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Policy and Strategy



The Media as a Theater of War, the Blogosphere, and the Global Battle for Civil Society

December 17 – 18, 2006

Daniel Hotel, Herzliya

Panel II, Dec. 18, 2006 (11:00-12:30)

"The Albert Camus Paradigm: When Your Mother Comes Before Your Ideals"

By Dr. Emmanuel Navon

Former French Prime Minister Édith Cresson once claimed that most British men are gay. The reason she gave for her strange theory was that no British gentleman had ever courted her while she was in England. That her own appearance might have provided a more scientific explanation did not occur to her –or perhaps it did, which is precisely why she stuck to her absurd paradigm.

We may be amused, but our paradigms are no less absurd when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Our enemies don't even try anymore to conceal the fact that their goal is to wipe out Israel. Only a couple of weeks ago, Ismail Haniyeh was in Teheran coordinating his moves with Ahmadinejad who says explicitly that the purpose of his nuclear bomb is to destroy Israel in one shot. Meanwhile, it is now official that the United States will let Iran get away with its bomb. And yet, Prime Minister Olmert returned from his recent trip to Washington declaring that the United States will never let Iran go nuclear, and he declared in Sde Boker a couple of weeks ago that Israel was ready to give up territories for peace –as if Haniyeh and Ahmadinejad cared about these territories.

Stephen Hawking suggested lately that we start colonizing other planets because, he said, "Sooner or later, disasters such as an asteroid collision or nuclear war could wipe us all out ... But once we spread out into space and establish independent colonies, our future should be safe." This is definitely an interesting "paradigm shift." Let's call it "the two-planet solution." One planet, the Earth, would be left for Ahmadinejad, Nasrallah, Hugo Chávez and Jimmy Carter, while Jews, Christians, free-marketers and democrats would run for their lives in outer space. I doubt Ahmadinejad would put up with Jewish settlements on Mars –why, Mars is surely an Islamic planet. But what Hawking is suggesting is actually in line with the strategy that Israel and the West have adopted vis-à-vis Jihad: surrender and retreat.

The reason Israel's leaders are unwilling or unable to abandon the "two-state" and "land-for-peace" paradigms despite their obvious irrelevance and failure is that doing so would leave Israel with three unpleasant alternatives: 1) Keeping the status quo indefinitely; 2) Adopting the bi-national state paradigm; 3) Conducting a mass population transfer. No Israeli politician can get elected on any of these three platforms, and trying to sell the status quo or a Palestinian population transfer to international public opinion would be, to put it mildly, counter-productive.

To Abba Eban, the brilliant and outspoken "Voice of Israel" in the early days of the Jewish state, partition was almost ideal: it enabled Jewish statehood without denying Arab rights; it was both realistic and humanistic. Indeed, Eban wrote in his memoirs that he could not have been Israel's international advocate had Zionism not accepted the

principle of partition. He thought that Arab rejection of Israel might eventually wane and he saw in the Six Day War an opportunity to trade territory for peace. This paradigm worked with Sadat because he came to realize after the Yom Kippur War that the only way for him to recover Sinai was to sign on the dotted lines. But to the Palestinians, 1967 had never been the issue: it is the 1948 *Naqba* that they wanted, and still want, to avenge.

This is the eternal quid-pro-quo between the Zionist Left and the Palestinians. In an interview with Ari Shavit published in *Haaretz*'s supplement in May 1998, Azmi Bishara summarized this quid-pro-quo as follows: "You have to distinguish between a historical compromise and a temporary arrangement ... A temporary arrangement is valid for a limited period of time ... It is based on a balance of powers ... This is what Rabin wanted, and he made a mistake ... You can't have a temporary arrangement and expect peace with the Arab world and a new historical period. This is part of my argument with the Zionist Left. They don't get it. They only talk about the 1967 issue as if the 1948 issue didn't exist ... And this is a bitter mistake."

Indeed, and the Oslo war only confirmed what the Palestinian leadership kept saying all along: you want to withdraw to the pre-1967 status quo, fine, but don't expect us to leave you alone after that. As Dan Schueftan says, if the Israelis were willing to fool themselves, why should the Palestinians have stopped them?

The PLO outmaneuvered Israel in public diplomacy when Arafat feigned in 1988 to renounce terrorism and to accept UN Security Council Resolution 242. If the PLO was no longer a terrorist organization and if

all the Palestinians wanted was to achieve independence alongside Israel, there was no excuse for Israel to hold on to territories when letting go of them would deliver peace and justice. It was Israeli stubbornness and territorial greed versus human rights and peace. The Second Camp David Conference and Arafat's war revealed the PLO's bluff to its full extent, yet Arafat got away with murder, essentially because he managed to picture his terror war as a struggle for independence on behalf of the weak and the oppressed.

Then came September 11, the Iraq War and the Road Map. Ariel Sharon somehow turned the tables on Arafat by officially endorsing the Road Map, which both called for a Palestinian state and for the end of Palestinian terrorism as a condition for statehood. Since asking Arafat to fight terrorism was like asking al-Capone to fight the mafia, Israel got a pretty good deal: it could hang on, hammering its commitment to the two-state solution while blaming the Palestinians for preventing its implementation. As long as George Bush was in the White House and had a majority in Congress, and as long as Arafat was around, Sharon could go on with this convenient stalemate. Except that the police was on his case, that the Geneva initiative was starting to catch the media's attention, and that the Security Council adopted the Road Map as a resolution. Sharon decided to reenact the Suez Canal crossing and surprise the enemy from his rear.

When he announced three years ago in this very building that he had decided to "separate" from the Palestinians, Sharon was praised as a new Ben-Gurion. He had finally adopted the "Herzliya Consensus" and the *Realpolitik* paradigm. Since the conflict with the Palestinians is not territorial, handing over territories will not bring peace. But, on the other

hand, holding on these territories forever is demographically suicidal. So Israel should emancipate itself from the idealistic paradigms of the Left and of the Right, and forget about both territories and peace. It will turn Jabotinsky's metaphorical iron wall into a physical reality, fencing out the Arabs and letting them bang their heads on Israel's defiant fortress.

In theory, it was brilliant. In practice, it was a disaster. Realism is always in the eyes of the beholder. Fences can be bypassed by tunnels and missiles, as the abduction of Gilad Shalit and the bombardment of Sderot amply show. Israel may have left Gaza, but Gaza did not leave Israel. And Israel's military defeat in its proxy war with Iran last summer gave us more than a hint of what would happen if Israel were to repeat the Lebanese and Gaza withdrawals in Judea and Samaria. Far from banging their heads on a defiant Israeli wall of deterrence, our enemies are gaining in strength and confidence, emboldened by America's retreat from Iraq, Iran's new regional power, and the Shia takeover of Lebanon.

So the two-state solution is off, because the Palestinians don't want it and Israel can't impose it on them. And why should they come to terms with Israel's existence, when this very existence is now objectively threatened by Iran? But on the other hand, the *Realpolitik* alternative of disengagement is clearly not an option, as it would deliver the West Bank to an Iran-backed Hamas.

So what is the alternative? There are three, as I said: status-quo, bi-national state, or population transfer. Which is why a paradigm shift is unlikely: you would need to be a tenured professor or a retired politician to afford to take the risk of endorsing any of these three paradigms. Maybe that's why Benny Morris, now that he has tenure, said the

following in an interview with Ari Shavit in *Haaretz*'s January 2004 Supplement: "I know this stuns the Arabs and the liberals and the politically correct types. But my feeling is that this place would be quieter and know less suffering ... if Ben-Gurion had carried out a large expulsion and cleansed the whole country – the whole land of Israel, as far as the Jordan River. It may turn out that this was his fatal mistake. If he had carried out a full expulsion –rather than a partial one – he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations ... If we find ourselves with atomic weapons around us, or if there is a general Arab attack on us ... acts of expulsion will be entirely reasonable ... If the threat to Israel is existential, expulsion will be justified ... I know it doesn't always sound politically correct, but I think that political correctness poisons history in any case. It impedes our ability to see the truth. And I also identify with Albert Camus. He was considered a left-winger and a person of high morals, but when he referred to the Algerian problem he placed his mother [who lived in Algeria] ahead of morality. Preserving my people is more important than universal moral concepts."

Voilà. If you were looking for a paradigm shift, there you have it: an icon of the Israeli left now advocates an Arab population transfer. Whatever one may think of Morris' recommendation, it is with his comparison with Albert Camus that I want to conclude. The world has gone mad, and the Jews have to care for their lives. There is no need, time or room for pleasing world opinion. Like Albert Camus with his mother, we have reached the point where we have to choose between our life and our image. The choice is ours, and the time is now.