case of tenured Israeli professors who publicly oppose the occupation. Academics like Ilan Pappé of Haifa University, are periodically harassed by their university administration by being brought up on disciplinary charges for alleged seditious activity. They are denied promotion. Their graduate students have found it hard to get jobs, so now few will work with such professors. Untenured professors are reluctant to take a public stand against government policies because they are more vulnerable and could lose their positions. And finally, Jews outside of Israel who publicly criticize the Israeli government and the Zionist ideology are accused of being “self-hating Jews.” Nonetheless, so horrid is Israeli behavior toward the Palestinians that the number of such Jews, best exemplified by the “refuseniks” is slowly increasing both in Israel and abroad.

Behind the wall of fortress Israel, most Israeli Jews are scared and depressed. Popular feelings are affected by a constant concern for personal and family safety. Israelis tend to look over their your shoulders and worry about riding the bus or going to a restaurant. Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* (September 30, 2003) has reported on the poll conducted by the Israeli Hebrew daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*. The report concludes that “Israelis are in a state of open despair about their country’s future.” 73 percent of Israelis do not think that their children will have a better future Under these conditions one can ask why the Israelis simply do not negotiate a just peace with the Palestinians? Give them their state on the 22 percent of Palestine on the other side of the 1967 border (the Green Line). This is an offer the vast majority of Palestinians will readily accept. Also, such a move would very likely make an ally of a Palestinian government which, predictably, would go to great lengths to control anyone whose actions would threaten to bring the IDF back across the border. Just such a scenario was described to this author as the basis for peace by Yasir Arafat in June of 2003. This is also the arrangement Israel has with the Jordanians who control their border with Israel quite effectively. And, in a quiet way, the same arrangement prevails with the Syrians and the Egyptians.

Yet the Israelis insist that allowing the Palestinians a state of their own on the West Bank and Gaza Strip is impossible and mortally dangerous as well. How do they know? The Orwellian political language that dominates their “closed information environment” tells them so. Remember, such an

environment binds one to internal references only. These references become inbred and self-serving so that one's major sources of information function like sycophants telling one only what supports and rationalizes one's actions. Information that undermines or contradicts *a priori* points of view remain unseen, unheard, or are magically reinterpreted to fit the set parameters in one's mind.

This closed information environment has led most Israeli (and diaspora) Jews to believe that :

1. It is the Palestinians do not want peace

The Israelis make two claims for this assertion. First they point out that the Palestinians have a long history of attacks against Israelis. The second point is that Arafat rejected Ehud Barak's supposed "generous offer" at Camp David II in 2000.

The Israelis reject the Palestinian claim that the intifadas (the word means to "shake off") are episodes of resistance against Israel's aggression and occupation. They point out that Palestinian attacks pre-date 1967 and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This was the position taken in December of 2002 by Major General Isaac Ben-Israel at a Tel Aviv University discussion in which the author participated. Because there was violence prior to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there must be violence if Israel withdraws from the territories. It should be noted, however, most of the cross border incidents, particularly in the ten years following 1948, involved Palestinians who were simply seeking to return to their homes. According to the Israeli historian Avi Shlaim hundreds of these unarmed Palestinians were shot down by the Israelis. Statistically the number of Palestinian armed attacks on Israel before 1967 was low and relatively infrequent, and reflected the slow Palestinian recovery from the shock of the Nakba (or 1948 catastrophe). The Jewish Virtual Library (a Zionist source) lists only 27 Israeli fatalities as a result of Palestinian attacks between 1958 and 1966. In the same period Israeli retaliatory raids into Jordanian and Egyptian territory killed many hundreds of people. Nonetheless, from the Israeli point of view, these pre-1967 attacks were not a response to anything the Zionists did, but rather the expression of an undying *a priori* desire to destroy the Jewish state. Unfortunately, this line of thinking requires a

negation of the history of Zionist goals and behavior, and an assumption that past Palestinian behavior will continue indefinitely into the future.

Israelis and other Zionists simply take it for granted that, from 1917 onward, the history of the occupation of Israel proper (that is the 78 percent of Palestine that is Israel behind the Green Line) was benign and any Zionist military action associated with it was purely defensive. In reality, as any number of Israeli historians (Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, etc.) have shown, large Jewish immigration under the protection of British imperialism initiated the displacement of Palestinians. Palestinian resentment of and reaction to this process was natural and led to resistance that began as early in the 1920s. In truth all Zionist history in Palestine is the history of occupation which has been and is offensive rather than defensive in nature.

However, today the situation is not the same as it was in the 1920s or in 1948. In 1988 the PLO recognized the state of Israel within its 1967 borders. This constituted a supreme compromise in that by this recognition they voluntarily forfeited 78 percent of their historic homeland and restricted their claims to the remaining 22 percent that make up the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip. It is the refusal of Israel to seriously respond to this recognition and the sacrifice it represents, and cease its occupation of Palestine beyond the Green Line, that has led to a new level of violent resistance on the part of the Palestinians.

Of course the Israelis do not believe they have failed to respond. They believe that in the year 2000, at Camp David II, Ehud Barak put forth a “generous offer.” This belief has taken on mythic proportions not only in Israel but throughout the world’s Jewish communities and in the United States as well. It now stands as an excellent example of political language restricting the range of thought and thus resulting in mass self-deception within a closed information environment. According to the Zionist story, this “generous” offer gave the Palestinians the Gaza Strip and almost the entire West Bank. Instead of accepting this deal the Palestinians, under the leadership of Yasir Arafat, rejected it and launched the on going and deadly Second Intifada (2000 to the present).

2. Arafat is the one who is responsible for this rejection and the subsequent violence.

While Israelis believe they are willing to make peace through “historic compromises,” there is, in their view, no “partner” on the Palestinian side to negotiate with. Yasir Arafat, a man who is shut up in two buildings in Ramallah, amidst acres of rubble, his communications monitored and his travel restricted, is responsible for on-going terror and, according to the Israeli novelist and political pundit Eyal Megged, “employs tactics that remind us of Hitler.”

Essentially what one has here is an alternate history which, is accepted by the majority in Israel and also by the present U.S. government. In the summer of 2002 National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice stated on national television that “Arafat is somebody who...failed to lead when he had a chance....Ehud Barak, the former prime minister of Israel, gave him a terrific opportunity to lead. And what did he get in return? Arafat started the second Intifada instead and rejected that offered hand of friendship.” Unfortunately, both the Israelis and Ms Rice are wrong about their facts. The “generous offer” has been disproved by both American and Israeli experts. For instance, among others, Robert Malley, President Clinton’s advisor on Israeli-Arab affairs who was at Camp David II; Ron Pundak, Director of the Peres Center for Peace; Professor Jeff Halper (Ben Gurion University); Uri Avnery, head of Gush Shalom, Israel’s foremost peace organization; and finally Ehud Barak himself has twice (in the *New York Times* of May 24, 2001 and in the Israeli Hebrew newspaper *Yediot Ahronoth* of August 29, 2003) denied that his offer was anywhere near “generous.”

What did Barak really offer? According to the above reports his offer gave the Palestinians a little over 80 percent of the West Bank carved into nearly discontinuous cantons. The Israeli government would have controlled all the Palestinian borders (none of which would touch on another Arab state), it would have controlled the air space above the Palestinian territory, most of the major aquifers, retained sovereignty over East Jerusalem, maintained almost all Israeli settlements and access roads, controlled immigration into the Palestinian “state,” and retained the Jordan Valley through an indefinite “long term lease.” This is an offer that no Israeli would ever accept. However, most Israelis and Americans do not know these details and believe instead in the myth of generosity.

Unfortunately, *what is true is not as important as what one thinks is true*. Believing that the Palestinians rejected a generous peace at Camp David II, and opted

instead for the violence of the Second Intifada, the Israelis now look to other ways to achieve security. How this is to be done is dictated by their Orwellian *Weltanschauung*. Thus:

1. You insist on Palestinian elimination of militancy *while systematically destroying the Palestinian Authority's police capabilities*. The Israeli army attacks Palestinian police in uniform on sight and most police facilities have been destroyed. Simultaneously the Israeli government demands that what is left of the Palestinian Authority direct whatever security forces they still have to the job of "fighting terrorism" which are code words for defending Israeli borders and settlers. Given the position of the Palestinians as an oppressed people facing illegal colonization, this amounts to a demand for the Palestinian authority to take it upon itself to eliminate Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. *Within this scenario Palestinian resistance to land confiscations, home demolitions, and settlement activities become offensive actions, and the invasion of towns and villages by Israeli tanks and helicopter gunships becomes defensive action.*

2. You build a "Security Wall" to separate yourself from the bulk of the Palestinians. However, you do not do this along the 1967 Green Line which most of the world recognizes as the *de facto* border between Israel and Palestine. Rather you build this barrier deep inside of the Palestinian West Bank. Its construction thus facilitates ongoing land confiscations. You build it so as to confine the Palestinians into a series of walled off areas of concentration. *De facto*, this transforms the "security wall" into a "ghetto wall." Those West Bank Palestinians who find themselves on the Israeli side of the wall are to eventually be transferred into the Palestinian ghettos. *This will produce future peace and security for Israelis in the same way that prisons prevent crime.*

3. And you enforce a harsh collective punishment on the Palestinians, entailing draconian curfews, roadblocks and checkpoints, "security" sweeps leading to mass arrests, house demolitions, denial of access to medical facilities, mass shut down of education, and the "legal" use of torture, etc. until they "come to their senses" and negotiate peace on "acceptable terms." This tactic at once brutalizes the Palestinians and Israelis as well. As the Israelis visit violence and destruction on their Palestinian victims, their own levels of domestic violence—spousal and child abuse, violence in schools, road rage, and violent crime—have gone up.

Maya Rosenfeld, a sociologist at Hebrew University and a member of Checkpoint Watch, attributes this downward spiral of Israeli society and culture to the fact that “a military discourse has taken over in Israel.” Within the context of this militarized society who can best achieve peace and security? It continues to be the case that a majority of Israelis believe it is Ariel Sharon (a general who made his reputation based upon his personal brutality) and his right-wing coalition. This seems to be so *not despite* the fact that these politicians are ideologically committed to retaining the West Bank and Gaza Strip (and also the Golan Heights), *but because* they are determined to continue the occupation.

This would seem, from an outside perspective, to be yet another Orwellian proposition-- that is, the road to peace lay through demanding the right of permanent occupation. Yet this notion does not appear to be contradictory to most Israelis. Among the reasons for this is that Zionist perceptions of reality deny the true nature and consequences for the Palestinians of 37 years of colonial occupation in Gaza and the West Bank. Indeed, for a long time the Israelis refused to even entertain the word occupation for what they were doing. As the Israeli writer David Grossman explained in an interview with Bill Moyers in March of 2002, “there was a whole machinery of fabricating names to the situation, there was a whole narrative that in a way used words not to describe reality but rather to camouflage it, to protect us the Israelis from the harshness of what we are doing.” This is what the Israel Lawyer Leah Tsemel calls the “laundering of language.” In Hebrew “occupation” became “release” or “salvation,” while “colonizing” became “peaceful settlement” and “killing” became “targeting.” Orwell would have recognize this use of “political language” without much trouble.

Another Zionist trick of the mind is to assign the blame for any negative consequences arising out the occupation to the Palestinians themselves. For instance in an August 2002 editorial in the Israeli newspaper, the Jerusalem Post, the common assertion was made that “...the Palestinians’ current malaise is no one’s fault but their own, considering that they started and are continuing the war that is exacting from them such a hefty price.” That the “war” is actually resistance against colonial occupation is lost on the Jerusalem Post editors.

In Israeli eyes the occupation is a warranted defensive action driven by a pervasive national fear and suspicion of Palestinians as terrorists. It should be

noted that to most Israelis, and Americans too, the terrorist is the essential Palestinian. Each Palestinian whether man, woman, or child is just a body potentially encased in dynamite. The Israelis point to Occupied Palestine as the place from which suicide bombers come and thus they feel they must “control” these lands. *That the occupation and its accompanying colonizing policy are in fact the sources of suicide bombings and overall Palestinian violence is simply not accepted by most Israelis.* Instead, they ascribe these actions to Muslim religious fanaticism. This came out clearly in a January 2002 interview by the author and others with Ben El Eliazar, the former Israeli Defense Minister. Ben El Eliazar described how he would go and interrogate prisoners suspected of being failed suicide bombers. “If you interrogate them long enough you can see the religious fanaticism surface.” His interrogations may well result in self-deception. Push long enough and hard enough and you can get a prisoner to tell you anything, particularly what they soon realize you want to hear

There are other ways in which the Israelis manage to promote the occupation, arguably the source of their insecurity, as a source of security. Here is how the Likud leader and member of the Knesset, Yuval Steinwitz conceptualized the situation to the author in December 2002: the occupation is necessary because it alone can give Israel, “this little land with impossible borders” defensive depth. According to Steinwitz Israel is a “great regional power” that is at the same time “fragile” enough to be destroyed by the Palestinian terrorists allied to the Egyptians. This is a variation on the notion that the Israel is in perpetual danger of being “kicked into the sea.” One can locate the origins of this fear in the Holocaust and understand how deep rooted it is, but it nonetheless defies reality. There is no military intelligence service outside of Israel who believes this myth. No military engagement (including those in 1947-1948) has ever come close to suggesting this scenario was or is possible. Yet the myth is pervasive in Israel and among the Jewish diaspora community as well. So, acting on what you believe is real (not, in this case, what is in fact real) you justify colonial occupation, the brutal destruction of Palestinian society, and the slow by sure ethnic cleansing of Occupied Palestine of its non-Jewish population (all of which is *overtly offensive* and brutally aggressive in nature) in the name of needing “*defensive depth.*”

The Israelis and their supporters have other rationalizations for occupation. There is the biblically based claim that “Judea and Samaria” are “covenant

lands,” that is lands given to the Jews by God. This, of course, is a matter of faith and not provable fact. Many people take the bible, where this covenant is to be found, as the word of God. However, this too is faith and not provable fact. Nonetheless, such faith put forth as fact allows some Israelis to see the indigenous population as “strangers in the land” and Jewish folks from Brooklyn as rightful inhabitants. This leads to more tricks of the mind. For instance, Carolyn Glick, the Associate Editor of the Jerusalem Post told this author and others that the removal of the West Bank colonies would constitute the “ethnic cleansing of Judea and Samaria.”

Whether it is for imagined military reasons (which entails a denial that occupation is the source of their insecurity), or faith based religious reasons (which entails exoneration from responsibility for brutal actions because they are doing the work of God), the majority of Israelis have come to the conclusion that there is no alternative to a hard line, right wing government which can only conceptualize a peace treaty that ghettoizes, economically emasculates, and subordinates any eventual Palestinian political entity. And even then most Israelis do not believe such a treaty will lead to real peace, not because it fails to satisfy Palestinian needs, but because the Palestinians are all anti-Semites who will forever want to destroy all of Israel.

Palestine

PALESTINE IS A LAND OF DEEP DESPAIR, GROWING POVERTY, and pervasive insecurity. In a slow but sure fashion the Israelis are reducing the Palestinians to an impoverished cheap labor pool within ghetto-like areas of concentration. Here is how they are doing it.

1. The ancestral lands of the Palestinians are being confiscated: 78percent of Palestine was taken in 1948. According to Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics the over 1 million Israeli Palestinians who now live in Israel proper (behind the Green Line) make up 20percent of the country’s population (and 40percent of Israel’s population growth rate) are confined to 3percent of the land. And, this 3percent is subject to continuing periodic and unpredictable confiscations. Israel’s Palestinian communities are not allowed to geographically expand. In 1967 the Israelis took over the remaining 22percent of Palestine (now designated the Occupied Territories) and immediately began a colonization program that is illegal under international

law. To date they have confiscated some 40percent of this remaining 22percent of Palestine and now operate over 200 colonies which hold nearly 400,000 illegal residents. They are continuing to expand these “settlements” through the continuous confiscation of land in Occupied Palestine (that is beyond the Green Line). This means that the Palestinians, both within and without of Israel proper, are being relentlessly ghettoized into smaller and smaller areas.

2. Besides the land, the people in Occupied Palestine are experiencing the destruction of their property on a daily basis. According to B’Tselem, Israel’s own civil rights organization, hundreds of thousands of olive and other fruit trees have been and continue to be destroyed; hundreds of water wells have been sealed (90 percent of all the water resources of Occupied Palestine is now reserved for exclusive use by the occupier); according to the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions about 11,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished since 1967; the population is subjected to periodic indiscriminate artillery shelling and automatic weapons fire; American made jet planes and helicopters discharge high explosive missiles and bombs in crowded civilian areas. Some of these bombs and missiles are made of depleted uranium infused metals. All of this is illegal under international law as promulgated in the Hague Conventions of 1907 and 1987, and the 4th Geneva Convention.

3. Palestinians have seen their rights of free movement, free association, access to education, access to medical care, ability to transport and market goods (most of which rights are guaranteed by the Declaration of Universal Human Rights adopted by the United Nations after World War II) severely restricted by the creation of some 480 checkpoints and roadblocks. Most of these are not placed between Israel and Palestinian towns and villages, but rather between Palestinian locales. These checkpoints, the purpose of which seems to be harassment rather than security, attack the most basic personal rights. The most tragic example of this is the resulting collapse of the Palestinian medical system. According to Human Rights Watch, Israeli soldiers purposely harass and sometimes target for injury or death Palestinian doctors and medical personnel. Checkpoints prevent ambulances from getting to hospitals or the residences of ill people and they prevent pregnant women about to give birth from going to hospitals. The soldiers at the checkpoints do not prevent these things all the time, but rather they do so in an unpredictable, random fashion that heightens the sense of uncertainty and

vulnerability of the Palestinian population. I asked Benjamin Ben Eliazer, the former Defense Minister, about this practice in the January of 2002 interview mentioned above. He asserted that the Palestinians use ambulances to transport weapons and “wanted criminals.” When I pointed out to him that there was a qualitative difference between stopping an ambulance and searching it for weapons or wanted individuals and stopping an ambulance until the patient inside it died, he became sullen and said that he did not need any help from me when it came to security. Since their tactics have left the Israelis continuously insecure, this is a questionable claim. At the very least the Israelis need help in maintaining a basic level of humanity. As a result of the policies just described the rate of death from curable diseases is on the rise among West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians, and vaccination and preventive medicine is almost non-existent.

In addition to the checkpoints, draconian curfews which keep the entire populations of cities and towns under forced house arrest for weeks on end contribute to the breakdown of medical care, education, and employment. (According to United Nations Relief and Works Agency reports unemployment in the Occupied Territories now stands over 65 percent and more than half the population lives in poverty.)

It bears repeating that much of this harassment and destruction occurs in a random and arbitrary fashion. One does not know if one can get through a checkpoint to go to school or work. If one gets through, one does not know if one can return home again through the same checkpoint. One does not know when the curfews will come. One can be arrested anytime for any reason. It is a *Kafkaesque world* wherein one cannot predict the consequences of one’s daily behavior.

Under these circumstances, 90 percent of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories see no hope in their future without international intervention. Yet intervention is consistently blocked by the United States which vetoes any UN resolution that seeks the creation of such a policy. It is because they are not “balanced” says the U.S. State Department, but this is ridiculous in the face of Israel’s brutal behavior. The U.S. uses its veto to protect Israel because Zionist interest groups have such powerful influence with the American government and political parties. In any case, the Israeli government is adamantly against such intervention and would resist it by force. As a consequence there is no choice for the Palestinians but to

continue their resistance to Israeli occupation, for to concede defeat would mean to acquiesce in the death of Palestinian society and culture.

When it comes to resistance, it is historically the case that the violence of the oppressed usually rises to the level of the violence of the oppressor. That is what has happened in Palestine. The Israeli occupation constitutes 37 years of institutionalized terror which has just about destroyed the economic, social, and political lives of all Palestinians under Israeli rule. Civil society and its infrastructure are nearly gone. Civilian deaths due to direct military action and indirect consequences of Israeli colonial policies now (November 2003) stands at just over 2700 people (compared to about 800 Israelis). Palestinian civilian injuries due to Israeli action stand at over 47,000. Resistance is all that remains.

This brings us to the issue of suicide bombings. The context for understanding this tactic is the occupation itself. The consequences of the occupation do not discriminate between men and women, adults and children. Confiscations impact them all, home demolitions displace them all, curfews confine them all, Israeli violence targets them all. This is the truth. The author has seen much of this with his own eyes. Americans and many Israelis may not believe it, but their disbelief does not change the Palestinian reality. That reality produces deep despair, feelings of humiliation and unavoidable hatred. It is from this context that the bombers come. Their tactic is the reverse coin of Israel's own practices and not the product of some innate religious fanaticism.

It is this despair and rage, and not religious fanaticism, that also leads to popular support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad. They are supported so widely not because they are Islamic fundamentalists, but because, in an atmosphere of despair, they serve the needs of the rapidly growing numbers of poor and they resist the Israelis. Give the Palestinians back their hope of a just settlement by moving concretely toward the satisfaction of their basic demands, and the support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad will diminish. This is not mere conjecture. Right after the Oslo Accords were signed, and despite their serious flaws, there was much hope for peace among the Palestinians. As a consequence support for groups like Hamas fell to under 10 percent of the population in the West Bank and Gaza. By the middle of 2003, in an atmosphere of near hopelessness that still prevails, polls taken by the

Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research indicated that support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad stood at 58percent.

Any Hope?

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REALIZE THAT MOST ORDINARY PEOPLE on both sides say they want many of the same things: normal lives, security for themselves and their families, acceptance by the other side. And while the majority of Israelis, and a number of Palestinians cannot get past perceptual barriers dominated by fear, suspicion, and anxiety there are factors that can, at least in theory, result in movement toward real peace if given a chance to come to the fore.

1. The vast majority of Palestinians know (even if the Israelis do not) that they cannot destroy the Israeli state.
2. Most Palestinians in the Occupied Palestine are willing to negotiate compromise solutions to all issues (including the controversial issue of the “right of return”) except their right to a viable state occupying roughly the 22percent of Palestine beyond Israel’s 1967 borders. For the Palestinians, this is the sine qua non of a just peace. This is not a new stance on the part of the Palestinians or their leaders. Here is a list of peace initiatives that the Palestinians have welcomed (and various Israeli governments have rejected): The Rogers Plan (1969); The Scranton Mission on behalf of President Nixon (1970); Sadat’s land for peace mutual recognition proposal (1971); Carter’s call for a Geneva international conference (1977); Saudi King Fahd’s peace offer (1981); The Reagan Plan (1982); The Shultz Plan (1988); The Baker Plan (1989); A continuation of the Taba negotiations (2001); The Saudi Peace proposal on behalf of the Arab League (2002); The unofficial Geneva peace initiative of November/December 2003. And, of course, in 1993 Arafat signed the Oslo Accords which unraveled after Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination (November 1995) and the subsequent return to power of the Likud party

To the extent that the Israelis block the possibility of a viable Palestinian state, Palestinian leaders and intellectuals put forth the idea of a one state solution. That is, the acceptance of one state from “the sea to the river” with the struggle then directed toward bringing about equal rights for all citizens.

This would of necessity negate the idea of a “Jewish state.” I do not believe this is the preference of most Palestinians but it may be made inevitable by the short sighted policies of the Zionist movement.

3. The recent Geneva Initiative (November/December 2003) is at least a sign that Israelis and Palestinians can work together to come to a settlement. It certainly is not the end game for it fails to give adequate attention to the fate of millions of Palestinian refugees who have rights under international law. If this initiative is to be seriously pursued negotiators need, at the very least, to improve the water rights package, and add onto the initiative an Israeli acceptance of responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem plus a pledge of compensation. It is to be noted that the Geneva initiative has been endorsed by Yasir Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. It has, however, been attacked by the Sharon government as a traitorous act.

4. On the Israeli side there are a growing number of influential military men (such as Amram Mitzna and Ami Aylon), who have credibility with the Israeli public, and understand that continuing the occupation will not bring security and normality, but rather a continuing brutalization of Israeli society. There is also a very small, but growing, number of resisters both within and without the army who refuse to cooperate with the Israeli government’s occupation policies.

The problem is that while those who are ready to take risks for peace appear to be a majority on the Palestinian side, they are as yet a minority on the Israeli side. In the end what we have is a horrible process of physical and emotional destruction that can only be overcome by a psychological leap—and that mostly among Israelis. They must come to a realization that the occupation is the source of Israeli insecurity and only by giving it up can there be security and normality. If you will, only through peace with the Palestinians, can Israel be a safe haven for Jews. Whether the Israelis can achieve this level of awareness while in the grips of an historically rooted, paralyzing fear and anxiety (played upon by a Likud government and right-wing factions which are determined to stay in “Judea and Samaria” forever) remains to be seen. Nonetheless, *it is their occupation*. It is they who have brought to life the nightmare worlds of Orwell and Kafka. If things are to change, it is they who must wake up.

Notes

1. Here are some additional Orwellian notions and behaviors described to this author by the individuals noted: 1. Oren Yiftachael of Ben Gurion University explains that Israel has a “Green Patrol,” a special police to keep the Bedouins from developing their land. When Bedouin crops turn green the Israeli Green Patrol sprays them from the air with herbicides. 2. According to Victoria Buch of Hebrew University, refusal by some soldiers to serve in the Occupied Territories (which results in the destruction of Palestinian civil society) is regularly described by Israeli politicians as “a knife in the heart of democracy.” 3. Michael Warschawski, former Director of the Alternative information Center in Jerusalem, told this author that the Israeli government acts to empty Jerusalem of Arabs by creating “green lands” (expropriated Arab lands which cannot be built on without a permit). All the lands between Arab neighborhoods have been declared “green lands” which are then commuted into Jewish settlements. Thus the concept of something that preserves and grows is used to destroy and displace. 4. Most of the built up areas around East Jerusalem, as well as most of the “Jewish only roads,” were created *after* Oslo which was supposedly a “road to peace.” 5. The Tel-Aviv artist Ami Nof was arrested and then committed to a mental institution for publicly suggesting that Israel open peace negotiations with pre-war Iraq. 5. According to the Israeli writer and poet, Yitzhak Laor, reports of Israeli casualties in the Occupied Territories are referred to as “the result of attacks within Israel,” while lethal attacks on West Bank and Gaza Palestinians are referred to as defense of the homeland from foreign attack beyond the borders.

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