



# The Other Israel

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## THE TRAIN TO DAMASCUS

*The following editorial was written before the coup d'état in the Soviet union. It now seems, with the return to office of President Gorbachev, that Soviet foreign policy will remain essentially unchanged, and therefore the conclusions drawn here are still valid.*

After months of strenuous diplomatic efforts, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker seems to have produced, at last, some tangible results.

At the Moscow Summit, President Bush even felt that the time was ripe to announce solemnly the convening of a Middle East Peace Conference in October, under the auspices of himself and of his Soviet colleague. Bush made the announcement with the knowledge that all but one of the prospective participants had already given their consent.

It had not been so difficult to get the support of the traditional American allies in the Arab World: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. And for Jordan every opportunity was welcome to repair its relationship with the U.S. - severely damaged by the Gulf war.

Baker's key acquisition, however, was Syrian president Hafez El-Assad, who - since the Iraqi army's decimation - controls the largest military in the Arab world. Since the end of the cold war, Assad - long allied with the Soviet Union - has drawn closer to Washington. Syrian participation in the

Gulf war brought a generous reward: American acquiescence in the imposition of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon, as well as large cash subsidies from Saudi Arabia. Syrian participation in the peace conference would consolidate Assad's American alliance, and hold out the prospect of Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights, occupied since 1967.

For Yitzchak Shamir - heading Israel's most right-wing nationalist government ever - the American proposals presented a difficult dilemma. Any successful peace process would inevitably involve territorial concessions. For months, Shamir hedged about details and employed delaying tactics - at which he is an incomparable expert. However, no Israeli Prime Minister could afford to openly defy the President of the United States. Shamir received dire warnings, from American Jewish leaders and from some of the most friendly senators, with regard to the possible consequences of definitely rejecting the proposed conference.

Thus, Shamir finally gave a highly qualified "Yes" to Baker, compromising on some of his procedural sticking points. For example, he agreed to have a U.N. observer present at the proceedings - though he refused to have the international organization's auspices for the conference.

### *Yes to conditions upon aid!*

*The following is the text of an advertisement published in Ha'aretz and the Jerusalem Post, July 3.*

The Prime Minister is opposed to the American loan guarantees being made conditional upon Israel openly calling off further settlement activities in the Occupied Territories. He pretends that this position reflects the sentiment of the Israeli society. He argues that such a condition is tantamount to foreign interference with Israel's internal affairs. The opposite is true.

Guaranteeing billions of dollars to the Israeli government without making such guarantees conditional upon cessation of settlement activities amounts to a repudiation of all chances to reach a peaceful settlement, which alone would guarantee Israel's future and security.

Not subjecting the loan guarantees to such a condition would mean that more billions of dollars would be channeled to further finance the settlements rather than to integrating the Soviet immigrants - for whose well-being the guarantees are requested.

Refraining from making the guarantees conditional upon cessation of settlement activities would be a direct interference of the U.S. administration in Israel's internal affairs.

**We call upon the Israeli public to oppose Shamir's position and explicitly demand that such a condition be attached to the American loan guarantees so that the money will not flow into the settlements, each one of which constitutes an obstacle on the road to peace.**

The Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace



Despite earlier predictions, this decision did not, so far, shake Shamir's coalition. The parties of the extreme right did threaten to leave the government and deprive Shamir of his parliamentary majority. This threat was, however, fast withdrawn after the opposition Labour Party offered to give its backing to Shamir, "as long as he moves towards peace". The extreme rightists decided, reluctantly, to stay in for the time being – in the (not entirely unfounded) expectation that Shamir might succeed in torpedoing the conference once the territorial issue is seriously placed on the agenda.

An Israeli song, written in the 1950s, begins with the words *When peace will be, we'll take the train to Damascus*. Indeed, there used to be a train from Haifa to Damascus. Since 1948 this railway connection has remained abandoned and rusting. The Israeli-Syrian border (whose location was changed several times by war) continues to be a front line, with mighty armies poised on both sides. The only Israelis to visit Damascus in the past 43 years were either brought there as prisoners of war, or came on secret missions with forged papers. But now that Assad as well as Shamir decided to participate in the peace conference, people start to realize that Syria is there, just across the border. A Tel-Aviv magazine already published a map of Damascus – plus some advice for Israeli travellers who may visit the city one day (*Ha'ir*, August 17).\*

Israeli settlers on the Golan heights – who for many years felt secure because of the 1981 annexation law, which declared the Golan to be an integral part of Israel – are now becoming apprehensive. Their leaders started to mobilize a parliamentary lobby against withdrawal. However, there is dissent among the Golan settlers themselves – who are, as a whole, less ideologically motivated than those on the West Bank.\*\*

Many observers, trying to predict Yitzchak Shamir's future strategy, believe that he may be trying to achieve a separate peace with Syria – to return the Golan Heights in return for a tacit Syrian acquiescence in continued Israeli rule over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Such a scheme – similar to Menachem Begin's strategy at Camp David – would fit in with the traditional Likud ideology, which relegates the Golan to a secondary role in comparison with the Biblically-hallowed "Judea and Samaria" (as the

West Bank is officially designated). Some recent Shamir statements lend additional credence to this theory (*Hadashot*, August 2).

It is not known whether Assad, for his part, is considering such a deal with Shamir. There is no love lost between Assad and Arafat – but the Syrian president's prestige in the Arab World would soar considerably higher, if he could present himself as the saviour of the Palestinians. Nor did Bush and Baker clearly define the scope of the Middle East settlement they mean to broker.

A "Syrian Camp David" may have some positive effects – it would further bolster the principle of "peace in return for territory", and – for some years at least – a large-scale clash between regular armies would become extremely unlikely. There would be no end, however, to small-scale armed clashes and confrontations. Already, there is an increased use of firearms by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, many of whom express their distrust of the ongoing diplomatic game by replacing stones with guns and grenades.

Shamir succeeded in imposing humiliating terms upon the Palestinians; he failed, however, in his prime objective – to exclude the PLO from the negotiating process. On the contrary: the Americans, in order to obtain any kind of Palestinian participation at their conference, must deal with the PLO. Feisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi, Baker's Palestinian interlocutors, make no secret of their close coordination with the PLO's Tunis headquarters.

To bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table, the United States will have to offer them some guarantees with regard to the future of the Occupied Territories, which will offset – at least to some degree – the humiliating terms offered for their participation. And among such guarantees, the most immediate one must concern the issue of continuing Israeli settlement activity.

A few days after delivering its "Yes" to Baker, the Shamir government established a new settlement named "Eshkolot" in the south part of the West Bank. This was not done by oversight – as Defence minister Arens made clear on Israeli television, this action was taken to demonstrate ongoing government policy. The minister also firmly rejected Saudi Arabia's offer to drop the trade boycott against Israel, in return for a settlement freeze.

The constantly expanding settlements are the most

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provoking part of the occupation, constituting a de-facto, ongoing annexation and presenting the Palestinians with the prospect of total dispossession. Continuation of the settlement activities, while the peace conference goes on, would deprive that conference of its last shred of credibility – certainly in Palestinian eyes.

Thus, for the proposed conference to have any real significance, the settlement drive must be stopped – and the United States possesses an excellent means of stopping it, in the 10 billion dollar housing loan guarantees which the Israeli government is due to ask for in early September. The use which the United States will make of this lever will be the crucial test of its determination to bring to an end the conflicts of the Middle East.

#### The editor

\* Ha'ir also published a long account by Udi Adiv, an Israeli who secretly visited Damascus in 1972, on a private peace mission – and who, on his return to Israel, was convicted of espionage and spent more than ten years in prison. At the time of his trial, Adiv was denounced as a traitor. Now, he is increasingly regarded as a harbinger of Israeli-Arab dialogue.

\*\* "I am 22 years old. I was born here. Actually, I was the first Israeli baby on the Golan. My life, except for one year on a farm near Jerusalem, passed on the Golan. My husband is from the Golan as well, and I thought we would spend our life here. But I am not willing to be an obstacle for peace. Absolutely not! For peace I am willing to go away. I don't know where I will go and what I will do, but if the government tells me to evacuate I will evacuate." Noa Weiner-Malul, of Merom Golan settlement, in Hadashot, August 2.

## Conditions? Of course!

by Uri Avnery

The following article was translated from Ha'aretz, July 3.

Let there be no doubt about it: I am in favour of the U.S. government making the housing loan guarantees conditional upon the cessation of settlement activities in the Occupied Territories.

Does this make me a disloyal Israeli? Quite the contrary! It has been said that placing conditions upon aid would constitute an interference in Israel's internal affairs. I say it is the absence of conditions which is an interference.

Without any conditions placed upon it, a large part of the aid would be used to accelerate the process of building settlements; with the help of the American taxpayer, many new obstacles would be erected on the road to peace – to any conceivable peace agreement. The billions would enable arch-annexationist Yitzchak Shamir to foil James Baker's carefully put together peace conference; in the aftermath, the region would inevitably escalate towards a new war – a war of mass destruction dwarfing anything wrought in the Gulf war.

Yes, Mr. Bush. You are daily interfering in the internal affairs of Israel. With the praises of peace on

your lips, you are supporting Shamir, financing Ariel Sharon's settlements and dooming the Israeli peace movement to impotence. Unless you are expressly going to prevent it, a large part of the money you provide will be literally stolen – it will not be used to help the Soviet immigrants, but to build villas for the settlers.

There will be no laboratories built for the immigrant scientists, nor hospitals for the doctors among them, nor conservatories for the musicians. These Soviet Jewish scientists, doctors and solists will continue to sweep our streets, while the money which could have created them jobs is wasted upon the hilltops of the West Bank. Any house constructed in a new settlement (or in "an extension to an existing one") is a disaster for the State of Israel. Anybody who finances it is committing a crime against Israel.

Our country now faces two alternatives for its future. Israel can try to get rid of the dirty reality of occupation, with its concomitant dark deeds and secret death-squads, and become a modern state – a Middle Eastern Japan, a technological-scientific-medical center and a true cultural "light unto the nations" such as Theodore Herzl dreamed of. On the other hand, Israel can stay where she is, sink deeper and deeper into the stinking bog, become a hothouse for corrupt politicians, ambitious generals and fanatic clergymen, send the cream of her sons to chase stone-throwing kids in the alleys of refugee camps, miss the historical opportunity offered by the Soviet immigration wave, and wait for the next inevitable war.

The choice between these two alternatives should be up to the citizens of Israel. They, and only they, must elect their own government. But the flow of American billions is interfering with this choice: it is hiding the dangers inherent in the present situation, obscuring the real problems, confusing the citizens of Israel. If this is not interference, what is?

The public opinion polls clearly show a new consensus coming about among the Israeli public – a consensus against settlements, against a continuation of the present situation, against a continuation of the occupation, in favor of a compromise solution with the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. This consensus is not reflected in the frozen, hidebound political system – and indeed, among the public there is an increasing demand for "a change in the system", a demand which is roughly blocked by the politicians.

This is the background against which the issue of conditional aid should be seen. The question is not "does a condition on aid constitute an interference" but rather: In the absence of conditions, who is benefiting? Which system is supported? Whose purpose is being served? In which direction do they push the country?

The right-wing does not want these questions to be voiced loudly. They want to silence those who ask them, by branding them "a bunch of snitchers".

Let those who are afraid keep their silence.

Those who don't fear will shout it out loud:

**Yes to conditions!**



## Gaza: a tax upon living

by Beate Zilversmidt

Gaza – this densely-populated part of the Occupied Territories which is so immensely miserable and poor with its sweltering, unpaved streets, and its grey chain of ruins – is nonetheless one of the places where new Jewish settlements constantly arise.

That after 24 years it is still under Israeli rule is partly due to the fact that Egypt – under whose custody Gaza was before Israel conquered it – simply did not ask for it during the peace negotiations.

Most Israelis are not very happy with Gaza, either. Among Israeli soldiers, Gaza is another name for nightmare. In army circles one hears more and more sounds like *Gaza, who needs it?* Meanwhile the military rule continues. The oppression in Gaza is more tough than in the West Bank. As if its inhabitants should be punished for the fact that nobody wants them.

Since the Gulf crisis, and the following war – and the simultaneous massive Russian immigration – unemployment has risen up to 50%. And, since that time, the little bit of financial help from relatives in the Gulf stopped as well.

In the Israeli media one reads that Defence Minister Arens has removed some of the limitations upon setting up industries in the Occupied Territories. But it seems that the occupation officials don't act accordingly. The daily *Hadashot* reported on August 1, about a Palestinian industrialist in Baka El-Sharkiya, who received from high levels the hint that he could already start building. At a certain moment he received an order to provide the plans for his new factory. A month later – after he did provide the plans and without any warning – there came army bulldozers which erased the whole building and destroyed a million dollars' worth of equipment, in an eleven hour operation.

In the television news of Friday night, August 9, the economic deterioration in the Occupied Territories was analysed. Experts of different political colours all agreed that the situation has become utterly explosive.

For the Israeli peace movement Gaza is rather inaccessible. Contacts are significantly less frequent than with the West Bank. Partly it is the geography: unlike East Jerusalem, Ramallah, or Nablus, Gaza is far from the Israeli centers. But the psychological distance seems to be bigger, as well.

A newly-formed group organised a tour from Tel-Aviv to Gaza on Saturday, August 10, in order to collect information about the newest tax measures imposed upon the population of Gaza. At half past seven in the morning, twenty five Tel-Avivians arrived at the point of departure. The tour was made in private cars plus the van of Kibbutz Shfayim; Amos Gvirtz, one of the organisers, lives there.

Before departure there was a short consultation about the plans for the day: after passing the Gaza-Strip border there should be an UNWRA bus waiting, which would bring the group to the trade union office

in Gaza. There the problem of the taxes are to be discussed. It is agreed that in case of difficulties there will be no confrontation with the army – the purpose of this day being to speak with the trade unionists, not to fight the occupation in its totality.

The difficulty came soon. At the border checkpoint Amos, who drives the van, answers the questions of the military: *we are a peace group on our way to Gaza, where we are going to meet with trade unionists, and UNWRA people.* Amos, who refused all his life to do military service, also refuses to lie.

It is not at all sure that we will be let in. Since nothing was coordinated with the UNWRA liaison officer, the soldiers would wait for orders from the higher command. After some to and fro an army vehicle comes very close. The lieutenant who drove it shouts that all the Gaza Strip is being declared “a closed military area”. Meanwhile other Israelis are passing without problems. For them there are no limitations: settlers. There is still some hope that the other military official – of the civil administration – will give permission before the fighter type receives the written closure order from his commander. The organisers seem to know this kind of situation. Some have experience through Kav Le'oved (Workers Hotline). Still after waiting one and a half hour in the sun everybody seems surprised that after all we got permission to go on.

Of course the intention had not been to harass anybody. It all had been *out of concern for our safety!*

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There was no UNWRA bus to be seen, but that was no problem: we left our cars – with the Israeli license plates! – at the gas station behind the checkpoint. From there we took improvised Arab taxis.

My driver was a man between forty and fifty who spoke Hebrew. He told how he had lost his job after the Gulf war. How difficult it was to get into Israel. In order to be let in you had to prove that all your taxes were paid. And they knew how to squeeze money out of you. Of the thousand Shekels he earned (more or less \$400) only less than half was left to him. That is what you have to live from for a whole month with a big family. The newest invention is the so-called “living-tax”. That is something you don't find elsewhere, he claimed: not in Israel, not in the West Bank, not in any country; only in Gaza. When you don't pay income tax because you do not have a job, you suddenly have to pay a tax for living! When you can't pay it, than you won't get the “magnetic card”, and without that you can't enter Israel to try to find a job. In Gaza there is no work, whatsoever. The people don't have anything to eat, and they have to pay for the air which they breath – as if it was specially provided by Israel.

In the meantime we got in the middle of a traffic jam in Gaza city. Already for years nobody is regulating the traffic, he explains. It is Intifada policy that



policemen, too, don't work for the occupier. Then, a man in the street waves. The driver opens the window. They speak in Arabic, but there are things you understand in every language. The man in the street asks: *Americans?* The driver answers: *No, Germans.* He seems to feel that this lie is better for our safety. What would Amos say about the lie?

**In a closed meeting, all military governors of Gaza Strip towns expressed the opinion that no diplomatic process in the Middle East can succeed without the PLO, and that the PLO is the only possible negotiating partner on behalf of the Palestinians.**

This occurred during a conference of military governors convened on June 27 by Major-General Danny Rotschild, who is coordinator of government activities in the Occupied Territories (*Ha'aretz* July 30).

At the trade union, a line of well-dressed men (they afterwards turn out to be the trade union's legal advisors) are shielding us when we leave the cars and go into the building.

Inside, in the not so big office, we sit in two rows at the table with the trade unionists. The words of welcome are really touching. It seems that our number – twenty five people, all of them from Tel-Aviv – makes a good impression. Then follow the explanations about the taxes. It adds some numbers and examples to what I already heard from the driver. A huge pile of forms is shown, of all people that suddenly received a computer printout for the so-called *living tax*, and who out of despair came with it to the trade union office. Here we hear that "living tax" is not the official term for the new taxes. Officially it is called "income tax arrears".

The officials just assume that somebody earned more than what he told them, or when one did not have an income at all, they draw this conclusion from the fact that he did not starve to death – ignoring the possibility that in emergency situations family members might sustain each other.

There is very little the union can do. They can't really help the people. He who tries too hard finds himself suddenly in Administrative Detention. The system of taxation was already unjust for a long time. In Gaza you always had to pay income tax twice. The fact that in Israel income tax was taken off the salary did not prevent you from paying it again in Gaza. And the salary is to begin with lower than that of Israelis.

Furthermore, Israelis do get something for the 20% which is taken off their salary for social security. The Gazan pays them as well, but does not get anything back. The income tax in Gaza is totally arbitrary. They can let one pay what they want. They just say: you must have had other income, which you did not report – now you have to pay for it with compound interest. Nobody can force them to prove it. It is a situation of utter lawlessness. There was the case of a man who was ordered to pay 100,000 Shekels. When he came to talk about it, and asked the officials from what he was supposed to pay it, they told him: Okay, we take off 80%, you only have to pay us 20,000.

The taxes seem to form part of a whole series of measures meant to harass Palestinians of the Occupied

Territories and Gazans in particular: before the war only 15% of the workers from the Territories were registered. Registration costs money to the employer as well. And the employer pays more for registering a worker from the Occupied Territories than for an Israeli. Most workers from Gaza worked illegally. But now it has become impossible to enter Israel without a registration card. And the boss for whom you worked illegally for years suddenly does not have work for you when it can't be done "black" anymore. Russian immigrants are eager enough.

It is such a sad accumulation. It is too much. At least a concrete plan is also formulated: Common action of Israelis and Gazans is agreed upon. **Kav Le'oved** will collect details about the "living tax" from the Gaza trade union and publish them.

The trade unionists take us with them in their cars to the house of Mary Hass, where lunch was to be offered. (Mary Hass, who works as an educational supervisor for UNWRA and who is a respected leader of the community has been doing this honour to visiting peace delegations for nearly twenty year.) Her house is in a clearly better neighborhood, but here, too, the streets are unpaved. The last part we have to walk. In the middle of the street, like in many others, there is a barrier erected by the army. We have to wriggle through a narrow opening.

After the consumption of delicious Palestinian dishes we are addressed by our hostess Mary Hass. She asks us urgently to tell the Israeli public about what is going on in Gaza. The economic emergency was explained to us by the trade unionists. She has something to add about the situation of the Palestinians who are being deported from Kuwait. Among them are some 30,000 who originally are from Gaza but can't return. They left Gaza before 1967 on an Egyptian *laissez-passer*, and Israel does not allow them to return, nor does Egypt. They have nowhere to go. Nearly everybody in Gaza now has, on top of his own problems, big worries about relatives in the Gulf. "Of all people you Israelis should be able to understand that we want them to come here. We don't ask to settle them in Tel-Aviv. Here in Gaza 700,000 people are already living. We can make place for another 30,000. It is not only men, also women and children, and elderly. And when Israel does not want the people who have a file with the security service, okay, but let them at least allow the others in."

Contact: **Kav La'oved**, POB 2319, Tel-Aviv; tel: 03-663754

■ In June 1991, two-year old Aslan Al-Sharif fell off the roof of his parents' home in Gaza. Severely wounded in the head, he could not be treated in the under-equipped Gaza hospital – but without special permission from the military governor's health staff officer, the health insurance does not pay for treatment of Palestinian residents of the Territories in Israeli hospitals. In the Al-Sharif case, permission was given for one week of treatment at the Asuta Hospital in Tel-Aviv.

The child was successfully operated, but needed at least a month of intensive, specialised after-care. The



child's father, an unemployed worker, was unable to pay for that – and the child was sent home with half his body paralysed and his sight impaired.

At the Asuta Hospital, the medical team in charge of Aslan did not accept this outcome, and continued writing letters to the Gaza military government. The Association of Israeli and Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights was also mobilised. After the affair got into the press, the governor of Gaza ordered the health staff officer to approve the necessary funds for the child's recovery.

On August 12, Aslan Al-Sharif was taken to Alin Hospital in Jerusalem, which specialises in rehabilitating the victims of head injuries. Its doctors say that he stands a good chance of being restored to full health.

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## Threatened village

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The nightmare of all Palestinians since 1948 has come true for the inhabitants of Ramyah in the year 1991. Ramyah – in the very north of the Gallilee – is one of 40 unrecognized Arab villages and hamlets inside Israel. For its 100 inhabitants, not being recognized means that after more than forty years of officially being Israeli citizens, they still live without water and without electricity. Their children have to walk every day seven kilometres to go to school in a nearby Arab village. There is no road, only a path. But the Ramyah people don't complain about that. They live the life which their parents, and their parents' parents, lived before them, and don't mind as long as they are left alone.

The nearby, quickly expanding, Jewish town of Carmiel – built in 1966 on expropriated Arab lands, part of which in the past belonged to the people of Ramyah – comes nearer and nearer. The Jewish-owned acres between Carmiel and Ramyah are for sale, for huge prices.

On April 27, 1991, the whole village of Ramyah received a summons to appear in court. On June 16, the Haifa District Court decided that the people of Ramyah must vacate their homes and their lands within three months because of *the urgent need to settle immigrants in that area*, as it was formulated by the Israel Lands Authority in an affidavit presented to the court.

A Day of Solidarity with the residents of Ramyah was held, on August 17. Several (Arab) Knesset Members were there, as well as representatives of the neighboring Arab municipalities, and other organizations. From Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem came more than hundred people in busses organised by a Hanitzotz-led committee. A few inhabitants of Carmiel also came.

Uri Avnery of the ICIPP was one of the speakers on the improvised podium in the orchard of Ramyah. Another of the speakers was Yousuf Savi'el, of Ramyah itself. It might not have occurred to all listeners that both said parctically the same: *I am not against immigration, I am in favour of it – but not at our/the Arabs' expense.*

Yousuf Savi'el also told: *We don't mind to become a neighborhood of Carmiel; that was what we expected to become. Why can't we live together, Jews and Arabs, original inhabitants and new immigrants side by side?*

The Day of Solidarity succeeded in making the issue into a media topic. Already one day later, a television crew arrived at the inaccessible spot, and Yousuf Savi'el appeared in every Israeli living room. The mayor of nearby Carmiel commented: *the eviction of a few dozen Arabs living illegally on public lands – that is the price for the Judaization of the Gallilee* (Ha'aretz, 18.8.1991). These statements were, however, not received well among his town's inhabitants. Two days later, the mayor presented a new position: he now agrees to create a neighborhood for the Ramyah people in Carmiel – if they give up their present lands.

The problem of Ramyah is not yet solved: the new proposal still requires them to give up the agricultural lands from which they draw their livelihood. Nevertheless, the mayor's volte-face indicates that the authorities are vulnerable to pressure. Further actions are being planned.

**Letters of protest:** *Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir, Prime Minister's Office, Hakiryia, Jerusalem – and/or: the Israeli embassy in your country.*

**Copies to:** *The Ramyah Resident's Committee, POB 388, Al Ban'aneh 20189, Israel.*

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## Abie Nathan goes on

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Abie Nathan, the most flamboyant figure in the Israeli peace movement – and perhaps in the Israeli society as a whole – continues to hold the headlines.

On June 6, he came to the residence of Haim Herzog, President of the State of Israel, where, at the presidents's request, he ended his prolonged hunger strike; dozens of television cameras followed Nathan, as he drank his first cup of soup in forty days (*see TOI-47, p.3*).

Abie Nathan has diverse friends. Only three weeks later, he was reported to be visiting PLO Chairman, Yasser Arafat. It was not Nathan's first appearance at Arafat's Tunis residence. He is gradually becoming a regular visitor there. But this time he was received more warmly than ever. Altogether, Nathan spent a week in Tunis, contacting several senior PLO officials and meeting Arafat twice. These meetings culminated in an official PLO document, in which Arafat answered 15 questions put to him by Nathan.

Among other things, Arafat proclaimed his readiness to enter direct negotiations with the government of Israel and to stop all acts of violence on the Palestinian side during the negotiations.

Arafat agreed with Nathan that Palestine and Israel would have to cooperate closely over the vital issue of water sources; and he stated that he has no intention of destroying even one house in the Israeli settlements on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and that the possibility of Israelis continuing to live in the Palestinian state would be considered on a humanitarian



base. For Nathan, this was an essential point since it often comes up in conversations with ordinary Israelis. (The withdrawal from Sinai in 1982 was, for many, a traumatic event – with Egyptian President Sadat insisting on evacuation of all settlers and Israel's then Defence Minister Sharon having bulldozers raze all settlements to the ground prior to the final withdrawal.)

Still another issue considered in Arafat's document was the 1964 Palestinian National Covenant, with its total rejection of the State of Israel. Already for many years, the PLO has taken positions flatly counter to the Covenant. (The Covenant forbids, for example, all contacts with Israelis.) But the Covenant was never formally abolished, as Israeli government propagandists continue to point out. Asked to comment on this point, Arafat stated:

*Previous to the signing of a definite peace treaty by the Israeli government and the PLO, the two sides should declare their willingness to change and abolish, in their constitutions or basic political documents, all articles which may be regarded as threatening or infringing the security of the State of Israel or the State of Palestine* (.Quotation translated into English from the Hebrew version published in *Ha'aretz* on 7 July).

At the news of Abie Nathan's newest meeting with Arafat, the Israeli right flew into a paroxysm of rage. Likud KM Yehoshua Matza was quoted exclaiming: *He is just a common criminal! He should be put behind bars immediately!* (*Ha'aretz*, July 1).

Unfortunately, Nathan's civil disobedience was also attacked by some sections of the peace camp, mainly on the grounds that even a very bad law must be obeyed as long as it is law. The prominent liberal KM Amnon Rubinstein, leader of the Shinuy Party, went as far as stating: *I want peace with the Palestinians, but why meet that clown Arafat who supported Saddam Hussein?* (*Ha'aretz*, July 1).

Nevertheless, numerous voices were heard in support of Nathan's act of defiance. Ratz KM Ran Cohen stated: *Only a coward would avoid talking peace with the enemy, and would prefer to send 18-year old boys to kill and be killed... Abie Nathan is willing to pay the price of his struggle for peace. He is a dedicated man, who never harmed even a fly, and he deserves nothing but honour and respect* (ibid.). To the right-wingers' chagrain, the Israeli army radio station, Galey Tzahal, displayed a clearly sympathetic attitude towards Nathan, broadcasting a long commentary by Uri Avnery (ICIPP).

David Tal, a senior researcher at the Tel-Aviv University Center for Strategic Studies – one of Israel's best-known experts on Palestinian affairs – joined the fray: *The new document signed by Arafat should not be underestimated... it is another indication of the positive changes in PLO positions. Never before did Arafat speak so clearly about changing the Palestinian Covenant* (*Al Hamishmar*, July 22).

On the afternoon of July 14, Abie Nathan was expected to arrive at Ben Gurion airport. That day's Israeli newspapers carried a large advertisement, signed by 60 "prominent Israelis" (artists and

academics): *Welcome home, Abie Nathan, after your brave quest for peace!* Several of the signatories could be seen among the peace activists gathered outside the terminal to welcome Abie Nathan with signs and flowers. There were also others who came to greet him by waving hanging nooses and shouting: *Traitor Nathan – to the gallows!*. The airport police, arriving at the spot, impartially confiscated signs, nooses and flowers.

Nathan himself saw nothing of it all. Heavy police forces waited at the foot of the plane which brought him from France, and arrested him on the spot. He was placed in a black-curtained police van, and taken off to police headquarters. Only KM Tamar Gozanski, with her parliamentary immunity, was allowed to approach and give him a brief warm greeting.

Nathan's interrogation did not last long: he handed the police a copy of Yasser Arafat's document, saying: *This speaks for itself, I have nothing to add.* After several hours he was released.

In September, the Jerusalem District Court is due to resume proceedings with regard to Abie Nathan's previous meeting with Arafat – where he faces as much as four years' imprisonment. As yet, no charges were presented for the latest meeting. Undaunted, Nathan outlined a bold new plan: *I am going to place advertisements in the press and call for young people who are willing to break the law in public and go to prison. We will erect a tent at El-Arish (in Sinai), PLO people will come, we will all shake hands with them, and we all go to prison* (*Hadashot*, July 19).

On August 17, Abie Nathan met a leader of Hamas – the Gaza-centered Palestinian Islamic movement, rival of the PLO, which hitherto intransiently rejected any idea of compromise with Israel. Nathan's interlocutor was 46-year old Mahmud Al-Zaher, a surgeon by profession and a veteran of the Israeli prison system.

In their conversation, Nathan expressed the opinion that all Palestinian factions should unite in forming a delegation to the peace talks with Israel. The two agreed that it is up to the Palestinians to select their own representatives, and that the Israeli government has no right to interfere in that process (*Yediot Aharonot*, August 18).

Contact:

*Abie Nathan, POB 47099, Tel-Aviv 61470; tel: 03-5467637*

■ On July 14, the day of Abie Nathan's return, a delegation headed by former Justice Minister Haim Zadok also arrived at Ben-Gurion airport from Cairo. There, as the Israeli press reported, they had met with a senior Arafat aide. They were not in the least molested by the police, probably because their meeting with the PLO was not as public and spectacular as Nathan's.

One of the participants, Labor KM Aryeh Eliav, told *Yediot Aharonot* (July 14): *It was a big conference in Cairo, and a PLO delegation was also there. We met many people, Egyptians, Palestinians, and others, and did not ask everybody to which delegation he belonged.*



■ At the end of July a "simulation game" was held at Stanford University, California, in which Israelis and Palestinians acted out a process of peace negotiations between their peoples – with former State Department senior official Harold Saunders playing the role of mediator. With the exception of dialogue veteran Moshe Amirav, the Israelis present were academics and reserve military officers belonging to no organization and placing themselves "at the center of the political spectrum". At the insistence of some of them, the Palestinian group participating in the simulation game, headed by El-Fajr editor Hana Siniora, did not include official representatives of the PLO – though Arafat adviser Nabil Sha'ath was present in a nearby hall, and was in close contact with Siniora and the others. Thus, the Stanford simulation game achieved a high degree of realism, approximating the peace conference as envisaged by Secretary of State James Baker.

After three days of deliberations, the participants were able to work out the text of an agreement, providing for a phased Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state.

The event was duly reported to the Israeli press. *Yediot Aharonot* (July 24) had the headline: *Symbolic Israel-PLO peace treaty signed in the U.S.* Reserve Brigadier Giora Forman – who was among the Israeli participants – criticised this headline in a letter to the editor: *We did not speak with anybody from the PLO.* Another realistic simulation of the government behaviour after signing the dreamt-of peace?

■ The annual meeting of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) on the Question of Palestine is due to take place on August 27-29, at the U.N. headquarters in Vienna. As always, such meetings – with their worldwide participation – may provide a forum for Israelis to meet with Palestinians in general and with PLO members in particular – and the kind of Israelis who participate in these meetings do not flinch from openly proclaiming them.

This year's NGO meeting already had, before convening, the effect of bringing closer together the Israelis and Palestinians due to participate in it. After prolonged discussions, some 30 Israeli NGOs and about 60 Palestinian ones from the Occupied Territories agreed on the text of a common statement – a far from easy task, at a time when the American diplomatic initiative stirs up considerable controversy among Israelis and Palestinians alike\*.

On August 14, Matti Peled and Taufik Ziad (for the Israeli NGOs) together with Ibahim Dakak and Dr. Haider Abd-el-Shafi (for the Palestinians) presented the statement to hundreds of local and international journalists assembled at East Jerusalem's El-Hakawati theatre. The statement begins by recognising *the right of both the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples for self-determination and the right to live in sovereign independent states alongside each other.* It goes on to condemn the Israeli and American governments, for violating these principles by attempting to by-pass the PLO and deprive the Palestinian people of having

their own chosen representative at the proposed regional conference. The NGOs then call for an immediate halt to Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Territories, and for the creation, in East Jerusalem, of a U.N. agency to monitor human rights violations in the Occupied Territories.

*The full text of the NGO statement can be obtained from the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue, POB 1777, Tel-Aviv 61016.*

\* *The Committee of Israeli and Palestinian Writers and Artists was, for the first time since its foundation in 1988 (see TOI-31, p.6), unable to formulate a political statement, mainly because of disagreement among its Palestinian members, some of whom support and others oppose participation in the American-proposed peace conference.*

■ Over the past few months, the Supreme Court has been hearing Peace Now's appeal against the locating of Jerusalem's new cemetery on the West Bank (see TOI-46, p.6).

Apparently, Peace Now's case – prepared by Adv. Avigdor Feldman – stood a good chance of winning. On July 14, the state suddenly informed the court that the cemetery plans have been abandoned.

Many of the legal arguments raised by Feldman may apply not only to the establishing of cemeteries, but also to the establishing of settlements for the living, in occupied territory.

Peace Now intends to use the precedent and make a new appeal to the Supreme Court, challenging the government's right to use state lands in the Occupied Territories for the building of Jewish settlements.

■ On the evening of July 20 – one day before the arrival of American Secretary of State Baker for further talks with the rejectionist Israeli government – about a thousand demonstrators marched through the streets of Jerusalem, at the call of the Mapam, Ratz and Shinuy parties. The official slogan was *Yes to peace and to Baker! No to war and to settlements!* Among the many youthful demonstrators could be found improvisations such as *Shamir, Peace is not Aids – Don't be afraid of it!* The marchers passed Shamir's residence, but the police did not allow them to stop there. The concluding rally was held at a nearby square.

■ On July 21, as Baker arrived in Jerusalem for his talks, his car was approached by several demonstrators, headed by Se'adyah Martziano, former leader of the Oriental Jewish Black Panthers Movement and presently a member of the Labor Party. Their signs, reading *United States Government, don't finance the settlements!* were immediately confiscated by the police.

■ On the early morning hours of July 21, drivers struck in traffic jams on the chronically congested roads of metropolitan Tel-Aviv were surprised to find the road sides lined with Peace Now activists.

Each of the stalled drivers received a brochure, compiled by Peace Now's Settlement Monitoring Team. The figures contained in it detailed the enormous sums invested by the government in constructing roads intended for use by Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories.



■ On June 10, the trial of Mapam activist Ilan Gil'on started at the Ashkelon Magistrate's Court. On April 30, Gil'on led thirty activists who disrupted the construction of the new settlement "Dugit" in the Gaza Strip. Gil'on is accused of trespassing and organizing an illegal demonstration, as well as of sabotaging a truck.

In the same session, the court is hearing the complaint of Ilan Gil'on against building contractor Nir Peleg, who during that event had attempted to hit Gil'on with the claw of a bulldozer.

■ On July 22, a group of Peace Now activists disrupted a "Housing Fair" in Jerusalem, where building contractors offered to the public government-subsidized villas at the settlement of Efrat, on the West Bank. The activists distributed leaflets, calling upon the contractors' prospective customers: *Don't let yourself be tempted by rosy promises of a detached house and a garden. You will be living in daily conflict with the inhabitants of 15 villages around Efrat.* There was a scuffle when several contractors tried to violently to stop the distribution of this material.

■ On August 6, some fifty activists of the Mapam, Ratz and Shinuy parties held, for several hours, a protest vigil at the site of Eshkolot, a new settlement being established in the southern part of the West Bank. Dr. Benny Temkin, who led the group, said on Israeli television news: *This provocation, coming but three days after the government ostensibly said "Yes" to Baker, shows that Shamir has not yet grasped what peace means.*

■ Since November 1990 Adi Naffa, a young Druze conscript, has already spent half a year in military prison for his refusal to serve in the Israeli army - being consecutively sentenced to a month, four months and a month again. At the time of writing, he is at home, while the military authorities deliberate whether to discharge him or send him to another period of imprisonment.

Adi Naffa's struggle received public attention mainly because he is the son of Communist KM Mohammad Naffa. Actually, Adi Naffa is but one among dozens of Druze youths who yearly face imprisonment because of their refusal to accept conscription - applied to their community, and to it only, among all of Israel's Arab citizens (*see TOI-42, p.10, and TOI-44, p.6*).

■ On August 10, Yesh G'vul held two simultaneous demonstrations, in front of the Athlit and Megiddo prisons where soldiers are imprisoned for refusal to serve in the Occupied Territories. In Athlit were imprisoned, at the time, the reservists sergeant Ronen Katz and private Yuri Pines; in Megiddo was held the conscript Barak Ben-Gal - imprisoned for the second consecutive time.

■ Since Israeli law regards East Jerusalem's Arab inhabitants as residents of the state of Israel, they are entitled to the same National Insurance benefits as Israeli citizens. Since the Intifada, however, the National Insurance avoids paying them the benefits - claiming that "it has become impossible for their

officials to enter Arab neighborhoods in order to verify claims".

The movement for Progressive Judaism took up the issue; its members collected thousands of complaints. On August 12, these were presented at the Jerusalem National Insurance Offices, together with a warning of impending legal action, should the benefits continue to be withheld.

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## Women in Black - 1991

by Debbie Lerman

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*Lately, the Women in Black vigils got special attention from Moledet and Tehiyah youngsters. In Tel-Aviv, the youths try from time to time to use the sticks of their Israeli national flags to chase away the women. Failing to do so, they continue having their counter-demonstrations at the opposite side of the road, with slogans calling the women "traitors", and with dolls wrapped in black rags swinging from a gallows.*

*Women in Black organiser Debbie Lerman wrote the following update-1991 especially for The Other Israel.*

Here we stand, three years and seven months after our first vigil. From that day to this, we have met many challenges, we have encountered many obstacles, but we have seldom wavered in our resolution to continue.

Hundreds of women, dressed in black, stand every week in more than thirty different locations in Israel and many others throughout the world, demonstrating against the occupation. By doing so, we have developed into a well recognized, sometimes hated, but always respected reality in the political consciousness of the Israelis. We count to our credit the hundreds of thousands of people that have seen us and the political statement we represent as women and as silent advocates for peace and dialogue. We also take the credit for not wavering despite the violence, the insults and the constant harassment suffered by each and every one of the Women in Black groups every week.

It is true that the Gulf war, and its destructive influence on the Peace Camp in Israel, was a blow and created a dilemma for many of us. For two weeks, after the war began, we could not demonstrate. During those two weeks we held meetings and intensive discussions, which clarified and strengthened our resolve to continue. Most Women in Black groups decided that the war and the new conditions did not change our position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, our message is still the most important political demand in Israel today, and we should not withdraw. So, most vigils went back to work even before the war ended.

Conditions now are much more difficult: Women have become somewhat tired of the long effort and discouraged by the government's refusal to consider peace and by the racist and nationalistic atmosphere in Israel.

Many of us have begun to question the relevance of



our movement to the struggle for peace. Many of us were influenced by the reticence and paralysis shown by other groups in the peace movement and by political parties in the left. Some of us became disheartened by the lack of visible results shown by the peace camp. We have seen many women stop; there are more than ten Women in Black vigils in the country taking what we hope is no more than a "long vacation".

Still we are here, because we think that developing a peace dialogue with the Palestinian movement is the only solution to the deteriorating situation in our area.

Encouraging news was that **Women in Black** has been awarded the 1991 "Aachen Peace Prize", granted every year in Germany to organizations or individuals for their contribution to peace and humanitarian causes in the world. We are proud to accept it, as it represents the international recognition of our efforts.

Next on our agenda is a national conference of **Women in Black**, intended to start a renewed drive to bring hundreds of new women to join us.

**Contact:** *Women in Black*, c/o Dita Bitterman, 209 Dizengoff St, Tel-Aviv.

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## Torture and the law

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When the respected B'tselem human rights organization published its report on the use of torture against Palestinian prisoners, the authorities tried to deflect the public outcry by appointing its own investigators (see *Toi-46*, p.6).

An extensive report by **Amnesty International** once more demonstrated the use of torture in Israeli prisons; the government reacted by accusing Amnesty of a pro-Arab bias. The government did, however, use Amnesty's reports in its publications on the treatment of Jews arrested by the Syrian security service.

Now, the Israeli media have taken up the Israeli courts' frequent practice of accepting as evidence confessions signed during police interrogations – disregarding the accused's contention that these were extracted by torture. Even the government-controlled television paid some attention to this issue, and in particular to the case of the Danny Katz murder in 1984. From the start, the murder of this 14-year old boy – allegedly committed from sexual motives – was exploited by racists (see *TOI-28/29*, p.9). There is more and more evidence that the five Arabs convicted of this murder were all innocent.

After the conviction of the five was upheld by the Supreme Court, in May 1991, former police officer Ezra Goldberg started a campaign. He believes that the five are innocent and that the true murderer is still at large. His allegations were taken seriously by the media, since in another case he already succeeded to prove the innocence of a man (a Jew) after he was convicted of murder and had spent years in prison.

Also active on this issue is KM Amnon Rubinstein. Rubinstein, who is the former dean of the Tel-Aviv

University Law School, published articles in different papers criticising the Supreme Court for accepting uncritically the confessions. An increasing number of respected jurists are joining Goldberg and Rubinstein in calling for a re-opening of the Danny Katz case.

Some renewed attention is also given to the case of Mahmud Masarweh, the Arab trade unionist convicted in 1989 (see *TOI-38*, p.12) to ten years on charges of espionage and arson. In this case, too, the conviction was mainly based upon a confession which was extracted by force. (Among other things, Masarweh's arm was broken during the interrogation.)

There is an international campaign being waged in support of Masarweh. At the opening of his Supreme Court appeal on August 8, a delegation was present, including members of the British, Swedish and European parliaments. Also present, and capturing much media attention, was Paddy Hill – one of "The Birmingham Six", a group of Irishmen who were convicted of terrorism in similar circumstances and whose vindication is shaking the British judicial system.

■ Over the past half year, Investigating Judge Ezra Kama has been holding an inquest on the Temple Mount massacre. At the insistence of Adv. Avigdor Feldman, representing the family of one of the victims, senior police officers were called to testify and many classified police documents were released. In his conclusions, published on July 18, Judge Kama stated that much of fatal shooting by the police was unnecessary, and that there existed no real danger to the lives of policemen or of Jewish worshippers – thus demolishing most of the government's justifications for the killings.

However, the judge decided not to bring charges against any of the policemen, since no autopsies were performed, and therefore it is impossible to determine which policeman has killed which Palestinian.

■ On July 22, the notorious nationalist-religious "Temple Mount Faithful" held another of their provocative demonstrations, calling for the destruction of the Jerusalem mosques and the erection of a Jewish Temple in their place. This was the first such demonstration allowed after the one in November 1991, which provoked the Temple Mount massacre and left 18 Palestinians dead.

The fanatics met a hostile reaction from an unexpected quarter: Orthodox Jewish worshippers at the nearby Wailing Wall shouted at them *Blasphemers!* and accused them of inviting divine wrath by arrogating to themselves a task which should be left to the Messiah.

■ Among Soviet immigrants there is growing bitterness about their humiliating living conditions: with several families packed in 2- to 3-rooms apartments, the only work they can easily get is work done before by Palestinians – unwanted, underpaid work. On July 14, a group of such Russians called publicly upon Prime Minister Shamir to stop asking money for immigrant absorption, but spending it on settlements – and to open peace negotiations with the Palestinians instead (*Ha'aretz*, July 14).



■ For many Israeli peace activists, traveling abroad through Ben-Gurion airport is – as it is for Palestinians – a troublesome affair. All those whose names appear on a “blacklist” stored in passport control computers can expect thorough searches of their persons, their belongings and especially any written material in their possession. Political materials are often confiscated.

Since November 1990, the Supreme Court has been hearing an appeal by three of these blacklisted persons, backed by the **Civil Rights Association** and the **Alternative Information Center**. The court has not yet rendered a final verdict. However, an affidavit presented by the Attorney-General has already made the airport searches a bit less arbitrary: it has now been recognized that the searcher must identify himself and tell the person being searched according to which article of the law the search is being conducted (there are several). Also, anybody could ask the police authorities whether he or she appears on the blacklist and why, or ask to be removed from it.

## *Chances for peace?*

by Israel Loeff.

The official announcement by the President of the United States, that a peace conference – in which Israel as well as Syria were willing to take part – is due to be convened in October this year, aroused some hopes for the settlement of the nearly century-old Israeli-Arab conflict. Soon however, it became clear that there were still many strings attached to the actual convening of such a conference, let alone the huge barriers on the road towards positive results.

The original Israeli demand for direct negotiations without preconditions between Israel and its Arab neighbors soon proved to include many conditions from the Israeli side: no negotiations with the Palestinian national representative, the PLO; no resident of Jerusalem in the Palestinian delegation – Jerusalem's future being unnegotiable. Moreover, Shamir tries to convey that Israel could win peace with Syria without giving up the Golan Heights.

Time and energy are being wasted to overcome so-called procedural difficulties. At the moment of writing, the main problem not yet solved for the convening of the conference seems to be finding a formula for the Palestinian participation which is acceptable for the PLO – and at the same time is not violating the letter of the Baker-Shamir agreement. Even assuming that till October such a formula could be brought about, it will still be only a prelude to dealing with the real problems.

It is indeed doubtful whether the American effort to concentrate from the start upon procedural matters was justified. Presumably the Americans calculated that the obstacles – when dealt with on the level of procedure – could be overcome. In fact, they overcame only a first defence line, fought for fiercely, but with remote significance for the final outcome.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the only item on the agenda of this first stage of negotiations would apparently be autonomy in the West Bank and

Gaza Strip. Israel will then concentrate on questions of who will actually be in charge of the public owned lands, presently marked for Jewish settlements, and the water resources. These were the issues constituting the main obstacles during the short-lived autonomy negotiations with Egypt in the time of Begin. The outcome would be decisive for Israel's ability to continue its settlement activities.

The objective interest of Israel is of course to put an end to the long conflict with the Arab world. Only a comprehensive and just peace settlement with the neighbor states *and* the Palestinian people could be a lasting one. This, however, would require a meaningful withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, along with Israel's consent for the establishment of a Palestinian state – which is difficult to foresee. Already the possibility of an evacuation of the Golan Heights arouses a storm. And the Golan Heights are not part of the traditional Greater Israel and therefore are not as sacred in the Likud ideology as West Bank and Gaza Strip. But the extreme right leaves no doubt that it is opposed to any possible withdrawal from the Golan Heights. And curiously enough, Labor leaders Peres and Rabin join them – on security grounds. Indeed, security problems do exist, but they should be handled by proper security measures: demilitarization, the presence of U.N. units, etc. Rabin and Peres are misusing the argument of security on behalf of the Golan settlers, most of whom are Labor voters.

In spite of the opposition in Israel to withdrawal and in spite of Syrian commitment to the Palestinian cause, one has to take into account the possibility of a separate peace treaty between Syria and Israel. This would, however, not mean an end to the Israeli-Arab conflict – though it would mean Israeli retreat from some occupied territory and stabilization of the Israeli-Syrian border.

Whatever the outcome will be, the U.S. will be held responsible to a large extent. And the U.S. approach to its own initiative will be judged upon its not interfering on behalf of one party. American plans for the settlement of the Middle East conflict, which have not really changed since the Rogers Plan of 1969, have one thing in common: so far, they have all failed. In the meantime, big changes took place in the international balance of power. Another factor is Israel's present vulnerable position. Israel is going to ask the U.S. government for a ten billion guarantee (in addition to the 3 billion dollars allocated annually by the U.S. government). This sum is considered to be crucial for Israel's development and the absorption of the many new immigrants who came and are still coming to live in Israel. Unconditional massive financial assistance of Israel – which would enable Shamir to continue his policy of stubborn refusal – would cast serious doubts upon the United States' sincerity towards its own official policy.

Restrictions attached to the financial assistance for Israel are by no means *anti-Israeli*, since the price of failure of the forthcoming peace conference would be a new war with all its terrible casualties and its unknown political consequences.





## Letter to Members of Congress

*The following open letter was published simultaneously in Jerusalem and Washington D.C., on July 22, 1991.*

Out of our deep concern for the fate of our country, we – a group of Jewish Israeli citizens – feel that the time has come to address you.

Since its founding, our country has been at war with its neighbors. In its isolated position and burdened with huge military expenses, it could maintain itself only thanks to foreign aid, which in the last two decades has been generously provided by the United States. In fact, due to your willingness to provide that aid to our country, Israel has become the largest recipient per capita of U.S. aid.

By virtue of this policy towards Israel, the U.S. has assumed a considerable responsibility. It is with American money that the government of Israel can pursue its policies, which regrettably include the policy of gradually annexing the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Such annexation is effected by setting up new settlements and creating an expanding Jewish presence in those territories. With American money, the government is able to offer Jewish settlers, native-born or newly arrived Israeli Jews, extremely generous subsidies, amounting practically to free housing, as well as other benefits.

*In the United States a coalition has been formed*

### CALL ON CONGRESS

*for Israeli-Palestinian Peace*

*Wednesday September 25, 1991*

**NO LOAN GUARANTEES WITHOUT CONDITIONS!**

**Information: Anne Shirk, tel (202)5466546; fax 3646605**

At the same time, inside Israel proper, the shortage of affordable houses for young couples and new immigrants has reached alarming proportions. Such a policy inevitably entails gross violation of the human rights of the indigenous Palestinian population of the Occupied Territories, whose land is expropriated so that new Jewish settlements may be established. Indeed, this policy of de facto annexation of the Occupied Territories lies at the root of Israel's disregard for universal declarations of human rights insofar as these territories are concerned.

All this is done openly, with the knowledge of the entire Israeli population. The United States cannot shrug off a degree of responsibility for the way its money is used. Against the wishes of at least half of Israel's own citizens, the government maintains a policy which is detrimental to the chances for peace in our region. It can afford to do so only thanks to the continued flow of unconditional American aid.

Indeed, peace initiatives, such as the one presently undertaken by Secretary of State Baker, stand no chance of success as long as the Shamir government persists in its unrealistic and irresponsible "Greater Israel" policy. This policy is directly responsible now for the daily hardships caused by a violent conflict which is being unnecessarily perpetuated, at a time when – at long last – there seems to exist a real chance to bring it to an end and start a process aimed

at achieving peace. Needless to add that, with the elimination of the chances for peace, the danger of another war becomes imminent.

As you know, an Israeli request will be brought before you in September of this year for ten billion dollars in loan guarantees, for the purpose of absorbing the Soviet and Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel. Those immigrants are, indeed, in great and urgent need of help. They were brought to Israel by the government and the Jewish Agency, which exerted all their influence to prevent the Soviet Jewish emigrants from going to any other country. But while directing them towards Israel, no adequate measures were taken to ensure their proper reception, and many of them are facing exposure to hardship and poverty. Supporting these immigrants is a worthy humanitarian cause; they certainly deserve a decent life in their new homeland. But this cannot be achieved in a country torn by conflict, where the daily life of everybody is becoming increasingly insecure.

On you, Members of the U.S. Congress, rests a tremendous responsibility. It is within your power to make sure that your willingness, of which we have no doubt, to extend humanitarian aid to these immigrants not be turned against the principle of "Land for Peace", which is the cornerstone of the Administration's peace initiative, and with which we are in full agreement. The loan guarantees requested by Israel should therefore be made conditional upon the Israeli government's acceptance of that principle.

Such acceptance should be manifested by an immediate cessation of all settlement activities, namely, setting up new settlements or expanding existing ones, within the Occupied Territories. Unless this condition is met by the Israeli government, you could never be sure that part of the money given for the absorption of immigrants would not in fact be used to accelerate the de facto annexation of territories subject to negotiations.

We, like many other Israelis who deep in their hearts share our view, would regard the adoption of such a measure on your part as the greatest service the United States could render Israel at the present moment.

**Mattityahu Peled,**

*Major General (Ret.), Professor of Arabic Literature*

**Yossi Amitay, Orientalist**

**Shimon Ballas, Author and Professor of Literature**

**Hayim Bar-Am, Journalist**

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