
Peace, Justice and Autonomy in the Middle East

Concepts of justice and autonomy are examined in the light of the following perceptions: Israel wants a piecemeal approach to a comprehensive peace while Arab states have advanced a comprehensive approach to a piecemeal peace; Kissinger formulated a piecemeal approach to a piecemeal peace, but Carter has been advancing a comprehensive approach to a comprehensive peace.

by Howard Adelman

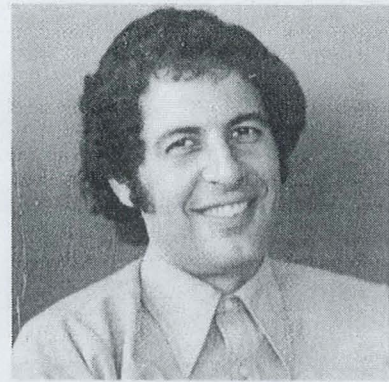
I. Peace

In a recent address in Toronto on the topic, The Middle East after Camp David, a spokesman of the government of Israel described his country's view of peace and justice. Peace was a "piece by piece" process. It was a gradual approach. Israel would make peace with one Arab country and then another; first Egypt, then Jordan; then the other Arab nations. The problem with the Arabs and their supporters in the White House and the State Department is that they wanted a comprehensive approach to the process of making peace. All the Arab parties to the conflict should be involved in the process at the same time. Even Egypt, which had turned away from the comprehensive approach, still clung to a vestigial strand when it insisted upon linking the Israeli-Egypt peace agreement to the progress towards self government on the West Bank. As far as Israel was

concerned, such an approach was doomed to failure. The only approach that had been proven to work was the method used after the War of Independence when an agreement was made first with Egypt, then with Jordan, and then Syria. Piece by piece peace was good. The comprehensive approach was bad.

Only a few years ago another spokesman of the government of Israel, speaking in Toronto, said the problem was that the Arabs only wanted a bit of peace – a cease fire, an armistice. They didn't want to establish a full peace, a proper peace, with mutual recognition, an exchange of ambassadors, trade and cultural exchanges. Israel wanted a full peace, a comprehensive peace and rejected the piecemeal approach of the Arabs.

The recent spokesman, talking after Camp David, rejects a comprehensive approach to peace. The



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earlier one speaking long before Sadat went to Jerusalem, lauded a comprehensive conception of peace; piecemeal peace was bad.

Were the two contradicting each other? Not at all. The terms 'comprehensive' and 'piecemeal' were merely being applied to two different aspects of peace – the means of arriving at it and the end intended to be achieved. The later representative was concerned with the means. The method of achieving peace required a piecemeal approach in which peace was made first with one Arab country and then another. The previous one had focused on the goal – a comprehensive, a full peace. **Israeli policy had remained the same – a piecemeal approach to a comprehensive peace.** As Egypt had shifted a long way to accepting the Israeli view of the goal, the Israelis now stressed their differences

with the Arabs in the method envisioned in achieving that goal.

Nor did either misrepresent the Arab position. The basic Arab long term policy had been diametrically opposed to that of Israel. They wanted a comprehensive approach and rejected a piecemeal method of arranging an agreement between one Arab country at a time and Israel. At best, the Arabs wanted a piecemeal result. Though they accepted the idea of peace, that concept never included establishing normal relations and ties between the Arab nations and Israel. Peace simply meant the temporary cessation of military conflict.

The Carter administration in the United States, basing its policies on the Brookings Report, tried to marry the two positions. The comprehensive goal of the Israelis and the comprehensive methods of the Arabs were to be fused. Geneva was to be reconvened with all the parties to the conflict, including the Soviet Union as co-chairman, and possibly even the PLO, sitting around a peace table.

Sadat's visit to Jerusalem scuttled the comprehensive approach. Though it sank out of sight, the comprehensive approach remained an obstacle. Implacable enemies in the Arab camp – the Saudis and the rejectionists, Syria and Iraq, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and its civil war enemies, the PLO – all began to move closer together to isolate and haunt Sadat with his betrayal of their long term strategy. Though Sadat seemed to have accepted a variation of the Israeli view of a piecemeal approach to a comprehensive and full peace, the two key outstanding differences since the Camp David agreement signalled that he had not cut his ties to the traditional Arab strategy altogether. The linkage issue and the refusal of Sadat to downgrade his defence agreements with his old Arab partners were real signs that Sadat's commitment to a comprehensive, full and irreversible peace agreement was not wholehearted, and that minimal remnants of the comprehensive approach to achieving peace remained an integral part of his policy.

Nor had the Americans completely abandoned the comprehensive ap-

proach. The Saunders visit to Jordan, the White House and State Department support for linkage, possibly prodded by the Saudis, if they did not instigate at least reinforced Egyptian rigidity.

The Israelis want a piecemeal approach to a comprehensive goal. The Arabs want a comprehensive approach to a piecemeal goal, (including Egypt which refuses to abandon the Arab strategy in toto). The Carter administration would prefer a comprehensive approach to a comprehensive peace, reinforcing Sadat's inflexibility with regard to minimal elements in the comprehensive approach. Is there any alternative? There is only one – the piecemeal approach to a piecemeal peace. It was the old Kissinger strategy which the present American administration once rejected.

II. Justice

The Israeli spokesman in Toronto also compared the perception of justice of his country with the viewpoint of the Arab nations. The Arab views justice as a matter of status. Justice is the assignation of each individual or group to a proper and rightful role. When everyone receives what he deserves, justice is achieved. Justice is a matter of status; when there is a hierarchy of roles, natural justice results.

Such a view is not peculiar to Arabs or even to Islam. Plato outlined this theory of justice in *The Republic*. Within the state, everyone does the job for which he is best fitted and receives the corresponding rewards and responsibilities. Applied to the international sphere, each nation has a role or status in a hierarchy.

For Israelis, in the view of this spokesman, justice will be achieved when everyone is treated as equal in the eyes of the law. Justice is a matter of status, but equal not unequal status. The *historical* goal is equality in contradistinction to the traditional hierarchic arrangements. Though he had discussed peace as a means, he now looked at justice as an end. Peace is a process and justice is the intended result. To the current Arab slogan, 'Peace based on Justice', he was really proposing an alternative Israeli slogan: 'Justice based on Peace'.

Like the concept 'peace', however, 'justice' also is made up of two aspects, an end and a means. Justice is also a process. In the traditional Jewish view governing the relations between ethnic groups and national entities, justice is based on mutual tolerance of differences and the rule of law to adjudicate conflicts. Thus, for Israelis, justice is a process of respecting the rights of others; as a goal, justice is defined as equality.

Others interpret justice as a process differently. Justice requires the unification of viewpoints rather than a respect for differences. At its most tolerant pole, it is a movement towards consensus; at the other extreme, it is militant conversion. Such a conception of justice as a process usually involves creating a common front as a temporary measure of unification while confronting the group perceived as the major enemy. Justice is the process of working together against the group which appears to threaten the process of unification most. The vision of that threat is also the means by which unification is achieved.



Obviously, there are many variations of the way in which justice as a mode of conversion is perceived. But the main determinant is the conception of justice as an end with which the process is linked. Thus, Soviet Communism adopts a conversion approach to justice as a process linked to a goal of justice which envisions equality among individuals but a hierarchy among nations (with Russia, of course, at the pinnacle, a view most strongly resisted by the proud Chinese). On the other hand, though Islam also tends to a view of justice as a process of conversion uniting different groups against the most visible enemy (hence, the spectacle of Khomeini, the advocate of an Islamic republic, embracing Arafat whose ostensible goal is a secular democracy, because Khomeini needed the most plausible external ally to keep control and win over his recent internal allies, the radical secular Iranians), Islam does not link that process of conversion with a goal of equality but with a hierarchical conception of the relations between individuals in a nation as well as among national entities. Thus, though Soviet Communism and Islam share the same view of justice as a process, and even the same view of justice as a goal when applicable to a hierarchy among nations, they differ in their perception of the goal of justice when applied to individuals. If Islam has a memory of a natural spiritual hierarchy, Soviet communism dreams of a future material equality among individuals.

Amongst the western democracies, justice as a process has come to mean tolerance of differences and respect for the rule of law. Though those nations are united in their commitment to an egalitarian goal when applied to the external relations amongst individual independent countries, they are divided internally between those whose goal of justice is equality in all its aspects and those who view the results of the process of justice as respect for the rule of law and a material hierarchy rooted in natural differences and inherited wealth. With respect to the goal of justice in relations among individuals within a nation, Israel tends towards one end of the spectrum – the pole of material equality – while the United States

tends towards the other pole, the preservation of a material hierarchy amongst individuals. Though those internal differences have an effect on their external relations as nations when the oil wealth of the Islamic nations is used to bring pressure on American economic interests, Israel and the United States are natural allies with respect to both the vision of the goal of justice applied to the relations among nations as well as the process by which justice is to be achieved.

If the Islamic nations and the Soviet communist bloc concur in their views of justice as a process and in their conception of justice as a goal when applied to the relations among nations, why are the Islamic nations not all allied with the U.S.S.R.? Why is America siding with Egypt in the current negotiations? The detailed examination of historical, political, geographic and economic factors would be necessary to provide an adequate answer. For our purposes it is sufficient to note that conceptual agreement in one area neither entails conceptual agreement in other areas nor any harmony in giving content to that agreement. Though the U.S.S.R. and Islam may have similar views of justice both as a process and as a goal insofar as international relations are concerned, there remains a fundamental difference on the content to be given to that goal. If there is agreement that justice entails a natural hierarchy among nations, there may be conflicts over the pecking order and the issue of which nation ought to occupy the pinnacle of that hierarchy, an issue which is a factor in inter-Arab rivalry.

The answer to the second question of the current shared positions of the Egyptians and the Americans is equally complicated, but the following three factors have contributed to the American support of the Egyptian position versus the Israeli one in the recent negotiations:

- (a) the congruence between the policies of the Carter administration and the Arab approaches to the methods of achieving peace;
- (b) the Egyptian shift towards almost a complete adoption of the American and Israeli view of the goal as a comprehensive peace agreement (a shift not quite completed



President Itzhak Navon: Palestinian issue & Israeli national security are linked

as long as Egypt insists on retaining the priority over any Israel-Egypt peace agreement of Egypt's obligations to come to the defence and aid of her Arab allies in a military conflict);

(c) the threat of Middle East instability and Arab oil wealth to the American conception of justice as a goal entailing the preservation of the material wealth and internal economic hierarchy in the United States.

III. Autonomy

The basic aim of the autonomy plan is to enable Arabs on the West Bank and in Gaza to govern themselves without threatening the security of Israelis. As President Navon of Israel said upon Carter's arrival to Israel on his shuttle diplomacy effort on March 9th, 1979, the Palestinian issue and Israeli national security were linked. Israel wanted a true peace, he said, and did not want elements to endanger peace or Israeli security. For Israel, there is no inherent connection between achieving this concrete goal and arriving at a full and comprehensive peace between Israel and one or more of her Arab neighbours.

The same cannot be said of the Arabs. The day before Carter left for Israel, Sadat stood beside President Carter on the balcony of Farouk's old castle and reiterated an old theme. Egypt wanted a just and comprehensive peace in the area. Egypt was determined to enable her Palestinian brothers to realize their national rights and regain their freedom. The comprehensive peace had to include justice for the Pales-

tinians, and justice for the Palestinians meant national self determination. As the head of the Egyptian assembly reminded Carter, Egypt was an Arab country first and had to take into account other Arab states.

Now it is understandable that Israel would remain suspicious of this rhetoric, since the Arab countries were even more belligerently disposed towards Israel only twelve years earlier when Israel did not occupy the West Bank and Gaza and when Jordan and Egypt, respectively, did nothing to advance the national aspirations of the Palestinians and a great deal, in fact, to retard them. But, irrespective of Israel's claims over the West Bank, there is a much more powerful motive among Israelis to abandon the occupation of the West Bank as long as the security of Israel is not threatened. There is an inherent contradiction between a situation in which Israel rules as a master in the administered territories, where the overwhelming majority of the population is hostile to Israeli occupation, and the Israeli (and American) conception of the goal of justice, which entails respect for the equality of other nations.

Though the main problem over the West Bank is the reconciliation of self determination for the Palestinians and security for Israel, other factors complicate the problem. The major one is Jerusalem. The minor one is the right of Jews to settle in the West Bank. With respect to the last point, a fully sovereign territory has the right to determine who can and who cannot settle within its boundaries. The Israelis will not return the West Bank to a political authority which could pass laws to make the West Bank – Judea and Samaria – 'Judenrein', i.e., free of Jews. The Israeli sovereign claim over the West Bank is a debating point; the right of settlement is not.

The major stumbling block to negotiating autonomy with the Palestinians is sure to be Jerusalem. Israel annexed East Jerusalem and is determined that it remain a united city under Israeli sovereign authority. Thus, one can anticipate many difficulties in the process of arranging autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians will not have self determination over all the territory which changed hands in the 1967 War. That self determination

will not only be spatially more limited than the Palestinians want it to be; it will also not be full self-determination. Palestinians will not be able to ban Jews from buying land. Nor will they, for obvious security reasons, be able to raise a standing army.

Thus, although the autonomy plan is designed to enable the Palestinians to govern themselves, that self government will be restricted both in its territorial and legal jurisdiction. Anticipating these difficulties the Israelis do not want to link progress on the autonomy issue with a peace treaty with Egypt, otherwise such a treaty will not be the comprehensive agreement that they were aiming for. Further, the Israelis are interested in a gradualist approach so that the residents of the area will have time to demonstrate that they will not be and do not intend to be a threat to Israel.

Thus, Begin's autonomy proposal implied not only a goal but a step by step process of reaching that goal. That process can be reduced to three stages: first, the setting up of an elected assembly, second, negotiations to define the powers of that assembly, and third, a decision reached by the various parties involved (including the Jordanian government) to define the final status of the West Bank. Such a process, provided it culminates in real independence, also has a great deal of appeal to Americans.

Unfortunately, the stages for achieving autonomy do not resonate as well among the Palestinians resident in the West Bank and Gaza, with a resultant decreased interest among those Palestinians in the autonomy proposal. Why? One of the reasons is clear. What is most important to them is not an elected assembly, the first and clearest stage of the proposal. Given their concept of justice, what is most important is the status given to those territories and the Palestinians in them, an issue left vague and to the end, leaving those Palestinians with the suspicion that the Israelis have no intention of surrendering their mastership role over the West Bank. Since most of those Palestinians are Muslims who have a vision of justice entailing a spiritual hierarchy among peoples, it is particularly galling to find themselves ruled by a people

defined in the Koran as inferior to themselves. A minimal issue for them has to remain a commitment to achieving at least minimal equality with the Israelis.

There is a second internal issue among Palestinians given this same vision of the goal of justice. In the Palestinian arena, who is to occupy the pinnacle of power, the residents of the administered territories, the PLO, or King Hussein? As long as the threat confronts the Palestinians that their inferior status will be perpetuated, all three parties have an incentive to coalesce. If the Israelis concentrate on separating the Jordanians from the other factions, such a process can only be achieved by a piecemeal method of seeking a peace treaty with Jordan which is comprehensive and total. Such a strategy not only conflicts with the general Arab plan, but King Hussein is far too weak within the Arab camp to take such an independent stand, especially if such a peace agreement entailed surrendering East Jerusalem and the Old City to Israeli authority. The result might also be an even closer identification between the Palestinians resident in the territories and the PLO.

Clearly, the PLO, representing as it does Palestinians resident outside of the West Bank and Gaza, though enjoying a great deal of support within those areas, remains an unacceptable partner for Israel given its goals and practices. The only alternative partners are the Palestinians resident in the West Bank and Gaza themselves. And the only way they could possibly take on that role is by reversing the order in staging the autonomy proposal. The independent and self governing status of the Palestinians would first have to be guaranteed. Then the powers assumed by them, that would not threaten the security of the Israelis while recognizing the equal status of the Palestinian nation, could be negotiated. The problem with this approach is obvious. It is too dangerous for the Israelis who want and need a negotiating partner strong enough to guarantee Israeli security will not be threatened. Only Jordan would suffice.

Thus, there are not only many precarious steps in negotiating autonomy, there are just as many

dangers in finding a partner with whom to negotiate. This is why the Camp David agreements and the subsequent negotiations must be seen as really a surrender of the idea of a comprehensive and full peace agreement. The Arab idea of a comprehensive road to peace was effectively scuttled by the Sadat initiative in going to Jerusalem. The Israeli idea of a comprehensive peace as the goal, which the Carter administration also bought, has been systematically worn down until we have been returned to the Kissinger formula of a piecemeal approach to a piecemeal peace. In the terms of the proposed peace agreement to

which the Israelis have already agreed, Israel has already gone some distance in recognizing that a comprehensive agreement has to emerge in stages.

For Egypt, the more comprehensive and total the peace agreement, the more all inclusive the treaty will have to be in guaranteeing autonomy for the Palestinians. If Israel wants an exchange of ambassadors and a guaranteed supply of Sinai oil to Israel, then the firmer the language must be guaranteeing Palestinian autonomy. What in fact has happened is that the piecemeal steps to a piecemeal peace have now been put in a context

linking them to the goal of a comprehensive peace which will emerge in stages and a comprehensive approach in the sense that the central issue of the status of the Palestinians has been made central to the peace agreement between Israel and her major Arab antagonist – Egypt. Each agreement – the oral agreements of Begin and Sadat in Jerusalem that there would be no more war, the Camp David agreements, the negotiations for an Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement must all be seen as mere interim stages in a much longer process whatever the rhetoric of comprehensiveness attached to them.