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Rabin's Deception: Autonomy For Palestinians

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and
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While the Palestinians always speak of independence and Statehood, the Israelis and their American allies always twist this Palestinian demand into a vague concept usually termed "autonomy".

In traditional statecraft, the autonomy or "self-rule" status is always considered a way to allow a sub-group some forms of local administration while denying it sovereignty and a place in the list of nations.

This "autonomous" status is usually "granted" to an ethnic minority living within the recognized jurisdiction of a specific state's authority.

Ordinarily, when the idea of autonomy is entertained, it is believed that the members of the ethnic minority aspiring to achieve this status share historical, geographical, cultural, linguistic, and perhaps religious commonalities that are different from the makeup of the majority of people living under the sovereign state's rule.

Furthermore, an attempt to confer "autonomy" is often the result of an active campaign -- sometimes through civil disobedience, sometimes through violence -- for independence and self-determination and thus a means of attempting to prevent the fulfillment of these nationalistic goals.

In such situations the autonomy status enables the ethnic minority in question to administer its own affairs within a restricted geographic area and within clearly defined and nearly always quite limited areas of jurisdiction.

Most importantly, the ethnic minority is certainly not to adjudicate its own authority nor to define its own areas of competence. In short the members of the ethnic minority do not have the final say over their affairs, whether externally or internally, for in reality sovereignty continues to reside with the central government which alone, legally, defines the scope of "autonomous" authority. The

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Basques in Spain; both the Kurds and the Armenians in areas of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran; and in a sense the Indians of North America are all illustrative examples.

In the case of Palestine, throughout modern history the indigenous people to the country are actually the Palestinians themselves, rather than the Jews who today dominate. Prior to events this century the Palestinians were the recognized owners of most of the land, and throughout recent history, until the Israeli declaration of Jewish Statehood in 1948, the Palestinian national identity was intact. Indeed, the world map clearly demarcated the area as "Palestine" and even today's Israeli *Jerusalem Post* newspaper was prior to 1948 known as the *Palestine Post*.

Now that the Palestinians are reduced to minority, subjugated, and "occupied" status in their own country, and with the Israeli government refusing to even recognize the Palestinians as a national entity, a situation has arisen in which the Israeli occupier, along with its sponsor the United States, is desperately attempting to find a method of permanently overcoming the Palestinian will to nationhood, of permanently disenfranchising the "natives" if you will.

The outbreak of the "Intifada" a few years ago only underscored Israel's inability to completely control the Palestinian population even after a generation of military occupation, thus making the goal of subjugation or co-optation even more urgent for the Zionist establishment.

Furthermore, Israel believes it can achieve still additional American financial and military grants -- but now understands that continuing to do so requires at least an outward impression, if not the reality, of moderation and reasonableness.

And the Americans, especially today in the wake of their unprecedented bloody intervention in Arab affairs combined with heightened attempts to crush all independent Arab power, feel the imperative to nurture the image of attempting to achieve Israeli-Arab peace while in actuality the U.S. continues to nearly totally support and fuel Israel's regional hegemonic designs.

For Israel and the U.S. one of the overall goals in recent years has been to so demoralize and strangle the Palestinians, to so crush their spirit and starve their aspirations, so that an offer of "autonomy" could be presented as something positive -- however ironic -- rather than as a way of preventing self-determination and liquidating Palestinian nationalism.

If accepted "autonomy" then becomes the preferred method of permanently burying Palestinian national rights and aspirations. If not accepted the propaganda machine, so well-tuned by Israel's minions of supporters and propagandists (especially in the U.S.), then goes into overdrive to portray the Palestinians as always missing every opportunity, as "radicals", as deserving of no further consideration.

Offer the famished heather some scraps from your plate -- the Israelis and Americans seem to be plotting -- and he's likely to bend down into the dust to eat the leftovers rather than risk starvation.

As well, "autonomy", in the context of the current "peace talks", is now in serious danger of becoming an attempt to twist one segment of the Palestinian population into becoming in reality if not in name a regime of occupation administrators. Various administrative functions would be turned over to these "acceptable" Palestinians who would be ultimately responsible to the sovereign power, in this case Israel, and to the sole superpower, the United States.

There might well be, of course, all kinds of rhetorical face-saving devices to make things arguably more acceptable, along with all kinds of time-tables and future "possibilities" that no one really ever expects to come to pass. But in the end "autonomy" would be just that, a lack of sovereignty and an acceptance of the jurisdictional power of the state authority -- in this case Israel, the "Jewish State".

These Palestinian administrators, of course, would be expected -- in addition to overseeing such things as education, health, and municipal services -- to also control and if necessary help liquidate any elements from within Palestinian ranks that might try to disrupt the "stability" or "security" of the "autonomy" regime. For in the context of "autonomy" the increasingly fragmented local community known as Palestinians would be considered to have no further rights to struggle for real self-determination and independence.

Those "Israeli-approved" and largely self-proclaimed Palestinian representatives who today appear to be in the process of being tricked or manipulated to negotiate away the basic Palestinian right to sovereignty and self-determination could well be leading the Palestinian people into a historic catastrophe, one whose magnitude could be even greater than the defeat in 1948.

It was in 1948 that the Palestinian people lost land and lives, but never hope for eventual justice and eventual sovereignty. Today the Palestinians may be on the verge of losing something even more substantial and final -- the very right to have rights, let alone to exercise them.

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Contrary to what many now believe, this autonomy trap did not start with the Camp David Accords so craftily maneuvered by Menachem Begin. In reality forcing the Palestinians to accept "autonomy" really goes back to Begin's ideological mentor Vladimir Jabotinsky, the militant founder of Revisionist Zionism. More than half a century ago, in 1923, Jabotinsky formulated his call for tightening the noose around the neck of the Palestinians until they would eventually accept "national autonomy" -- a status in which they would be surrounded by Jabotinsky's "iron wall" in a way reminiscent of how Indians are confined to reservations in the U.S. and Blacks were to be enslaved on "tribal homelands" in apartheid South Africa.

To quote Jabotinsky in the days when the Zionist movement was formulating policies -- at a time when the Palestinians were the substantial majority and the Zionists were just beginning their drive to wrest control over all of Palestine to establish a Jewish State:

"As long as there is a spark of hope that they [the Palestinians] can get rid of us they will not sell these hopes, not for any kind of sweet words or tasty morsels... Only when not a single breath is visible in the iron wall, only then do extreme groups loose their sway and influence transfers to moderate groups. Only then would these moderate groups come to us with proposals for mutual concessions... on practical questions like a guarantee against expulsion, or equality and national autonomy... But the only path to such an agreement is the iron wall, that is to say the strengthening in Palestine of a government without any kind of Arab influence, that is to say one against which the Arabs will fight. In other words, for us the only path to an agreement in the future is an absolute refusal of any attempts at an agreement now."

In today's circumstances, with the "iron wall" largely established, it falls to Yitzhak Rabin to turn to "sweet words" and to attempt to manipulate the Palestinians to their own final defeat. But whatever Rabin's rhetoric, the reality is that he continues to pursue the overall iron wall-autonomy strategy just as did other Labor Party leaders of the past, most notably David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir.

The main differences between Rabin's Labor Zionism and Revisionist Zionism (of which the Likud is the modern incarnation) have always been in the degree of outspoken bluntness with which similar policies have nearly always been pursued. Labor of course has been the master of rhetorical deception and the "Good Cop" in the ongoing Palestinian subjugation.

It was Labor, of course, which first began the settlement program in the occupied territories. It was Ben-Gurion who in the 30s and 40s deceptively invited the Palestinians to talk insisting there was no intention of setting up a separate "Jewish State". It was Golda Meir who loudly proclaimed in the 50s that "there are no Palestinians." And it was Rabin himself, last time he was Prime Minister, who even then, in the 70s, championed the "autonomy" notion before becoming Yitzhak Shamir's Defense Minister and touting the need to "break the bones" of the Palestinians.

The American Indian ultimately lost his rights by accepting "autonomy" on reservations, even though at times the words on the treaty papers seemed reasonable. The Blacks of South Africa in recent years appear to have avoided such a fate by firmly rejecting the Bantustans, the "tribal homeland" designs, of the White apartheid regime.

It remains to be seen at this historic juncture just what fate lies ahead for the Palestinians. As of this moment Palestinian choices

WHY "Mid-East Realities"?

This is a newsletter born in war, blood, and deceit.

American politicians of both parties have so regularly twisted the truth about U.S. involvements in the Middle East -- the real reasons behind these policies as well as the actual policies pursued -- that even experts are confused and bewildered.

Furthermore, the White House and the CIA have so undermined the very nature of accountability that Congress finds itself continually deceived and the press is often reduced to reporting more falsehoods and cover-ups than realities.

Furthermore still, multinational business interests and foreign-influenced lobbies so distort media coverage of events, that crucial facts and analysis are quite often well hidden from the American public.

Mid-East Realities will attempt to uncover the truths and expose the deceptions. And MER will assist those in the press wanting to delve into underlying Mid-East realities by making independent scholars and experts available to help them.

THE BIG LIE: RABIN

This month's Big Lie nominee: Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel.

Rabin has claimed to be freezing settlements in the occupied territories when in reality his policies will result in a 50% increase in settler population within a few years. Moreover his distinction between "political" and "strategic" settlements means he continues to back those settlements Labor has traditionally supported, while lessening support for settlements backed more by his political opposition in the Likud. Of course one major purpose of Rabin's big lie is to obtain further American financial and military aid, including unprecedented loan

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Negation: Palestinian Self-Determination Before 1948

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remain open and there is considerable tension and apprehension within Palestinian and Arab ranks that could still lead to major changes in leadership or doctrine.

But even if the "autonomy trap" springs further shut in coming months and years it remains certain that the flame of Palestinian and Arab nationalism will remain alive and likely to return at some future date in more unextinguishable form.

Those who today appear clever in continuing to suppress and brutalize the Palestinians in their quest for independence and national dignity may find in decades ahead that they have once again turned the rage of the oppressed inward creating a furor which will explode in future years with compounded vengeance.

Noam Chomsky: "Arguably the most important intellectual alive..." *New York Times*



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