

NOAM CHOMSKY

FATEFUL TRIANGLE

The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians
(Updated Edition) Foreword by Edward W. Said



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The Fateful Triangle

The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians
Updated Edition

Noam Chomsky



Haymarket Books
Chicago, Illinois

Fateful Triangle

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This edition published in 2014 by

Haymarket Books

P.O. Box 180165

Chicago, IL 60618

773-583-7884

www.haymarketbooks.org

info@haymarketbooks.org

ISBN: 978-1-60846-440-1

Trade distribution:

In the US, Consortium Book Sales and Distribution, www.cbsd.com

In Canada, Publishers Group Canada, www.pgcbooks.ca

In the UK, Turnaround Publisher Services, www.turnaround-uk.com

All other countries, Publishers Group Worldwide, www.pgw.com

This book was published with the generous support of Lannan Foundation and Wallace Action Fund.

Cover design by Josh On. Cover photo shows Israeli air force aircraft flying over the cities of Tel Aviv and Jaffa as Israel celebrates its 65th Independence Day on April 16, 2013. Photo by: Mati Milstein/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available.

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The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.

—George Orwell, “Notes on Nationalism,” 1945

Preface to the 2015 Edition

This book was written—or perhaps more accurately burst forth—in the immediate aftermath of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, a vicious act of aggression that killed tens of thousands of people, destroyed much of southern Lebanon, and finally demolished much of the capital city of Beirut. After a brief pause imposed by Washington, Israel resumed the assault, which ended with an Israeli-supervised slaughter that was eerily reminiscent of the famous Kishinev massacre, one of the most horrific crimes in pre-Holocaust Jewish history and one of the events that propelled a flood of Jewish émigrés from Eastern Europe. It was memorialized in a famous poem by Israel’s national poet Chaim Nahman Bialek, “In the City of Slaughter.” As discussed below, the analogy is painfully close, except that the number of victims was vastly greater in Israel’s reenactment of the Czar’s atrocities.

The war had pretexts—all acts of aggression do. Formally, it was “Operation Peace for Galilee,” but that was utter farce. The pretexts were so thin that they could only be echoed by true loyalists, as they were and still are. In reality, it was evident at once, and conceded, that the goal of the invasion was political: to remove impediments to Israel’s criminal settlement and development programs in the occupied territories (a goal that succeeded) and to impose a client Maronite regime in Lebanon (which failed). Like other Israeli crimes, this act of aggression relied on the decisive support of the United States, though by the end, the shocked international reaction to the bombing of the capital city of Beirut was damaging U.S. interests and President Reagan ordered Israel to terminate its assault and accept a “peace-keeping force.” As always when the U.S. issues commands, Israel has to obey, this time to the despair of Prime Minister Begin, who was dreaming of finally trapping Hitler-Arafat in his bunker and destroying him. Begin then faded from public life, but the policies continued under still more brutal hands.

The aggression was the predictable aftermath of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel negotiated by President Carter at Camp David in 1978–79. As discussed by Israeli strategic analyst Avner Yaniv, with the Egyptian deterrent removed, “Israel would be free to sustain military operations against the PLO in Lebanon as well as settlement activity on the West Bank.” As he explained further, “dealing a major blow to the PLO as a political force was the *raison d’être* of the entire [Peace for Galilee] operation.” The conclusion was confirmed by the highest Israeli officials, some quoted below. Among them was the architect of the invasion, Ariel Sharon, who had expressed his concern about the “distinct danger” that the U.S. and UN might support “realization of the rights of the Palestinian people,” a political threat ended by “Operation Peace for Galilee,” which “removed this menace” by “liquidat[ing] the PLO as a significant military and political force.”¹

The Camp David settlement is commonly regarded as a diplomatic triumph for Washington. In fact, it was a diplomatic disaster, not only because of the aftermath. That much is clear from the background. In 1971, President Sadat of Egypt had offered Israel a full peace treaty, with no mention of Palestinian rights, in return for withdrawal from the occupied territories, though it was understood that his concern was the Egyptian Sinai. Israel refused, with Henry Kissinger's crucial backing, dedicating itself to extensive settlement programs in the Sinai, including the city of Yamit and many settlements, while driving thousands of inhabitants into the desert, destroying towns, villages, mosques, whatever was in the way.

Israel's decision to choose expansion over security in 1971 is the most fateful one in its history, in my opinion, particularly because it has been pursued with impressive consistency in the following years, leading to Israel's international isolation and increasing pariah status.

Sadat continued to seek a political settlement, expelling Russian advisers, making very clear his willingness to become a loyal U.S. client. Kissinger wasn't interested, and in his memoirs, years later demonstrates that he had no understanding of what was happening.²

U.S.-Israeli rejectionism led to the 1973 war, which was a very close call for Israel, and perhaps the world. Kissinger called a nuclear alert to warn Russia not to interfere with his diplomatic games: in this case his informing Israel privately that they could ignore a cease-fire called jointly by Russia and the U.S., actions that did not amuse Moscow, which, fortunately, backed off.³

The war made it clear to Israel and Kissinger that Egypt could not simply be dismissed, leading to Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" and finally the Camp David accords. In this agreement, the U.S. and Israel agreed to the basic terms that Sadat had proposed in 1971, but in a harsher form, from their point of view. Unlike his earlier proposal, at Camp David Sadat insisted on formal recognition of Palestinian rights. The U.S. and Israel agreed, though Israel quickly sabotaged any meaningful interpretation of the agreement, to President Carter's discomfiture.

The chapters that are added to the original publication discuss further stages in undermining Palestinian rights, establishing Israeli control of what is of value to it in the occupied territories, attacking Lebanon without credible pretext, and undermining hopes of realizing the diplomatic settlement that is supported by virtually the entire world, with the crucial exception of the U.S.-Israel sides of the "fateful triangle." Later stages are amply discussed elsewhere.

The outcome for the West Bank is described by the prominent political economist Robert Wade. He has had extensive experience in the developing world, but writes that he has "never encountered elsewhere" anything like the sophisticated and extensive Israeli control system designed with great care to ensure that "political and economic development is barely possible" for the Palestinians who remain in the enclaves to which they are restricted in the West Bank. As he reviews, Israeli

restrictions penetrate deeply into the micro details of Palestinian everyday lives, including the movement of people within the West Bank, the import and export of goods and services, investments, education, and access to basic infrastructure (electricity, water, sanitation). They are so pervasive and systematic that it almost seems as if the Israeli state has mapped

the entire Palestinian economy in terms of input-output relations, right down to the level of the individual, the household, the small firm, the large firm, the school, the university, so as to find all possible choke points, which Israeli officials can tighten or loosen at will.

And do.⁴

As is well known to anyone with eyes open, the situation in the Gazan prison that Israel runs—now with the cooperation of the Egyptian military dictatorship—is incomparably worse. For twenty years the U.S. and Israel have dedicated themselves to ensure that Gaza will be cut off from the West Bank in violation of the Oslo Accords that they signed in the “Day of Awe” in 1993 that was acclaimed with due respect in the American press. The motivation is evident: cut off from Gaza, any limited autonomy that might be granted to West Bank Palestinians will be imprisoned between Israel and the U.S.-allied Jordanian dictatorship, with no access to the outside world. The task will be completed even more fully as Israel carries forward its systematic project of taking over the Jordan Valley, expelling Palestinians, sinking wells and establishing settlements, aiming for control of about one-third of the West Bank and much of its arable land. A sophisticated siege keeps Gazans at a bare level of survival, also subject to regular Israel attacks, with periodic episodes of “mowing the lawn,” the Israeli term for murderous assault.⁵

There has been a regular routine since Israel’s “disengagement” in 2005, which of course left it the occupying power, a fact recognized by the world outside of Israel, even by the US. A ceasefire agreement is reached. Israel ignores it while the elected Hamas government observes it, as Israel concedes, until finally some Israeli escalation of violence elicits a Hamas reaction, which serves as the pretext for the next episode of mowing the lawn, each more barbaric than the last. Outside of the United States, the facts are pretty well understood. Within the U.S., Israel is typically portrayed as the innocent victim, in accord with official policy.⁶

There is nothing secret about Israel’s objectives. The 1999 electoral program of the governing Likud coalition, never rescinded, “flatly rejects the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state west of the Jordan river.”⁷ With regard to Gaza, contrary to much propaganda about Israel’s noble aims in disengaging from the devastated region, the architect of the disengagement, Prime Minister Sharon’s associate Dov Weisglass, informed the Israeli press, with refreshing honesty, that “The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process.... And when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders, and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda. And all this with authority and permission. All with a [U.S.] presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of Congress.”⁸

Every relevant international body has declared these plans to be in gross violation of international law, but as long as the U.S. provides the decisive support for them—military, economic, diplomatic, and ideological, in how the issues are framed—there is no reason to expect Israel to refrain from

implementing them, despite some occasional clucking of tongues about how they are not “helpful” for
the just and peaceful settlement for which Washington so sincerely yearns.

These conclusions, needless to say, place a considerable burden on the shoulders of American citizens.

Foreword

Fateful Triangle may be the most ambitious book ever attempted on the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians viewed as centrally involving the United States. It is a dogged exposé of human corruption, greed, and intellectual dishonesty. It is also a great and important book, which must be read by anyone concerned with public affairs.

The facts are there to be recognized for Chomsky, although no one else has ever recognized them so systematically. His mainly Israeli and U.S. sources are staggeringly complete, and he is capable of registering contradictions, distinctions, and lapses which occur between them.

There is something profoundly moving about a mind of such noble ideals repeatedly stirred on behalf of human suffering and injustice. One thinks here of Voltaire, of Benda, or Russell, although more than any one of them, Chomsky commands what he calls “reality”—facts—over a breathtaking range. *Fateful Triangle* can be read as a protracted war between fact and a series of myths—Israeli democracy, Israeli purity of arms, the benign occupation, no racism against Arabs in Israel, Palestinian terrorism, peace for Galilee. Having rehearsed the “official” narrative, he then blows it away with vast amounts of counter-evidence.

Chomsky’s major claim is that Israel and the United States—especially the latter—are rejectionists opposed to peace, whereas the Arabs, including the PLO, have for years been trying to accommodate themselves to the reality of Israel. Chomsky supports his case by comparing the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—so profoundly inhuman, cynical, and deliberately cruel to the Palestinian people—with its systematically rewritten record as kept by those whom Chomsky calls “the supporters of Israel.” It is Chomsky’s contention that the liberal intelligentsia (Irving Howe, Arthur Goldberg, Alan Dershowitz, Michael Walzer, Amos Oz, Jane Fonda, Tom Hayden, Shlomo Avineri, Martin Peretz) and even segments of the organized Left are more culpable, more given to lying, than conservatives are.

Nor is Chomsky especially gentle to the PLO, whose “self-destructiveness” and “suicidal character” he criticizes. The Arab regimes, he says, are not “decent,” and, he might have added, not popular either.

In the new edition, Chomsky includes invaluable material on the Oslo and Wye accords—an unnecessary line of Arab capitulation by which Israel has achieved all of its tactical and strategic objectives at the expense of every proclaimed principle of Arab and Palestinian nationalism and struggle. For the first time in the twentieth century, an anti-colonial liberation movement has not only discarded its own considerable achievements but has made an agreement to cooperate with a military

occupation before that occupation has ended.

Witnessing such a sorry state of affairs is by no means a monotonous, monochromatic activity. It involves what Foucault once called “relentless erudition,” scouring alternative sources, exhuming buried documents, reviving forgotten (or abandoned) histories. It involves a sense of the dramatic and of the insurgent, making a great deal of one’s rare opportunities to speak. There is something profoundly unsettling about an intellectual such as Chomsky who has neither an office to protect nor territory to consolidate and guard. There is no dodging the inescapable reality that such representations by intellectuals will neither make them friends in high places nor win them official honors. It is a lonely condition, yes, but it is always a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the way things are.

Edward W. Said

New York, New York

January 1999

Preface

For some time, I've been compelled to arrange speaking engagements long in advance. Sometimes a title is requested for a talk scheduled several years ahead. There is, I've found, one title that always works: "The current crisis in the Middle East." One can't predict exactly what the crisis will be far down the road, but that there will be one is a fairly safe prediction.

That will continue to be the case as long as basic problems of the region are not addressed.

Furthermore, the crises will be serious in what President Eisenhower called "the most strategically important area in the world." In the early post-War years, the United States in effect extended the Monroe Doctrine to the Middle East, barring any interference apart from Britain, assumed to be a loyal dependency and quickly punished when it occasionally got out of hand (as in 1956). The strategic importance of the region lies primarily in its immense petroleum reserves and the global power accorded by control over them; and, crucially, from the huge profits that flow to the Anglo-American rulers, which have been of critical importance for their economies. It has been necessary to ensure that this enormous wealth flows primarily to the West, not to the people of the region. That is one fundamental problem that will continue to cause unrest and disorder. Another is the Israel-Arab conflict with its many ramifications, which have been closely related to the major U.S. strategic goal of dominating the region's resources and wealth.

For many years, it was claimed the core problem was Soviet subversion and expansionism, the reflexive justification for virtually all policies since the Bolshevik takeover in Russia in 1917. That pretext having vanished, it is now quietly conceded by the White House (March 1990) that in past years, the "threats to our interests" in the Middle East "could not be laid at the Kremlin's door"; the doctrinal system has yet to adjust fully to the new requirements. "In the future, we expect that non-Soviet threats to [our] interests will command even greater attention," the White House continued in its annual plea to Congress for a huge military budget. In reality, the "threats to our interests," in the Middle East as elsewhere, had always been indigenous nationalism, a fact stressed in internal documents and sometimes publicly.¹

A "worst case" prediction for the crisis a few years ahead would be a war between the U.S. and Iran; unlikely, but not impossible.

Israel is pressing very hard for such a confrontation, recognizing Iran to be the most serious military threat that it faces. So far, the U.S. is playing a somewhat different game in its relations to Iran; accordingly, a potential war and the necessity for it, is not a major topic in the media and journals of opinion here.²

The U.S. is, of course, concerned over Iranian power. That is one reason why the U.S. turned to active support for Iraq in the late stages of the Iraq-Iran war, with a decisive effect on the outcome, and why Washington continued its active courtship of Saddam Hussein until he interfered with U.S. plans for the region in August 1990. U.S. concerns over Iranian power were also reflected in the decision to support Saddam's murderous assault against the Shiite population of southern Iraq in March 1991, immediately after the fighting stopped. A narrow reason was fear that Iran, a Shiite state might exert influence over Iraqi Shiites. A more general reason was the threat to "stability" that a successful popular revolution might pose: to translate into English, the threat that it might inspire democratizing tendencies that would undermine the array of dictatorships that the U.S. relies on to control the people of the region.

Recall that Washington's support for its former friend was more than tacit; the U.S. military command even denied rebelling Iraqi officers access to captured Iraqi equipment as the slaughter of the Shiite population proceeded under Stormin' Norman's steely gaze.

Similar concerns arose as Saddam turned to crushing the Kurdish rebellion in the North. In Israel, commentators from the Chief of Staff to political analysts and Knesset members, across a very broad political spectrum, openly advocated support for Saddam's atrocities, on the grounds that an independent Kurdistan might create a Syria-Kurd-Iran territorial link that would be a serious threat to Israel. When U.S. records are released in the distant future, we might discover that the White House harbored similar thoughts, which delayed even token gestures to block the crushing of Kurdish resistance until Washington was compelled to act by a public that had been aroused by media coverage of the suffering of the Kurds, recognizably Aryan and portrayed quite differently from the southern Shiites, who suffered a far worse fate but were only dirty Arabs.

In passing, we may note that the character of U.S.-U.K. concern for the Kurds is readily determined not only by the timing of the support, and the earlier cynical treatment of Iraqi Kurds, but also by the reaction to Turkey's massive atrocities against its Kurdish population right through the Gulf crisis. These were scarcely reported here in the mainstream, in virtue of the need to support the President, who had lauded his Turkish colleague as "a protector of peace" joining those who "stand up for civilized values around the world" against Saddam Hussein. But Europe was less disciplined. We therefore read, in the London *Financial Times*, that "Turkey's western allies were rarely comfortable explaining to their public why they condoned Ankara's heavy-handed repression of its own Kurdish minority while the west offered support to the Kurds in Iraq," not a serious PR problem here. "Diplomats now say that, more than any other issue, the sight of Kurds fighting Kurds [in Fall 1992] has served to change the way that western public opinion views the Kurdish cause." In short, we can breathe a sigh of relief: cynicism triumphs, and the Western powers can continue to condone the harsh repression of Kurds by the "protector of peace," while shedding crocodile tears over their treatment of the (current) enemy.³

Israel's reasons for trying to stir up a U.S. confrontation with Iran, and "Islamic fundamentalism" generally, are easy to understand. The Israeli military recognizes that, apart from resort to nuclear weapons, there is little it can do to confront Iranian power, and is concerned that after the (anticipated) collapse of the U.S.-run "peace process," a Syria-Iran axis may be a significant threat. The U.S., in contrast, appears to be seeking a long-term accommodation with "moderate" (that is, pro-U.S.) elements in Iran and a return to something like the arrangements that prevailed under the Shah.

How these tendencies may evolve is unclear.

The propaganda campaign about "Islamic fundamentalism" has its farcical elements—even putting aside the fact that U.S. culture compares with Iran in its religious fundamentalism. The most extreme Islamic fundamentalist state in the world is the loyal U.S. ally Saudi Arabia—or, to be more precise, the family dictatorship that serves as the "Arab facade" behind which the U.S. effectively controls the Arabian peninsula, to borrow the terms of British colonial rule. The West has no problems with Islamic fundamentalism there. Probably one of the most fanatic Islamic fundamentalist groups in the world in recent years was led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the terrorist extremist who had been a CIA favorite and prime recipient of the \$3.3 billion in (official) U.S. aid given to the Afghan rebels (with roughly the same amount reported from Saudi Arabia), the man who shelled Kabul with thousands killed, driving hundreds of thousands of people out of the city (including all Western embassies), in an effort to shoot his way into power; not quite the same as Pol Pot emptying Phnom Penh, since the U.S. client was far more bloody in that particular operation.

Similarly, it is not at all concealed in Israel that its invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was undertaken in part to destroy the secular nationalism of the PLO, becoming a real nuisance with its persistent call for a peaceful diplomatic settlement, which was undermining the U.S.-Israeli strategy of gradual integration of the occupied territories within Israel. One result was the creation of Hizbollah, an Iranian-backed fundamentalist group that drove Israel out of most of Lebanon. For similar reasons, Israel supported fundamentalist elements as a rival to the accommodationist PLO in the occupied territories. The results are similar to Lebanon, as Hamas attacks against the Israeli military become increasingly difficult to contain. The examples illustrate the typical brilliance of intelligence operations when they have to deal with populations, not simply various gangsters.

The basic reasoning goes back to the early days of Zionism: Palestinian moderates pose the most dangerous threat to the goal of avoiding any political settlement until facts are established to which it will have to conform.

In brief, Islamic fundamentalism is an enemy only when it is "out of control." In that case, it falls into the category of "radical nationalism" or "ultranationalism," more generally, of independence whether religious or secular, right or left, military or civilian; priests who preach the "preferential option for the poor" in Central America, to mention a recent case.

The historically unique U.S.-Israel alliance has been based on the perception that Israel is a

“strategic asset,” fulfilling U.S. goals in the region in tacit alliance with the Arab facade in the Gulf and other regional protectors of the family dictatorships, and performing services elsewhere. Those who see Israel’s future as an efficient Sparta, at permanent war with its enemies and surviving at the whim of the U.S., naturally want that relationship to continue—including, it seems, much of the organized American Jewish community, a fact that has long outraged Israeli doves. The doctrine is explained by General (ret.) Shlomo Gazit, former head of Israeli military intelligence and a senior official of the military administration of the occupied territories. After the collapse of the USSR, he writes,

Israel’s main task has not changed at all, and it remains of crucial importance. Its location at the center of the Arab Muslim Middle East predestines Israel to be a devoted guardian of stability in all the countries surrounding it. Its [role] is to protect the existing regimes: to prevent or halt the processes of radicalization and to block the expansion of fundamentalist religious zealotry.⁴

To which we may add: performing dirty work that the U.S. is unable to undertake itself because of popular opposition or other costs. The conception has its grim logic. What is remarkable is that advocacy of it should be identified as “support for Israel.”

With some translation, Gazit’s analysis seems plausible. We have to understand “stability” to mean maintenance of specific forms of domination and control and easy access to resources and profits. And the phrase “fundamentalist religious zealotry,” as noted, is a code word for a particular form of “radical nationalism” that threatens “stability.”

Despite shifting alliances in a highly volatile region, Israel’s role as a U.S. strategic asset seems stable in the foreseeable future. Its advanced economy, like that of its patron, relies very heavily on the creativity and funding of the enormous state sector. The two countries are linked in joint research and development projects, mostly military and spin-offs, and Israel provides basing and storage facilities for the vast U.S. system of intervention forces targeting the oil-producing regions. Though effectively an extension of the U.S. military and economic interests, Israel is not entirely under control—client states commonly pursue their own paths, to the chagrin of the masters. Contradictions abound, at least contrary strains, as they do in U.S. policy as well. The Israeli Air Force is very visibly carrying out maneuvers in Eastern Turkey aimed at Iran, using advanced U.S. 15-E jets that can attack Iran and return without refueling. At the same time, headlines in the Israeli press report, “Israel and Iran have been conducting direct trade relations—from 1994.” Unlike the U.S., Israel does not officially list Iran as an enemy state, and there are no official barriers to trade, which is small but growing.⁵

Israel’s development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction continues under U.S. aegis, as it has since the Kennedy years. The well-informed military analyst Uzi Mahanaimi reports that “Israeli assault aircraft have been equipped to carry chemical and biological weapons manufactured at a top secret institute near Tel Aviv, military sources revealed yesterday.” Crews flying U.S. F-16 jets are trained to “fit an active chemical or biological weapon within minutes of receiving the command

to attack.” The weapons are manufactured at a biological research institute in Nes Ziona, near Tel Aviv, which “attracted unwanted scrutiny” when Dutch authorities confirmed that it was the intended destination of an El Al airliner that crashed in Amsterdam, killing many people on the ground, and found to have been carrying nerve gas components. “There is hardly a single known or unknown form of chemical or biological weapon...which is not manufactured at the institute,” according to a biologist who held a senior post in Israeli intelligence. Nes Ziona does not work on defensive and protective devices, but only biological weapons for attack, according the British *Foreign Report*. The devices have already been used, the report continues, in the attempt by Mossad agents to kill Khaled Mishal in Jordan, which backfired.⁶

Once again, Israel is following in the footsteps of its patron. After World War II, the U.S. took over the hideous biological warfare operations of Japanese fascists, including the personnel, and protected them from war crimes prosecution—ridiculing Russian war crimes trials of these Class A war criminals as Communist-style show trials. The U.S. takeover of the programs was denied until it was exposed in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* in 1980. The achievements of the Japanese Mengeles became the core of U.S. biological warfare capabilities—one reason, along with nuclear bombs, why the U.S. official stand from 1950 was that it is “fallacious” to divide weapons “into moral and immoral types,” and that the concept of “weapons of mass destruction” does “not appear to have any significance.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff included biological warfare in war plans by 1949. Shortly after, the plans included a first-use option, along with nuclear weapons, a position formalized by the National Security Council in 1956 and in force until the 1972 treaty banning biological warfare. Recently released Chinese and U.S. archives raise questions about the actual use of these weapons in North Korea and China, previously assumed (by me as well) to have been Communist propaganda; China appears to have downplayed their use, so as not to provide information to the enemy.⁷

The international framework in which these developments are proceeding is fraught with danger and uncertainty. The U.S. has been isolated for years in its policies on Israel and the Palestinians, and only since its Gulf War victory has it been able to institute the program it had demanded in opposition to a very broad international consensus. The U.S. is now quite isolated in its policies towards Iran, which most of the world wants to reintegrate into the international system. In the case of Iraq, the U.S. and U.K. have lost much of the limited support they had in the past, and must now pursue military action in increasingly brazen violation of the UN Security Council and regional opinion. Secretary of Defense William Cohen “won no public support” when he “visited Saudi Arabia and five other friendly Persian Gulf countries” to explain the U.S. policy of punitive raids against Iraq in March 1999. A senior Saudi official stated: “We object to any nation taking matters into its own hands, and using bombing as an instrument of diplomacy.” Saudi Arabia has consistently refused to allow U.S. combat planes based there to join in operations against Iraq.⁸

The U.S. hope is that the region’s governments are sufficiently despotic so as to be able to suppress

the growing popular opposition to the savage devastation of the civilian society of a neighboring Arab country—opposition that is growing elsewhere as well.

Concerns over these developments must surely have become serious as the U.S. and its British client were seeking to prepare the ground for bombing of Iraq in late 1997. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was sent to Saudi Arabia, but treated with noticeable coolness. In sharp contrast, former Iranian president Rafsanjani, “still a pivotal figure in Tehran, was given an audience by the ailing King Fahd in Saudi Arabia,” and as his 10-day trip ended on March 2, Foreign Minister Prince Saud described it as “one more step in the right direction towards improving relations.” He also reiterated that “the greatest destabilising element in the Middle East and the cause of all other problems in the region” is Israel’s policy towards the Palestinians and U.S. support for it. These policies might activate popular forces that Saudi Arabia greatly fears, as well as undermining its legitimacy as “guardian” of Islamic holy places, including the Dome of the Rock in East Jerusalem, now effectively annexed by U.S./Israeli “greater Jerusalem” programs. Shortly before, the Arab states had boycotted a U.S.-sponsored economic summit in Qatar that was intended to advance the “New Middle East” project of Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Instead, they attended an Islamic conference in Tehran in December 1997, joined even by Iraq.⁹

The increasingly prominent Turkish-Israel alliance is not welcome to other countries of the region and there are signs that they may be considering Iranian initiatives to develop a regional system that would be more independent of U.S. control, including the Gulf oil producers, Egypt, and Syria. That is not a prospect that U.S. planners can lightly tolerate, particularly with the reasonable likelihood that not too far in the future the current oil glut will decline and the Middle East share in global oil production will substantially increase. It is against the background of such possible developments in the region that U.S. planning with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be assessed.

Israel’s internal economy and social structure are coming to resemble that of its patron and paymaster, with growing inequality and the collapse of social support systems, along with a sense of social solidarity generally. One grave internal problem is the cost—economic, social, and cultural—of sustaining a large and growing ultra-religious (“Haredi”) population, which draws heavily on educational and welfare programs but contributes little to the economy. In a 1997 study, economists from the Hebrew University and Boston University found that Israel’s workforce participation for men is well below that of Western Europe and the U.S., and declining as “ultra-Orthodox non-participation...is permanent and increasing at a geometric rate.” If the tendencies persist, they will “make Israel’s welfare system insolvent and bankrupt municipalities with large ultra-Orthodox populations.” Refusal to work among the Orthodox is a specific Israeli phenomenon, not the case elsewhere or historically in anything like the manner of contemporary Israel. With the religious population doubling every 17 years, “economic bankruptcy is imminent,” the economists conclude, though the ultra-Orthodox Rabbi who chairs the Knesset finance committee feels that all is under

control because “this country is living with miracles.”¹⁰

Conflicts between the secular and religious populations are becoming more intense, exacerbated by class and ethnic correlations. Population growth is increasing among Palestinians and ultra-religious Jews, declining among secular and privileged sectors, as in Europe. Many Israelis find the looming “civil war” more ominous even than the dangerous international conflicts that are likely to persist.

As in the U.S., the Israeli political system is converging in a narrow center-right spectrum with little differentiation, and the traditional parties (Likud, Labor) are virtually collapsing. Their current leaders, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak, have “two identical maps,” political commentator Yosef Harif observes: “from a political point of view there is no difference today between Netanyahu and Barak”—not that matters were very different before, apart from the differences of style that trace to the differing constituencies of the political blocs. Netanyahu’s plan is “Allon Plus,” an amplification of the traditional Labor Party Allon Plan that grants Israel effective control over desirable regions and resources of the occupied territories. Barak’s “alternative” is what he calls “the expanded Allon Plan,” which amounts to about the same thing. Barak demands that “we must not uproot settlements” or “abandon the Jewish settlement in Hebron,” and it is “forbidden for us to agree to a Palestinian state.” “One listens to the ideas of Barak and hears the voice of Netanyahu,” the reporter observes, paraphrasing the Biblical passage. Considering their records, commentator Avi Shavit, speaking for the left, asks “why do we hate Benjamin Netanyahu so much,” particularly since he “bears responsibility for less bloodshed and less harm to human rights than the two patrons of peace who occupied the prime minister’s chair before him,” Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, the former “anointed as Messiah” in delusional fantasies of the left, Shavit comments.¹¹

With regard to the Palestinians, the U.S. and Israel continue to implement the extreme rejectionist program they have maintained since the early 1970s, in international isolation until the Gulf war gave the U.S. free rein to institute its version of the “peace process”: keeping unilateral control, rejecting Palestinian rights, and moving to implement a variant of South Africa’s homeland policies, though without many of the advantages that South Africa conferred on the Bantustans. The steps are reviewed in the text that follows and the chapters that update the story from 1983 to the present.

At the time of writing (March 1999), the most recent stage in the “peace process” is the Wye Memorandum signed at the White House on October 23, 1998, and approved by the Israeli Cabinet on November 11. In agreeing, the Cabinet declared that “The Government will continue to pursue its policy of strengthening and developing the communities in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district, on the basis of a multi-annual plan,” including “security roads” for Jews throughout the territories and preservation of Israel’s “national interests”: “security areas, the areas around Jerusalem, the areas of Jewish settlement, infrastructure interests, water sources, military and security locations, the areas around north-south and west-east transportation arteries, and historic sites of the Jewish people.” Immediately following the accord, settlers established more than 12 new settlements throughout the

West Bank, heeding the call of Israel's Foreign Minister, Ariel Sharon, to "grab" as much West Bank land as possible. By January 1999, the "land grab" was accelerating, including isolated settlements that would be the first candidates for eventual evacuation under any settlement that is not a complete caricature. Standard practices are being followed, among them, razing Palestinian houses in the search for "Jewish archaeological remains" and establishing "nature reserves," later to be converted to Jewish housing.

Of particular significance is new post-Wye development in the Givat Ze'ev Bloc northwest of Jerusalem, in pursuance of the Bush-Clinton-Rabin-Peres programs of cutting off what will be left to the Palestinians from the region around Jerusalem (let alone Jerusalem itself, the center of their cultural, social, and economic existence) and from the territory to the south.¹²

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling on Israel to observe the Fourth Geneva Convention, which bans settlement in the occupied territories. The resolution was passed 115 to 2, the usual two.¹³

The Wye agreement changes territorial arrangements in trivial ways—which are not easy to determine, since it is the first redeployment accord without a map indicating areas to be transferred to Palestinian administration.¹⁴ But it is presumably a step towards something like the 50-50 split of the territories that was Rabin's goal in the Oslo negotiations, at least if Israel is sensible enough to abandon useless lands where the population may rot in peace in scattered and isolated enclaves. The most significant and innovative aspect of the Memorandum is its barely concealed call for state terror to achieve the goals of the U.S.-Israel program. That breaks new ground for international agreements. The Memorandum emphasizes that the Palestinian security forces, which have a shocking record of torture and terror, must act to ensure the security of Israelis. The CIA will supervise them as they carry out arrests, hold mock trials, collect arms, and "criminalize" incitement against the agreements. They must operate on the principle of "zero tolerance for terror" (against Israelis), a concept that is broadly construed, as anyone familiar with the record of the OA will understand.

The Memorandum does contain a sentence stating that "without derogating from the above, the Palestinian Police will...implement this Memorandum with due regard to internationally accepted norms of human rights and rule of law."

There is no reciprocity: the security of Palestinians is not an issue, and even the meaningless and shameful comment just quoted does not apply to Israel, despite its brutal record of terror, torture, and violation of elementary legal and human rights obligations, too well-documented to review. Included are hundreds of killings of Palestinians since Oslo, most of them "unlawful" according to Amnesty International (AI), and exceeding killings of Israelis by a considerable margin (though less than before, when the ratio was extreme). AI reports further that "there continues to be almost total impunity for unlawful killings of Palestinians," not to speak of house demolitions, expulsion from Jerusalem and elsewhere, imprisonment without trial, systematic torture of prisoners, etc.—all well-

documented by major human rights organizations, including Israeli organizations, but of no concern to the framers of the latest stage of the rejectionist program. No less striking is the praise of the Clinton-Gore Administration for the harsh and illegal measures employed by the Palestinian security forces to suppress opposition to the accords and ensure security for Israelis.¹⁵

Amnesty International published an assessment of the human rights situation since Oslo as the Wye Memorandum was signed.¹⁶ AI estimates 1600 Palestinians routinely arrested by Israeli military forces every year, half “systematically tortured.” AI notes once again, as other major human rights organizations regularly have, that Israel is alone in having “effectively legalized the use of torture” (with Supreme Court approval), determining that in pursuit of Israel’s perceived security needs “all international rules of conduct could be broken.” AI reports similar practices on the part of the Palestinian Authority, including execution of two Palestinians for “incitement against the peace process.” The State Security Courts that conduct such abuses have been endorsed by the U.S. State Department as demonstrating Arafat’s “commitment to the security concerns of Israel,” with the support of Vice-President Al Gore.

Clinton’s achievement in bringing the two parties together to agree on the Wye Memorandum was hailed with the usual awe. He proved himself to be the “Indispensable Man,” the *New York Times* headline read, praising him for the “Crucial Salvage Mission.” Clinton is “staking out the moral high ground” by insisting on the terms of the Wye Memorandum. He “preached accommodation to immutable realities”—“immutable” because they are demanded by U.S. power. He crowned his moral achievement with “an uplifting, optimistically American speech,” while “tethering the vaunted U.S. idealism, which some Israelis and some Palestinians believe to be diplomatic naiveté, is the promise of a fat new American purse.” Nevertheless, the idealism and moral high ground cast a radiant glow over the proceedings.¹⁷

Particular cases illustrate the reality of U.S. policy. When some atrocity occurs, Palestinians are placed under harsh curfew, no matter who is responsible. A striking illustration was the massacre of 29 Arabs praying in a Mosque by the right-wing American religious settler Baruch Goldstein in February 1994, followed by severe curfew of Palestinians and killing of many more Palestinians. Visitors to the Kiryat Arba suburb where Goldstein settled can walk to the shrine established for him where they can worship in praise of the “martyr” who died “clean of hands and pure of heart,” as the words on the gravestone read. In one of the innumerable other curfews, in September 1998, a day-old infant died in Hebron and another, three months old, died in her mother’s arms, both on their way to the hospital, when Israeli soldiers refused to let them pass through security barriers that had been set up to ensure that Jewish settlers could observe ritually prescribed seven days of mourning without disturbance. The soldiers made “a mistake in judgment” the military spokesperson stated, ending the matter.¹⁸

A few days later, Osama Barham, who now holds the record for imprisonment without charge by

Israeli military authorities, reached the end of five years of administrative detention, then extended by the military without any court decision. A secular journalist, Barham is suspected of membership in Islamic Jihad, without evidence—or concern from the overseers. Barham can consider himself lucky by comparison to those sent to the Israel-run torture chamber Al-Khiam in Lebanon, administered by the mercenary army Israel established in the “security zone” it occupies in violation of a unanimous UN Security Council resolution of March 1978 ordering it to withdraw immediately and unconditionally; U.S. tolerance renders the decision moot. The first news in nine months from Al-Khiam was brought by Hassan, released after 12 years of regular torture, he reports, confirming ample evidence since 1982. Hassan may have been lucky, too, as compared with the 71 Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails as hostages for future negotiations after having been kidnapped in Lebanon, with the authorization of Israel’s courts.¹⁹

Israeli military operations in Lebanon continue, while its occupying forces come under more successful attack by the increasingly sophisticated Hizbollah resistance (called “terror” in the U.S., sometimes in Israel). Israeli military operations are not confined to the “security zone.” In February 1999, three Israeli officers from an elite command unit operating north of the zone were killed in a Hizbollah ambush. Israel warned that it would attack Lebanese civilian targets in retaliation, as, in fact, it has regularly done in the past. Since the end of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982, some 25,000 Lebanese and Palestinians have been killed, according to Lebanese officials and international relief agencies, along with 900 Israeli soldiers.²⁰

The achievement of imposing its rejectionist program in near international isolation is impressive enough. But U.S. power won an ideological victory that is in some ways even more dramatic. By now its rejectionist “peace process” is adopted as the framework of a just settlement worldwide, even among those who only a few years ago were calling for recognition of Palestinian rights and Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories (in accord with UN 242 of November 1967, as interpreted throughout the world, including the U.S. until 1971).

So far, U.S. and Israeli leaders have been unwilling to move as far towards accommodating Palestinian rights as South African advocates of Apartheid did towards Blacks 35 years ago. Their solution was “Black states,” to which the unwanted populations could be confined, to serve as a cheap labor force when needed. Presumably, the U.S. and Israel will sooner or later realize that they can gain by adopting a more progressive stand of the South African variety. If so, they will agree to call the Palestinian enclaves a “state” and perhaps even allow them a degree of industrial development (as South Africa did), so that U.S.-and Israeli-owned manufacturers, joining with rich Palestinians, can exploit cheap and easily exploitable labor, subdued by repression.

Calls for a Palestinian state are being heard, though it is instructive to look at them closely. At the extreme pro-Palestinian end of mainstream discourse, Anthony Lewis, joining in the standard denunciations of Netanyahu, contrasted him with “the unsentimental old soldier” Yitzhak Rabin, who

with his “sheer intellectual honesty,” was willing to sign the Oslo agreements. But unlike Rabin, Netanyahu “opposes any solution that would give the Palestinians a viable state—tiny, disarmed, poor, dominated by Israel, but their own.” That is “the heart of the matter,” the crucial distinction between the saintly Rabin and the bad Netanyahu. And because of Netanyahu’s recalcitrance, “Oslo is dying.”²¹

In fact, Rabin, and his successor Shimon Peres while in office, forcefully rejected any idea of a Palestinian state, while the Netanyahu government has been more ambivalent on the matter (see below). But no doubt Rabin would sooner or later have come to grant the Palestinians a state that is “tiny, disarmed, poor, dominated by Israel, but their own.” There is no more reason to doubt that Netanyahu would also agree to that, as his Minister of Information has already stated. Similarly, all but the most extreme fanatics in the Arab and Islamic world would probably be willing to grant the Jews a state that is “tiny, disarmed, poor, dominated by Palestine, but their own.” And they might even take “the heart of the matter” to be the unwillingness of some ultra-extremist to adopt this forthcoming stand.

A thought experiment suggests itself. One might ask what the reaction would be to a presentation of “the heart of the matter” in the terms just stated. The answer tells us a good deal about the ideological victory of U.S. power.

Hillary Clinton recently indicated her interest in running for the Senate in New York. In an article headlined “New York’s Palestinian State,” James Dao of the *New York Times* asked whether she had made a “monumental political gaffe” in advocating a Palestinian state. What she had said to a group of young Israelis and Arabs a year earlier is that “I think that the territory that the Palestinians currently inhabit, and whatever additional territory they will obtain through the peace negotiations,” should “evolve into a functioning modern state”—a state that would, surely, be “tiny, disarmed, poor, dominated by Israel.”

White House aides had immediately “disowned comments by Hillary Rodham Clinton about the need for a Palestinian state and insisted that she was speaking only for herself,” and she came under considerable attack. But when announcing her possible candidacy, she received some support, as well. A political science professor was quoted as saying that “supporting a Palestinian state used to be the peacenik position, an extreme left-wing position.” But perhaps now no more. Perhaps adopting the stand of South African racists 35 years ago can no longer be condemned so easily as “the peacenik position, an extreme left-wing position.”²²

Struggles for freedom and rights are never over, and this one is not either. All of the contesting parties in the region face very serious and possibly lethal threats. It cannot be said that the dominant outside power has helped to smooth the way towards a meaningful solution of their problems, or even towards reduction of the dangers. But that story has not come to an end either, and there are many options open to concerned people who hope to seek and pursue a far more constructive and honorable

course.

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