

NPK-info

Nederlands Palestina Komitee www.palestina-komitee.nl

Inhoud

Binnen Israel is een roep om met oorlogsmisdaden te gaan stoppen.

Zie <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/buitenland/1010987884155.html>

Buiten Israel wordt op dit punt doorgezwegen.

Checken op Kamervragen o.a. hierover kan gemakkelijk op www.bbo.org; de Kamer is nog met reces.

Zie hierna voor 3 bijeenkomsten

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* 21-1 Rotterdam

* 23-1 Amsterdam

* 24-1 Groningen

Acties

* Bij de Vakantiebeurs te Utrecht werden vorig weekend folders uitgedeeld tegen Israel-vakanties; het was een oproep om slechts daar te gaan zonnen waar "voor ieder de zon schijnt".

* Stop the Expulsion of the Palestinian Cave Dwellers from the South Hebron Hills www.southebron.com.

Mail bijgevoegd

* Amnesty on demolition of houses, 14-1-2002

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Sites

* Interview Hanan Ashrawi http://www.dailystar.com.lb/16_01_02/art30.html

* Want Security? End the Occupation, Marwan Barghouti

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A51887-2002Jan15.html>

* Foreign Media Protest vs. Israel http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/ap/20020115/wl/israel_media_1.html

* How does Israel get away with all this? http://www.dailystar.com.lb/opinion/14_01_02_b.html

Quote: "Sharon still enjoys domestic support, American backing, and European silence."

* Boycott Israeli Goods Campaign <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/1782/sw178204.html>

Quote: "There is a widespread mood of solidarity with the Palestinians."

* www.palestinemonitor.org

Quote: "Since the Palestinian December 16th ceasefire the Israeli army has made over 20 attacks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and has killed 23 Palestinians."

Radionieuws

Radio 1 op 9-1 om 8 uur: "Palestijnse extremisten hebben een Israelische legerpost aangevallen bij de Gazastrook; nog niet bekend is welke Palestijnse terreurgroep hiervoor verantwoordelijk is..."

Na attendering [035-624.07.55] op het feit dat verzet tegen een bezetting legitiem is [VN-resolutie] werd het woord terreurgroep bij volgende berichten weggelaten.

NPK/WL, 16-1-2002 ■

Bijeenkomsten

21-1-2002

Het comité Rotterdam tegen de 'Nieuwe Oorlog' organiseert op maandagavond 21 januari 2002 een informatie- en discussieavond over de situatie van de Palestijnen, over de oorzaken van de problemen, over de recente ontwikkelingen en het verband met de 'Nieuwe Oorlog'. Wim Lankamp, van het landelijk Palestina Komitee houdt een inleiding en namens het comité Rotterdam tegen de 'Nieuwe Oorlog' spreekt Wim van Wijk. De avond wordt gehouden in de Pauluskerk, Mauritsweg 19, R'dam (naast Calypso). Aanvang 19.30 uur; zaal open 19.00 uur. Toegang gratis.

Comité Rotterdam tegen de 'Nieuwe Oorlog'

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23-1-2002

Cordaid en de Evert Vermeer Stichting nodigen u uit voor: Een debat over de Palestijnse kwestie Moet Nederland haar steun aan Israël intrekken?

23 januari 2002, 20.00 uur

Plaats: De Balie Kleine Gartmanplantsoen 10, Amsterdam

Ontmoet de vrijwilligers die naar de Palestijnse gebieden zijn geweest in het kader van United Civilians for Peace. Aansluitend debat over de vraag of Nederland haar steun aan Israël moet intrekken, met de Internationaal secretarissen van de PvdA, VVD en het CDA. mm.v. Anja Meulenbelt

Inlichtingen EVS, 020-5512293 www.evertvermeerstichting.nl

Toegang gratis

24-1-2002

Lezing "De tweede intifada" door Anja Meulenbelt

Vanaf 20 uur In "De Beurs" [hoek Vismarkt] te

Groningen Zaal open om 19 uur.

M.m.v. Boekhandel Rosa. ■

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE 14 January 2002
AI Index MDE 15/005/2002 - News Service Nr. 7

Israel/Occupied Territories:

Demolition of houses is an act of collective punishment

Amnesty International today condemned the demolition of dozens of homes in Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip, as an act of collective punishment and a grave breach of international humanitarian law. After four Israeli soldiers were killed on 9 January 2002 in an attack by Hamas on a military post on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) entered Rafah with tanks and bulldozers and demolished houses. "Six hundred people, most of them children, were left homeless in this raid against quarters that had no relationship with the attack on the military post," said Amnesty International. The demolition of houses is one of the acts considered a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War which prohibits: "Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or cooperative organizations ... except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations." According to Agence France Presse, yesterday the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, said that tunnels were used from Rafah to smuggle weapons and "we have to take all necessary steps to stop the smuggling of weapons". "Over the past 16 months, at least 250 homes have been demolished in Rafah making more than 1,500 people

homeless, the vast majority of them children," Amnesty International said, adding that in the past four days, in the middle of winter, hundreds more men, women and children have been forced to live in donated tents. Today Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that he, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezar decided on Sunday to halt the policy of demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. On the same day as his statement, nine Palestinian homes in Isawiyeh in East Jerusalem were demolished by the Jerusalem municipality allegedly because they had failed to get planning permission. "Israel should cease this policy which has been universally condemned," the organization added, recalling that the United Nations' Committee against Torture concluded as recently as last November that house demolitions may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in breach of the UN Convention against Torture.

Background

IDF tanks and bulldozers entered Block O, in the area near the border with Egypt, around 2.30am on 10 January and demolished 56 homes without warning. The following night, at 1.35am on 11 January the IDF shot heavy tank shells on other Palestinian residential

areas, Block J and Barahmeh, injuring eight people, and reportedly damaging more than 200 homes, many of which may now be unsafe for habitation. Amnesty International visited many of the areas along the border between Rafah and Egypt where the IDF has been demolishing houses. Sometimes Palestinians, who have been given no notice of the demolitions, have been killed or wounded as their homes are destroyed. More than 250 Palestinian homes have been destroyed in Rafah since the beginning of the intifada at the end of September 2000; the families made homeless live with relatives or in tents. Over the past weeks the weather in the Gaza Strip has been extremely cold. A week ago, on

7 January, five Palestinian children aged between two and 11 from one family made homeless by the Israeli demolition of their home in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip died in a blaze caused by a candle in their tent.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

Visit <http://www.stoptorture.org/> or <http://www.amnesty.nl/> and register to take a step to stamp out torture. ■

A crime against the innocent

By Gideon Levy

Sunday, January 13, 2002 - Ha'aretz

The punitive action executed by Israel at the weekend in the Gaza Strip, and in particular the mass demolition of homes in Rafah on Thursday morning, constitute a war crime. There is no other way to describe and define the collective punishment of hundreds of innocent civilians who have been left utterly destitute. Under the cover of the media blackout in Israel - it is very difficult to get to the southern Gaza Strip - bulldozers of the Israel Defense Forces turned "homes into a wasteland," as M., a Rafah resident, said by phone. If there was a time when at least part of Israeli public opinion was in an uproar over the demolition of the home of a terrorist's family, and there was a public debate over the justice of the act, now Israel is demolishing the homes of hundreds of residents who don't even have a family connection to terrorism - and hardly anyone says a word in protest. Can we, the Israelis, even begin to imagine what it feels like to have bulldozers suddenly appear in the middle of the night and plow under everything a family has, as they and their children watch? Did the decision makers take into account the hatred they are sowing in the hearts of the children who witnessed the destruction of their homes? And what will become of these wretched people now, people who even before their homes were razed were doomed to a sordid life in one of the poorest of the refugee camps? Where are they going to spend the bitterly cold nights? And what was their sin? True, Rafah is a bastion of the Hamas organization, a place where the Palestinian Authority wields little influence; but does that justify the decision to launch war against every person in the city? According to UNWRA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, the IDF leveled 54 homes in Rafah, leaving 510 people without a roof over their head; according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, the number left homeless is 700. In the past year, before Thursday's action, Israel had already demolished about 200 homes

in Rafah. Even if the version put out by the IDF Spokesman is correct - at first he claimed that "a few houses" were demolished, and then conceded that "some of the houses were connected," so that a few more homes than originally stated were razed - this was a cruel and unjustified operation. The demolition of the houses in Rafah, the most extensive action of its kind so far, came in reaction to the killing of four Israeli soldiers in the Africa outpost near Kerem Shalom and the capture of the Karine A weapons ship - but there is absolutely no connection between the victims of the destruction and those two operations. Even if we believe the IDF's contention that the Palestinians used the houses as cover for opening fire on the IDF, and that their courtyards may even have been used to dig tunnels into Egypt through which weapons were smuggled, that is no justification for their demolition. Destroying the homes of civilians is precisely the type of action that an enlightened state does not do, under any circumstances. A country that opposes terrorism against civilians cannot demolish homes of innocent civilians and then claim that what it did is not an act of terrorism. The impression is that the Rafah action was another brutal manifestation of the Israeli need to "react" immediately, to inflict punishment - really, to exact revenge - even if the reaction is neither morally justified nor politically wise. In this context, the participation in the operation, according to reports, of the Bedouin unit that lost four of its members in the attack on Africa outpost last week, was particularly tasteless. Israel is now treating the Gaza Strip as its own territory - destroying the airport (and letting it be rebuilt), impounding dozens of fishing boats that serve as a rare source of livelihood in the area, and demolishing homes wholesale. Those who bear responsibility for these acts are not only the "extremist" cabinet ministers, but also the "moderate" ministers of the Labor Party, notably, of course, Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. They too will one day have to pay for being part of this government and for the part they played in operations such as the one in Rafah. Israel will have to explain the difference between the violence it is perpetrating and the violence perpetrated by the other

side - and, horrifically, it is hard to believe that the Palestinians will succeed in preventing mass terrorist acts in this state of affairs. The next suicide bomber may well emerge from the ruins of the homes in Rafah. The officers and soldiers who take part in contemptible operations of this kind will no longer be able to wash their hands of guilt and claim they are only following orders. What do they tell their families on the day on which they demolished dozens of tin huts, and what will they tell their children in the future? In a meeting sponsored by the Gush Shalom organization - which calls on soldiers to refuse to serve in the occupied territories -

last week in Tel Aviv, Colonel (res.) Yigal Shochat, a former combat pilot, called on Air Force pilots to refuse to obey orders to bomb civilians and liquidate wanted individuals, as such actions constitute war crimes. As far as is known, not one pilot has refused to obey an order to demolish the homes of civilians, an action that can be defined as flagrantly illegal. "These are disgusting days," the novelist David Grossman wrote on this page a week ago, referring to the hoopla surrounding the capture of the weapons ship. The IDF's punitive action in reaction to that affair only lends credence to his despairing description. ■

Emerging alternatives in Palestine

By Edward Said

End the occupation: that comes first. Edward Said comments on a brave initiative Since it began 15 months ago the Palestinian Intifada has had little to show for itself politically, despite the remarkable fortitude of a militarily occupied, unarmed, poorly led, and still dispossessed people that has defied the pitiless ravages of Israel's war machine. In the United States, the government and, with a handful of exceptions, the "independent" media have echoed each other in harping on Palestinian violence and terror, with no attention at all paid to the 35-year Israeli military occupation, the longest in modern history: as a result, American official condemnations of Yasser Arafat's Authority after 11 September as harbouring and even sponsoring terrorism have coldly reinforced the Sharon government's preposterous claim that Israel is the victim, the Palestinians the aggressors in the four-decade war that the Israeli army has waged against civilians, property and institutions without mercy or discrimination. The result today is that the Palestinians are locked up in 220 ghettos controlled by the army; American-supplied Apache helicopters, Merkava tanks, and F-16s mow down people, houses, olive groves and fields on a daily basis; schools and universities as well as businesses and civil institutions are totally disrupted; hundreds of innocent civilians have been killed and tens of thousands injured; Israel's assassinations of Palestinian leaders continue; unemployment and poverty stand at about 50 per cent -- and all this while General Anthony Zinni drones on about Palestinian "violence" to the wretched Arafat, who can't even leave his office in Ramallah because he is imprisoned there by Israeli tanks, while his several tattered security forces scamper about trying to survive the destruction of their offices and barracks. To make matters worse, the Palestinian Islamists have played into Israel's relentless propaganda mills and its ever-ready military by occasional bursts of wantonly barbaric suicide bombings that finally forced Arafat in mid-December to turn his crippled security forces against Hamas and Islamic Jihad, arresting militants, closing offices, occasionally firing at and killing demonstrators. Every

demand that Sharon makes, Arafat hastens to fulfill, even as Sharon makes still another one, provokes an incident, or simply says -- with US backing -- that he is unsatisfied, and that Arafat remains an "irrelevant" terrorist (whom he sadistically forbade from attending Christmas services in Bethlehem) whose main purpose in life is to kill Jews. To this logic-defying congeries of brutal assaults on the Palestinians, on the man who for better or worse is their leader, and on their already humiliated national existence, Arafat's baffling response has been to keep asking for a return to negotiations, as if Sharon's transparent campaign against even the possibility of negotiations wasn't actually happening, and as if the whole idea of the Oslo peace process hadn't already evaporated. What surprises me is that, except for a small number of Israelis (most recently David Grossman), no one comes out and says openly that Palestinians are being persecuted by Israel as its natives. A closer look at the Palestinian reality tells a somewhat more encouraging story. Recent polls have shown that between them, Arafat and his Islamist opponents (who refer to themselves unjustly as "the resistance") get somewhere between 40 and 45 per cent popular approval. This means that a silent majority of Palestinians is neither for the Authority's misplaced trust in Oslo (or for its lawless regime of corruption and repression) nor for Hamas's violence. Ever the resourceful tactician, Arafat has countered by delegating Dr Sari Nusseibeh, a Jerusalem notable, president of Al-Quds University, and Fatah stalwart, to make trial balloon speeches suggesting that if Israel were to be just a little nicer, the Palestinians might give up their right of return. In addition, a slew of Palestinian personalities close to the Authority (or, more accurately, whose activities have never been independent of the Authority) have signed statements and gone on tour with Israeli peace activists who are either out of power or otherwise seem ineffective as well as discredited. These dispiriting exercises are supposed to show the world that Palestinians are willing to make peace at any price, even to accommodate the military occupation. Arafat is still undefeated so far as his relentless eagerness to stay in power is concerned. Yet at some distance from all this, a new secular natio-

nalist current is slowly emerging. It's too soon to call this a party or a bloc, but it is now a visible group with true independence and popular status. It counts Dr Haidar Abdel-Shafi and Dr Mustafa Barghouti (not to be confused with his distant relative, Tanzim activist Marwan Barghouti) among its ranks, along with Ibrahim Dakkak, Ziad Abu Amr, Ahmad Harb, Ali Jarbawi, Fouad Moghrabi, Legislative Council members Rawiya Al-Shawa and Kamal Shirafi, writers Hassan Khadr and Mahmoud Darwish, Raja Shihadeh, Rima Tarazi, Ghassan Al-Khatib, Nassir Aruri, Eliya Zureik and myself. In mid-December, a collective statement was issued that was well-covered in the Arab and European media (it went unmentioned in the US) calling for Palestinian unity and resistance and the unconditional end of Israeli military occupation, while keeping deliberately silent about returning to Oslo. We believe that negotiating an improvement in the occupation is tantamount to prolonging it. Peace can only come after the occupation ends. The declaration's boldest sections focus on the need to improve the internal Palestinian situation, above all to strengthen democracy; "rectify" the decision-making process (which is totally controlled by Arafat and his men); assert the need to restore the law's sovereignty and an independent judiciary; prevent the further misuse of public funds; and consolidate the functions of public institutions so as to give every citizen confidence in those that are expressly designed for public service. The final and most decisive demand calls for new parliamentary elections. However else this declaration may have been read, the fact that so many prominent independents with, for the most part, functioning health, educational, professional and labour organisations as their base have said these things was lost neither on other Palestinians (who saw it as the most trenchant critique yet of the Arafat regime) nor on the Israeli military. In addition, just as the Authority jumped to obey Sharon and Bush by rounding up the usual Islamist suspects, a non-violent International Solidarity Movement was launched by Dr Barghouti that comprised about 550 European observers (several of them European parliament members) who flew in at their own expense. With them was a well-disciplined band of young Palestinians who, while disrupting Israeli troop and settler movement along with the Europeans, prevented rock-throwing or firing from the Palestinian side. This effectively froze out the Authority and the Islamists, and set the agenda for making Israel's occupation itself the focus of attention. All this occurred while the US was vetoing a Security Council resolution mandating an international group of unarmed observers to interpose themselves between the Israeli army and defenceless Palestinian civilians. The first result of this was that on 3 January, after Barghouti held a press conference with about 20 Europeans in East Jerusalem, the Israelis arrested, detained and interrogated him twice, breaking his knee with rifle butts and injuring his head, on the pretext that he was disturbing the peace and had

illegally entered Jerusalem (even though he was born in it and has a medical permit to enter it). None of this of course has deterred him or his supporters from continuing the non-violent struggle, which, I think, is certain to take control of the already too militarised Intifada, centre it nationally on ending occupation and settlements, and steer Palestinians toward statehood and peace. Israel has more to fear from someone like Barghouti, who is a self-possessed, rational and respected Palestinian, than from the bearded Islamic radicals that Sharon loves to misrepresent as Israel's quintessential terrorist threat. All they do is to arrest him, which is typical of Sharon's bankrupt policy. So where is the Israeli and American left that is quick to condemn "violence" while saying not a word about the disgraceful and criminal occupation itself? I would seriously suggest that they should join brave activists like Jeff Halper and Louisa Morgantini at the barricades (literal and figurative), stand side by side with this major new secular Palestinian initiative, and start protesting the Israeli military methods that are directly subsidised by tax-payers and their dearly bought silence. Having for a year wrung their collective hands and complained about the absence of a Palestinian peace movement (since when does a militarily occupied people have responsibility for a peace movement?), the alleged peaceniks who can actually influence Israel's military have a clear political duty to organise against the occupation right now, unconditionally and without unseemly demands on the already laden Palestinians. Some of them have. Several hundred Israeli reservists have refused military duty in the occupied territories, and a whole spectrum of journalists, activists, academics and writers (including Amira Hass, Gideon Levy, David Grossman, Ilan Pappé, Dani Rabinowitz, and Uri Avnery) have kept up a steady attack on the criminal futility of Sharon's campaign against the Palestinian people. Ideally, there should be a similar chorus in the United States where, except for a tiny number of Jewish voices making public their outrage at Israel's military occupation, there is far too much complicity and drum-beating. The Israeli lobby has been temporarily successful in identifying the war against Bin Laden with Sharon's single-minded, collective assault on Arafat and his people. Unfortunately, the Arab American community is both too small and beleaguered as it tries to fend off the ever-expanding Ashcroft dragnet, racial profiling and curtailment of civil liberties here. Most urgently needed, therefore, is coordination between the various secular groups who support Palestinians, a people against whose mere presence, geographical dispersion (even more than Israeli depredations) is the major obstacle. To end the occupation and all that has gone with it is a clear enough imperative. Now let us do it. And Arab intellectuals needn't feel shy about actually joining in. (<http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2002/568/op2.html> , Al-Ahram Weekly Online, issue No. 568, 10 - 16 January 2002) ■

The following interview with Ami Ayalon, the former head of Israel's "Shabak" secret police makes very interesting reading.

Ali Abunimah <http://www.abunimah.org>

An unconditional withdrawal from the territories is urgently needed

("L'urgence, c'est de se dsengager inconditionnellement des territoires")

Le Monde newspaper [http://www.lemonde.fr] Originally published on 23 December 2001 Jerusalem -- Ami Ayalon, 55 years old, was, from February 1996 to May 2000, the head of the Israeli internal security service Shabak, better known under the name of Shin Beth. Small, lean, dressed in jeans and an open shirt, Ayalon speaks calmly, but forcefully.

Sylvain Cypel (Le Monde): How do you see the state of political debate in Israel?

Ami Ayalon: Israeli society, top to bottom, is sinking into confusion. There are no reference points. People mask this reality with swaggering slogans: "We will vanquish terrorism!" At a colloquium, the army chief of staff declares: "We are winning"; he evokes the "superiority of Tsahal"-- the Israeli army -- and his "feeling that the nation is finding its strength". Then he adds "there are today more Palestinian terrorists than a year ago" and says there will be even more tomorrow! If we are winning, how come terrorists are multiplying? In Israel, no one is in touch with reality. This is a consequence of a misperception of the peace process. "We have been generous and they refused" is ridiculous, and everything that follows from this misperception is skewed. Moreover, our obsession with the Palestinians makes us forget to ask questions about ourselves. What do we want to be? Where are we going? No leader addresses these questions. Thus the confusion and general anxiety.

Sylvain Cypel : The majority of leaders though are convinced that time works in favor of Israel.

Ami Ayalon: Since September 11, our leaders have been euphoric. With no more international pressures on Israel, they think, the way is open. This obscures the consequences of our holding onto the Palestinian Territories. This is not only a moral matter. Our founders saw a state that provided a homeland for Jews and was a democracy. From both points of view, time plays against us! Demographically, it works in favor of the Palestinians. And politically in favor of Hamas and the settlers. But to fight against Hamas, we must evacuate the settlers, whose proximity to the Palestinians reinforces hatred. Among the Palestinians, the weight of the Islamists is increasing, and also that of intellectuals who used to favor a two-state solution, but who now say: "Since the Israelis will never evacuate the settlements, well, then, there will be a binational state". This is something I absolutely oppose. It would not be a Jewish state any more. And if it remained a Jewish state while

dominating the Arab population, it would not be a democracy.

Sylvain Cypel: Do you exclude the possibility of an Israeli victory, despite the power differential?

Ami Ayalon: We have had our "victory"! In 1967, we occupied all the Palestinian lands. Once "terrorism is vanquished", what shall we do? This is absurd. The Palestinians want self-rule. Whoever wants to "vanquish" them, then offer them bread and circuses, understands nothing. The Israeli army is stronger than ever, our secret services are excellent; then why is the problem not resolved? Reoccupying the Palestinian Authority lands, and killing Arafat, what would that change? Those who want victory want an unending war.

Sylvain Cypel: Yet, since September 11, many think that Israel can change the regional situation in its favor.

Ami Ayalon: An illusion! September 11 has changed many paradigms in the U.S., but nothing basic in the Middle East. Whatever Arafat's errors, the Palestinian people will continue to exist. As long as the Palestinian question is not resolved, the region will not know stability. Only a Palestinian state will preserve the Jewish and democratic character of Israel. We do need international political and financial help to resolve that problem and that of the refugees, because as long as the refugee problem persists, even if a Palestinian state exists, it will poison our relationship.

Sylvain Cypel: But the Israelis are traumatized by the Palestinian demand for the return of refugees.

Ami Ayalon: Let us stop worrying about what our adversaries say and ask what we, ourselves, want. We do not want the return of the refugees. But we can refuse only if Israel acknowledges unambiguously its role in the suffering of the Palestinians and its obligation to help solve the problem. Israel must accept the principle of the right of return and the PLO must commit itself to not question the Jewish identity of our state.

Sylvain Cypel: What do you think of the view put forth by the head of Mossad of Israel in the front line of the "third world war" against terrorism?

Ami Ayalon: Anyone who equals Arafat with Bin Laden understands neither Arafat nor Bin Laden. The latter is the guru of a very harmful sect, but one that is very marginal to Islam; it aims to bring chaos and cares nothing about the international community. But Arafat dreams of being accepted by the international community -

- since 1993, he has constantly made reference to it, demanding the application of the UN resolutions, while we, Israelis, refuse! If Bin Laden is killed, his sect may disappear with him. If we kill Arafat, the Palestinian people will continue to want its independence.

Sylvain Cypel: Do you fear that the Palestinian Territories may become a quagmire?

Ami Ayalon: We say the Palestinians behave like "madmen" but it is not madness but a bottomless despair. As long as there was a peace process - the prospect of an end to the occupation -- Arafat could maneuver, incite or repress violence to better negotiate. When there is no more peace process, the more terrorists one kills the more strength their camp gains. Yasser Arafat neither prepared nor triggered the Intifada. The explosion was spontaneous, against Israel, as all hope for the end of occupation disappeared, and against the Palestinian authority, its corruption, its impotence. Arafat could not repress it. The peace process is what allowed Arafat to be seen as the head of a national liberation movement rather than a collaborator of Israel. Without it, he can fight neither against the Islamists nor against his own base. The Palestinians would end up hanging him in the public square.

Sylvain Cypel: From Oslo to Camp David, did Israel miss a rare opportunity for peace?

Ami Ayalon: Yes. It is not all the Israelis' fault. The Palestinians, the international community, bear some responsibility, but we missed an extraordinary opportunity: the international situation was incredibly favorable after the fall of communism, the Gulf war, the emergence of globalization, all these phenomena led Israel to reexamine its own assumptions. Now, we are regressing.

Sylvain Cypel: Do you favor a "unilateral separation" from the Palestinians?

Ami Ayalon: I do not like the word separation, it reminds me of South Africa. I favor unconditional withdrawal from the Territories -- preferably in the context of an agreement, but not necessarily: what needs to be done, urgently, is to withdraw from the Territories. And a true withdrawal, which gives the Palestinians territorial continuity in a Transjordan linked to Gaza, open to Egypt and Jordan. If they proclaim their own state, Israel should be the first to recognize it and to propose state to state negotiations, without conditions, on the basis of the Clinton proposals, to resolve all pending problems.
[ends] ■