



Zalman Amit/Daphna Levit, Israeli Rejectionism. A Hidden Agenda in the Middle East Peace Process, Pluto, London-New York, pp 208, 24.70 \$.

After having negotiated for 20 years with different Israeli governments about a solution to the conflict in the Middle East, the Palestinian leadership is sick and tired of the charade that the U. S., the rest of the West and even the occupied Palestinians under the rule of Mahmud Abbas call “peace process”. Abbas and its cronies ask the United Nations to grant the “State of Palestine” full membership status. The Israeli government fiercely opposes this move and so does the U. S. Since 1967, when Israel’s violations of international norms were brought

before the UN Security Council time and again, the U. S. government has backed it off-hand. For the large majority of U. S governments, Israel was always the “good guy” even after it attacked the USS liberty in the June war of 1967 in international waters of the shore of Israel and killed 34 US marines. At the question, who is responsible for the stalemate in the progress towards peace in the Middle East for the last 80 years, the book “Israeli Rejectionism” comes into play.

Already in the introduction of this book, the authors blame Israeli leadership for its rejectionist attitude towards peace. “Our position is that Israel was never primarily interested in establishing peace with its neighbors unless such a peace was totally on its own terms.” (11) According to the authors, Israel has repeatedly proclaimed its commitment to peace, but it’s real political strategy has been to thwart any real possibility of peace. It’s leadership has always been convinced “that peace is not in Israel’s interest”. As history shows, this holds true up till now. This peace-rejecting attitude did neither evolve with the occupation of the rest of Palestine in 1967 nor with the establishment of the state in 1948 but can be traced back to the first Zionist leaders such as Theodor Herzl, especially David Ben-Gurion as the authors write. As an anticipated résumé of the authors one can state: Not Israel lacks a viable “partner for peace”, as the Israeli propaganda tells the public, but it is the other way around: the Palestinians have no reliable “partner for peace”. To proof this fallacy, they run through a gamut of statements, starting from slogan “Palestine – homeland for the Jews?” via “Barak leaves no stone unturned” to the “Peace on a downhill slope”. On this journey, they find the peace-resistant party: the different governments of Israel.

This assertion by the authors runs counter to the propaganda promoted by Israeli hasbara and their friends in the U. S. and elsewhere. Both authors were initially true believers of the socialist Zionist cause serving the neophyte state within the kibbutz movement. Over many years, they were loyal followers of Zionist ideology.

Zalman Amit particularly was a determined Zionist, who was even an emissary of the United Kibbutz Movement in Canada. There, he delivered sermons about the virtues of Zionism. At one of the Jewish jamborees, which he organized, he gave a speech in which he elaborated on the standard left-wing Zionist beliefs. After he finished, an Israeli friend who attend the gatherings for several days, asked him: "Do you really believe this?" So he explained to him that Ben-Gurion "never wanted peace". The Zionist façade slowly cracked. Both authors engaged in the June war of 1967. After the Six Day War, they finally experienced their aha-experience regarding the reality of Zionism. At that time, they were already adults. At that junction, they realized how difficult it was to admit to themselves that they had entertained a pipe dream. Finally, they realized that Israel always was the side that sabotaged opportunities for peace with the Arabs. Moshe Dayan's famous "telephone strategy" was an excuse for him to "do nothing". Israel waited for a telephone call from the Arabs but the call never came!

Among many historians and politicians, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, is highly regarded. But the picture the authors draw of his policy, he seems as a mere rejectionist; he did everything to sabotage any compromise towards the Arab side. His policy, according to the authors, was to gain as much territory with a minimum of Arab inhabitants. As his writings show, transfer and expulsion were political options. When Israel together with France and Britain conquered the Sinai in 1956, he talked about the „Kingdom of Israel“ encompassed biblical boundaries, but he also avoided any concrete commitment where Israel's normal borders should run. One day, before the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel was made, the question of borders arose in a meeting of Zionist politicians. Ben-Gurion, according to the protocol, said this should be left to "developments", a euphemism for further conquest. Up to this day, the Israeli leadership won't tell where Israel's exact borders should run. The authors show that former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser started several peace initiatives but to no avail. The Zionist leadership was not interested in and depicted him „as an enemy of the State of Israel“. Ben-Gurion also plotted against his successor Moshe Sharett. He was also a driving force in the 1956 conspiracy against Egypt with the colonial powers of France and Britain to overthrow Nasser in the war of 1956. Although this assault was militarily successful, it turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory, especially for Ben-Gurion. In the UN Security Council, the US tried to condemn Israel as the aggressor. For the first time, Britain and France cast their veto against the US. Massive pressure from the Eisenhower administration led to the withdrawal of all occupying forces from Egyptian territory. Ben-Gurion's „Third Kingdom of Israel“ was short-lived, it just lasted for four days.

Between the Israeli attacks in 1956 and 1967 there have been a number of military encroachments and Israeli provocations against its Arab neighbors, such as on the Golan and against Gaza. After the June war of 1967 Ben-Gurion's dream came true. Israel had captured land for which it claimed „biblical entitlement“. According to the authors, all of Israel's leadership were „intoxicated“ by this achievement of „messianic dimensions“. In

this mode of „drunken euphoria“ even self-proclaimed doves like Abba Eban referred to the armistice boundaries as the „Auschwitz lines“, and the nationalist Menachem Begin called for outright annexation of the West Bank and Gaza. The authors show that the Israeli government started right away with its colonial project by evacuating and destroying the Mugraby neighborhood adjacent to the Wailing Wall. Yigal Alon drafted at that time his famous „Allon Plan“, which still serves as a blueprint for Israel’s expansionist policies.

According to the authors - Zalman Amit and Daphna Levit - there are no major differences between Labor-, Kadima-, or Likud-led governments regarding colonization of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). It is only a matter of rhetoric that divides the three political camps. Between the June war of 1967 and the Yom Kippur war in 1973 there have been several peace initiatives by President Nasser or his successor Anwar al-Sadat but Israel was only willing to make „peace“ according to its own terms. The „expansionist positions“ among Israel’s ruling political class continued as revealed by the „Galilee document“ drafted by Prime Minister Golda Meir confidant, Israel Galilee. „It was no conciliatory step towards peace, and reinforced the Egyptian and Syrian inclination to go to war.“ (84)

Although the State of Israel had the upper hand, the sudden Yom Kippur war that dented the feeling of invincibility left Israel with a collective post-war trauma. Some Israeli politicians realized that the Middle East conflict cannot be solved by military means but only through a peace agreement. The reason why the peace process went nowhere lies, according to the authors, in the country’s unwillingness to give up the occupied territories and to recognize the national aspiration of the Palestinian people. The Israeli intransigence continued under the government of Menachem Begin, although he made peace with Egypt. After the fiasco in Lebanon, he was replaced by Yitzhak Shamir in 1983. Shamir „considered the only acceptable position for Israel was no retreat at all, and peace was not particularly high on his agenda“. (104) When Shamir was defeated by Yitzhak Rabin in the 1992 election, he made clear that „his intention was to drag out the negotiations for at least ten years“. (110) The peace conference in Madrid in 1991 agreed that all parties to the conflict should negotiate under Washington’s umbrella.

Space prevents from commenting on each particular historic incident the authors describe. One period is, however, worth mentioning. It’s Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s short term in office.. He is one of the most rejeconist Israeli politicians, although he disguised himself, until 2011, in Labor clothes that is still considered “left-wing” by few political pundits. He comes from a Zionist Kibbutz Movement, as Rabin’s Minister for the Interior he voted against the Oslo accords, and as Israel’s Prime Minister he destroyed not only the remnants of the so-called peace process but also the so-called Israeli Zionist left. His role at Camp David in the year 2000 was solely destructive. He played games not only with the Americans but also with Arafat and the Israeli public. He and Clinton blamed Yasser Arafat for the failure at Camp David. Actually, he was the one who

deceived everybody in order to disguise his rejectionist attitude. The authors demonstrate this by quoting people who attended this meeting that could have led to peace if the U. S. would have played its role as an “honest broker” seriously.

After Ariel Sharon defeated Barak, his “follow in spirit”, in 2001, peace did not have a chance at all. The events of 9/11 gave Sharon a welcome pretext for dismantling Arafat’s administration in the autonomous areas and commit atrocities in the OPT. The authors’ description of the Olmert government gives no hope for the future, not to speak of the right-wing Netanyahu/Lieberman government. They come to the conclusion that a peace agreement was never concluded because it “was never Israel’s top priority”. (163). Israel’s military strength is one of its main trumps, “but Israel has practically evolved into an army that has a country”. (163) For the authors, Israel’s ruling class is so successful because the Israeli people want to see itself as a “protected mighty”, and the settlement movement has been so successful because it presents itself as purely Jewish, authentic, and as a grass-roots force. Amit/Levit name many distortions: Israel is a substantial nuclear power with a powerful military; the Israeli Jewish people live in a “self-imposed ghetto” and nourish their own sense of victimhood, and claiming they are constantly threatened from without. The authors see no prospect for peace in their lifetime.

The book’s special value is in demonstrating that not the Arabs are the ones who never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity, as Abba Eban used to say. The real rejectionists are Israel elites who seek further territory for their “Eretz Israel” at the cost of another people. That “Israel is no partner for peace” is a daring, but well argued, conclusion that should be thoroughly examined by all those who are involved in Middle Eastern affairs.

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