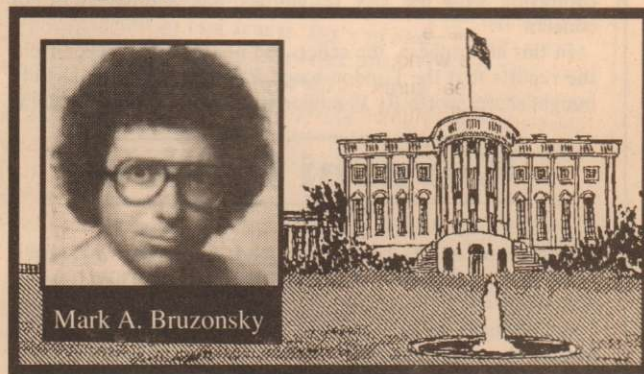


Peace process or peace trap

A FORMER MEMBER OF STERN GANG FINDS REASON TO SUPPORT PALESTINIANS AND OPPOSE CURRENT MOVES IN THE MID-EAST

From



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EVERYONE is nervous about what's going to be happening next.

From Saddam Hussein's future to the Arab-Israeli "peace process" there's a general undertone of apprehension that today's configurations in the Mid-east are unstable and that the "peace process" isn't likely to bring peace.

While the diplomats posture at the starting gate for both position and psychological advantage, the Mid-east community of scholars, diplomats, activists, and advocates has been anxiously waiting the arrival of this month — the month of the long-trumpeted opening of the latest "international conference".

No one wants to miss the train; and yet no one wants to be in the first car if and when the train crashes.

Everyone wants to appear eager for peace; but hardly anyone wants to be very committal before the specific contours of the impending conference become definite.

The Americans increasingly seem to want to appear "even-handed"; yet the realities of their most important position, the outlays of their substantial funds, and the flow of their arms, all combine to make it clear whom they are married to versus whom they occasionally dance with.

One notable exception to the general rules of hesitancy and wait-and-see attitude is a rather iconoclastic individual -- but also a quite serious and and quite sincere activist and writer -- living in Paris.

Maxim Ghilan is a former Israeli who long, long ago fought in the infamous Stern Gang alongside today's Israeli prime minister -- all this, of course, before he saw the light.

Then Ghilan wrote a rather unique treatise -- also quite some time ago now, in the sixties actually, about *How Israel Lost Its Soul*. Penguin books made it available in paperback; though I doubt it's in print these days. But it is a volume worth searching the stacks in your library for and studying -- for Ghilan is was an early prophet of doom scorned by most, followed by few, respected and even adored by some.

Searching for his own soul Ghilan exiled himself in Europe becoming a very early champion of the PLO and Palestinian rights. On the Jewish, and especially on the Israeli sides of the line Ghilan was a pioneer, a visionary, a fighter for truth and justice. Moreover, he was all these things at a time when concepts of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation were hardly even dreamed by many who today use such terms as their own.

Whatever one thinks of Ghilan's style, personality, or modus operandi -- and he and I have certainly have had our run-ins over the years -- Ghilan is a man of conviction, a man of principle, a man of courage, decency and vision.

Ghilan's highly personalised publication, *Israel and Palestine Political Report*, has in recent months been reduced to fragility. Past financial support from such luminaries as Nahum Goldmann on the Jewish side, and perhaps some Palestinians on the Arab side, has dwindled. He, like many others who have tried to struggle based on principle and independence has been victimised by events of recent years. His rare refusal to sell his soul is admirable; but those who know him very well that he

has had to pay many prices.

Ghilan himself has got on in years. His former offices have been greatly reduced both in size and personnel -- most of whom over the years were dedicated semi-volunteers. But today Ghilan and his publication, which in past decades developed a reputation for periodically crying wolf at the door and pleading for funds, truly can't even support it's skeleton operation of past years.

These days *I&P*, as its faithful followers know it, is just a little fold-over newsletter of a few pages; though just a year ago it was more of a substantial political magazine with unique features over-filled with information hard to come by -- especially in English.

But still today in various cities worldwide, an organisation Ghilan initiated, the International Jewish Peace Union (IJPU) continues to distribute *I&P* and follow its "teachings". Composed of well-meaning liberal and radical Jews, IJPU still has a very Zionist tinge to its ideas but it attempts in an honest and intellectual way to promote the idea of mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition which has been at the heart of Ghilan's teachings for more than two decades now.

But whatever hardships he currently is facing, Ghilan has his past, he has his integrity, and he has his independence, and his deep convictions.

And so, featured on the cover of the August issue of *I&P*, Ghilan obviously decided to boldly speak his mind in an essay he titled *Not this way*.

Not this way is an important personal statement coming from an individual who has earned the right to speak up on

these matters and to be taken seriously.

And so for all these reasons let me quote extensively:

"This writer has now spent 21 out of 33 years of struggle in favour of a just Israeli-Palestinian peace working, overtly and covertly, for peace negotiations and reconciliation between Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians.

"It is therefore with a heavy heart that I tell now my Palestinian and Israeli friends: not this way, not this conference, not at the cost of giving up essentials. Not a conference without sovereign Palestinian representatives. No to stopping Palestinian armed struggle while settlement continues in the occupied territories."

"This is a second Camp David that is being planned. If not checked and corrected, it will have similar awful results."

These are the introductory paragraphs to Ghilan's personalised warning. It's the style he has championed for some decades now -- very straight often terse prose lacking in style and flow but full of content and meaning.

From this opening Ghilan then goes on to use the bulk of the essay discussing the "awful" results of the Camp David agreement of 1978 and the events that have taken place during the past 13 years, including, most recently, the destruction of Iraq.

Then he concludes as follows:

"Without truly sovereign Palestinian participation, the regional peace conference -- touted by the Western media as the harbinger of Mid-east peace and prosperity -- will demolish what is left of Mid-eastern checks-and-balances,

destabilise the Arab regimes and send Israelis and Jews worldwide into a new nightmare of terror and blood.

"As for the Palestinians," Ghilan forecasts, "they are to be cut up into little pieces and then swallowed up. If the Palestinians are forced to become permanent serfs of the Israeli establishment rather than sovereign partners of Israel, if their land, water, children and homes are put permanently under the yoke of Israeli control, if Jewish-Israeli settlement becomes a 'normal', ever-expanding feature in the territories occupied since 1967, Israel will lose its chance to obtain real, lasting peace with those it must share the land: the Palestinians."

"As to the Arab and non-Arab peoples of the region, bilateral agreements with Israel, which exclude the PLO, will cause them to lose whatever chances still exist ... to develop and prosper: free, enlightened, at peace."

Then Ghilan suggests these final thoughts:

"What can the Palestinians do?"

"They can tell the Americans and the Israelis: 'You did not stop your war against us. You are still killing us, torturing us, jailing us and taking our land and water, while settling our areas with hundreds of thousands of non-Arabs. Yet you say you want to talk peace with local leaders. The leaders of towns and villages thus spoliated. Very well. We they shall talk. Meanwhile, there is no truce. We'll go on fighting you until either talks or war grant us peace, independence and freedom. When we reach these national goals, and only then, will we stop fighting and start cooperating'."