

Support of the Israeli Peace Camp for the Autocratic Palestinian Regime

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The Zionist left has always supported US imperialism and its autocratic Arab allies, claiming that US policy seeks to enforce peace and democracy in the Middle East. This claim has likewise been the pretext for their support of the PA police state in the making. However, Uri Avnery's embrace of Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad's oppressive regime lays bare an appalling fact: the genuine Palestinian national movement has no partner, even within the most radical wing of Israel's so-called "peace camp."

Introduction

Academics and publicists from the Zionist left have persistently distorted the notion of democracy when insisting on applying it to the political regime in Israel. Despite the fact that some admit the "stains in Israel's democracy," they support the definition of Israel as a "Jewish state," which implies the structural discrimination and marginalization of the indigenous Palestinian population. They usually cling to the misleading argument that the preference of Jews does not violate the equality of individual citizenship rights held by the Palestinians in Israel. This hypocritical stance of the self-proclaimed "liberals" has been largely sustained by the prevailing political culture, which they themselves actively helped create: namely, the state-centered culture portrayed by the late sociologist Baruch Kimmerling as "semi-fascist". Accordingly, the values of individual human rights, the essence of democracy, are perceived as subservient to state security.

Shlomo Avineri, professor of political science has well represented the role of the intellectual on the Zionist left in granting "scientific" confirmation to the definition of the Zionist settler state as "democracy." For example, he depicts the Law of Return – which is central to the Apartheid nature of the Israeli legal infrastructure as just an "immigration law," no different from immigration laws in other democratic states such as the US and Norway' 1.

Now, in wake of the popular uprising in Egypt that threatens the other dictatorial regimes across the Middle East, Shlomo Avineri has come up with a new insight on the imperative commitment of democrats to fight against an autocratic regime. He expressly argues that a peace treaty – which ensures the "security" of Israel – is a top "moral" value that justifies the past support of Mubarak's totalitarian "internal" regime:

"Recently, we here were presented with a rather problematic choice: Do we support democracy, or do we support the Israeli interest in maintaining security and stability?"

When a moral value (democracy) is thus posited against realpolitik (stability and security), it is easy to lapse into the argument that Peace is not only a political, military and security arrangement; it is also a moral value. The fact that for 30 years not a single Israeli or Egyptian soldier was killed in hostile activities on our common border, [...] is not only a strategic achievement, but a moral achievement of the highest order, credit for which goes to political leaders on both sides."

In his effort to justify the alliance with Mubarak and belittle his brutal oppression of the Egyptian people, Avineri makes a most bizarre comparison: [...] "Just as it is permissible to praise former Prime Minister Menachem Begin for achieving peace with Egypt, without agreeing with many of his views it is permissible to praise former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for his determination, sometimes under great pressure, to preserve the peace initiated by his predecessor Anwar Sadat. That is not support for a despot; it's support for the moral content of peace."

The lip service paid to "Israel's interest in democracy in Egypt" is soon wiped out by the summary of his main message to Israelis – and, indirectly, to Egyptians as well: "But Egypt's internal regime is the business of its own citizens, and we would do well not to try to advise them whom to elect and whom not to elect. In any event, the moral aspect of peace, which is based on the principle of preserving human life and its quality of life, must be a guide to us, as to Egyptian society that has now embarked on a new path".

Avineri's indifference toward Mubarak's despotic regime (and any regime that would replace his) because of Israel's interests in peace with Egypt, is merely the expression of US imperial strategy in the Middle East (and elsewhere), to which Israel is a lesser partner. This strategy consists of supporting even the most brutal oppressive regimes as long as they sustain their submission to US interests. A recent article by Noam Chomsky deals with, among other things, US concerns about the "shock wave throughout the region set in motion by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt that drove out western-backed dictators." He reminds us of what he has been emphasizing for a long time: "Washington and its allies keep to the well-established principle that democracy is acceptable only insofar as it conforms to strategic and economic objectives [...] The nature of any regime it backs in the Arab world is secondary to control. Subjects are ignored until they break their chains." 2

This is the true meaning of the "morality" that Prof. Avineri attributes to "maintaining security and stability" through peace with Egypt. He should know better the role of this "peace" in sustaining US and Israeli interests by fortifying the "moderate block" of the despotic Arab states. Their joint aim is to eliminate "secular nationalism," including the national rights of the Palestinian people. Mubarak's Egypt fully complied with Israel and the US in blocking a peace agreement that would recognize these rights, as has long since been known.

Shlomo Avineri's doctrine of privileging Israel's "security" over "internal" democracy, in the case of Egypt, has usually been adopted by leftist Zionists in regard to the Palestinian Authority, albeit without admitting it explicitly. It was Labor PM Yitzhak Rabin who justified Israeli "concessions" in the Oslo Accords on the grounds that the Accords would bring about a collaborative Palestinian Authority that would repress resistance "without [the shackles] of [Israel's] Supreme Court and [the human rights organization] B'tselem." And indeed, the Zionist left has embraced the autocratic regime that has developed under the PA, which thus granted the PA recognition as an "appropriate" partner for peace. This support for the oppressive and collaborationist PA has been shared by even the most militant wing of the Israeli peace camp. The release of the *Al Jazeera* documents, and Uri Avineri's response to them, have contributed the ultimate proof of this shameful support. These documents revealed the full compliance of the Palestinian leadership with US-Israeli demands, as well as their collaboration with the latter's schemes to do away with the national Palestinian movement. 3

Gush Shalom, founded and led by Uri Avnery, responded to the *Al Jazeera* papers in its weekly statement in *Haaretz* of January 28, 2011, saying: "*The Al Jazeera Disclosures prove: The Palestinians have no partner for peace.*"

Indeed, the "Palestine Papers" confirm in every detail that, during the last decade, Israeli governments have objected to any potential plan for peace settlement, while simultaneously entrenching the occupation regime in the '67 conquered territories. The papers disclose what was known to anyone who refused to take part in welcoming the charade of the peace process or to believe that it would lead to a peace settlement that would fulfill the Palestinians' national aspirations. Uri Avnery has played a significant role in creating and sustaining this baseless belief, which he shared with the intellectual elite and activists among the Zionist left. However, Avnery's positions have had a significant influence on genuine peace-seekers in Israel and abroad, due to his determined and persistent struggle against the '67 occupation and the atrocities committed in the occupied territories by Israeli authorities.

Avnery's optimistic message has relied on what he calls the "realism" of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership that ascended to power after his death; namely, their readiness for partial concessions to Israeli demands in the framework of the two-state solution which, however, don't violate the basic national rights of the Palestinian people. Moreover, Avnery has constantly assured the public, both in Israel and abroad, that the concessions made by Abu Mazen are accepted by the majority of the Palestinians who recognize the Oslo-created Palestinian Authority as their representative. He never challenged the legitimacy of the PA leadership even after the victory of Hamas in the 2006 democratic elections, which the PA ignored and which brought about the separation from the Gaza Strip.

The revelations of the *Al Jazeera* papers, as well as Avnery's long response to them, highlight his absolute loyalty to the PA, whose betrayal of the Palestinian cause was well documented. I'll first briefly discuss a number of *Al Jazeera* revelations that prove the strong collaboration between the Palestinian leadership and Israel-US dictates, both in regards to the negotiations process and the Palestinian autocratic regime. After reporting on the dismayed reactions of Palestinians in response to these revelations, I'll present Avnery's long response to the *Al Jazeera* papers in his January 29 article. In this article, he emphasizes his continued support of the collaborative Palestinian leadership and their "two-state solution" as disclosed in the papers. A review of his November 2010 article, in which he expresses his admiration for the PA police regime, confirms the betrayal committed by both the PA and the leader of Israel's peace camp.

A Selective Summary of Al Jazeera Documents

Al Jazeera's revelations point to the total capitulation of the Palestinian leaders, both those who led the negotiations (Abu Mazen and Saeb Erekat) and those who orchestrated the construction of a "police state" under Salam Fayyad's government. These detailed accounts narrate the secretly negotiated surrender of every one of Palestinians' core rights under international law – including, among others, the PA's willingness to concede all of East Jerusalem, the settlements around Jerusalem except Har Homa, and the blocks of settlements that cut the West bank into encircled enclaves.

The PA's betrayal, however, extends far beyond the realm of territorial concessions.

The Palestinian leadership has explicitly compromised on the two fundamental principles adopted and upheld by the Palestinian national movement: first, the Right of Return of the approximately five million refugees to their homeland; and second, the refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state – the central premise of Zionism as embodied in the settler colonial state of Israel.⁴

In explicitly recognizing the Jewish state, the current Palestinian leadership has turned their backs on the very perception that guided the Palestinian national struggle for entire decades: namely, that Zionism and the settler colonial state of Israel sought to abolish the Palestinian national movement; to commit the "sociocide" of the Palestinian people in all of historic Palestine; and, when possible, to drive their expulsion.

The recognition of Israel as a Jewish state also signifies the official abandonment of the Palestinians within Israel to their systematic discrimination and oppression as individuals and as a national collective. Moreover, it delegitimizes the democratic struggle undertaken to turn Israel into a state for all its citizens, allowing it to be continually defined as the state of the Jewish people alone.

The PA's compromises on the Right of Return and the Jewish State are fully in accordance with Israel-US's persistent attempts to fragment the Palestinian people. By the same token, the PA has been actively plotting with them against the legitimately constituted unity government with Hamas in Gaza. Senior PA officials deliberately suppressed Palestinian popular resistance in Gaza, and even called for Israel to once again "occupy" the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt after the border wall was blown up by Hamas activists in January 2008. 5

Revelations from the Wikileaks cables already underlined the US, Egyptian, Israeli, and Palestinian "cooperation" with Israel's war crimes in Gaza, both before and during the "Operation Cast Lead" massacre (and, in the case of the US, a pre-knowledge of the humanitarian crisis that would develop before the attack even commenced). As shown by the *Al Jazeera* papers, the PA continued their collaboration with their three partners in their attempts to push the United Nations Human Rights Council to delay a vote on the Goldstone Report, the fact-finding probe of these war crimes. The documents reveal the PA-Israel collaboration in targeting resistance and in the repressive actions of the PA security forces, trained under General Dayton in the service of the occupation. 6

Angry Palestinian Reactions

The shock and anger expressed by Palestinian public figures was not late to appear. An article by Karma Nabulsi in the *Guardian* of 23/1/11 conveyed the growing disgust at the "outrageous role of the PA and US and Britain in creating a security Bantustan, and the ruin of our civic and political space ... [Moreover], the claim they were acting in good faith is absolutely shattered by the publication of these documents [...] Whatever one's political leanings, no one, not the Americans, the British, the UN, and especially not these Palestinian officials, can claim that the whole racket is anything other than a brutal process of subjugating an entire people." 7

Mahdi Abdul Hadi, the director of the Jerusalem think-tank Passia says, "It is now much clearer to Palestinians that they are living in a prison and that the PA leaders are there only to negotiate the terms of our imprisonment." 8

Palestinian public opinion leaders call to put an end to the Oslo leadership and to renew the Palestinian Liberation movement – which would encompass the entire Palestinian people, including the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Asad Ghanem, a professor of politics at Haifa University, says: "With politics stifled inside the occupied territories, it is crucial that outside Palestinian leaders step in to redefine the Palestinian national movement, including Palestinians such as himself who live inside Israel and groups in Diaspora." 9

Uri Avnery, however, was deaf to these voices. As said, he remained loyal to his traditional absolute support of the collaborative Oslo leadership and disregarded the Palestinians' call for its downfall.

Uri Avnery's Support for the PA Police Regime

A week after the release of the Palestinian Papers, Uri Avnery responded to their revelations in an article called "The *Al Jazeera* Scandal." 10

Avnery ignores the rage expressed by Palestinians at the PA's betrayal of their people and their oppression carried out in collaboration with Israel and the US. Instead, he concentrates only on the concessions made in the "peace negotiations." These, according to him, "caused furious reactions and stirred up an intense controversy in the *Arab world*" (my italics).

However, he misleadingly claims that this controversy was only about trivial topics: "But what was the clash about? Not about the position of the Palestinian negotiators, not about the strategy of Mahmoud Abbas and his colleagues, its basic assumptions, its pros and cons."

Ignoring or belittling the Palestinian public reactions permits Avnery to direct his main attack on the *Al Jazeera* network, which he presumes was shared by the Palestinian masses in the West Bank: "On *Al Jazeera* the Palestinian leaders were wrongly accused "of treason and worse" Hence "in Ramallah, the Aljazeera offices were attacked by pro-Abbas crowds." On the other hand, he claims, the reaction of the Palestinian leaders themselves to *Al Jazeera*'s accusations lacked any bravery: "Saeb Erakat, the Palestinian chief negotiator and others did not have the courage to admit publicly that they indeed agreed 'in secret' to the concessions disclosed by *Al Jazeera*. They seemed to be saying in public that such concessions would amount to betrayal."

Depicting these concessions as betrayal "is nonsense," says Avnery. Moreover, "For anyone involved in any way with Israeli-Palestinian peace-making, there was nothing really surprising in these disclosures. "They confirmed that the Palestinian negotiators were following the very concessions made by Arafat himself in Oslo in order to achieve a peace agreement with Israel. Avnery proudly mentions his visit to Tunisia (before the PLO leadership was allowed to return to the '67 occupied territories and form the Palestinian Authority) when he heard from Arafat himself the details of the peace agreement which he would accept. A few years later, says Avnery, Gush Shalom published a draft peace agreement based on Arafat's positions: "As anyone can see on our website, *it was very similar to the recent proposals of the Palestinian side as disclosed in the Aljazeera papers*" (my italics). These proposals, says Avnery, "should be at the center of the public discussion".

Avnery's call for a debate that would focus on the negotiators' positions alone, while ignoring *Al Jazeera*'s revelations regarding the PA's totalitarian regime, is rather futile.

It is precisely this regime and its brutal repression of its people that enabled its leaders to make such capitulations to Israel-US demands. Moreover, the "new" discussion suggested by Avnery has been taking place for many years. Hundreds if not thousands of critical works have been published on the Palestinian surrender in Oslo and thereafter, as well as on Avnery's own political positions, which supported them.¹¹ Unlike Avnery's own analyses, these critical publications did realize the connection between the Israel/US version of a two-states solution and the kind of a Palestinian regime that would support such a "peace solution" at all.

No doubt Avnery is familiar with the plentiful information on the oppressive PA regime that has been published in recent years by senior political analysts and research centers. A study by Aisling Byrne of the Conflicts Forum in Beirut, based on this information, lays bare the disastrous dimensions of the "police state in the making" enforced by US and Israel: ¹²

Says Byrne: "[General] Dayton is a political actor who essentially is overseeing and facilitating a process of political cleansing in the West Bank, the consequences of which for the Palestinian national project, for political reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and for political engagement and prospects for peace are damaging, if not disastrous.... "Dayton has been clear about his aim: to reduce the 'IDF footprint' in the West Bank by developing Palestinian capabilities and 'proven abilities'; that is, capacity-building and training of the Palestinian security forces ("paramilitaries", as the *Wall Street Journal* describes them); turning them, as he explained, into the "new men of Palestine" ¹³

....., Dayton's 'capacity-building' initiatives are facilitating the creation of an autocratic and totalitarian 'state' led by Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad: political debate is almost non-existent, criticism not allowed, and the extent of collusion between the Abu Mazen/Salam Fayyad government and their security forces with Israel is so extensive that both the Palestinian public and members of the security forces themselves are beginning to question and criticize "what they see as the PNA's attempt to increase repression and curtail freedoms." ¹⁴

....A recent report in the British newspaper, the *Mail on Sunday*, exposed "the horrific torture of hundreds of people by Palestinian security forces in the West Bank [which] is being funded by British taxpayers".¹⁵ The report documents how 'not only are PA forces carrying out torture ... but that the authority [also] ignores judges' orders to release political detainees' One Palestinian commentator described the new recruits as being 'saturated with ideological ideas against the resistance'. 'This is how', he explains, the PLO army has been molded to be the security forces that ... protect Israeli settlements ... and protect the Israeli army from Palestinians and all forms of resistance.'¹⁶

"This process of creating 'new Palestinians,'" says Byrne, "has complimented the political metamorphosis of the Palestinian Authority. A high-ranking Israeli defense officer explained to leading Israeli journalist, Nahum Barnea [of Yediot Ahronot] in early October 2009 : 'the Palestinian Authority changed right in front of our eyes ... The Fayyad government was formed [and] it was clear that they wanted to give Hamas a fight. We began to meet with the heads of the [Palestinian] security organizations". At the top of our agenda we put law and order in the cities and the war on Hamas... We were surprised by the intensity of their willingness to cooperate." 17

[..]'A key turning point', the Officer explained, 'was the intensification of American involvement. ... We learned the lessons that the Americans learned from the fighting in Iraq. You take one place, Jenin for example, you crush terror there, you put a strong police force there and move on. We started with Jenin... At first, it failed. Fayyad said, let's try again. We tried again, and it caught. We needed a lot of patience ... The greatest achievement was that the moderates defeated the extremists".

...'The extent of collusion', explains Palestinian analyst Ramzy Baroud, 'illustrates how the Palestinian Authority functions more than ever before as a subcontractor for the IDF, the Shin Bet security service and the Civil Administration'18

Avnery's hair-raising and utterly misleading portrayal of his allies in the PA is presented in his article of 4 November 2010, a year after the horrid facts were published in foreign and Israeli newspapers. 19

Avnery glorifies Salam Fayyad, the Prime Minister of the Palestinian government that runs the autocratic regime in the West Bank:

"It is impossible not to like Fayyad. He radiates decency, seriousness and a sense of responsibility. He invites trust...In the confrontation between Fatah and Hamas, he does not belong to either of the two rival blocs.... Fayyad believes, so it seems, that the Palestinians' only chance to achieve their national goals is by non-violent means, in close cooperation with the US." Avnery depicts this belief as a version of Zionist labor "pragmatism" led by Ben Gurion: "This is reminiscent of the classic Zionist strategy under David Ben-Gurion. In Zionist parlance, this was called 'creating facts on the ground'. He plans to build the Palestinian national institutions and create a robust economic base, and by the end of 2011, to declare the State of Palestine-

Avnery is thrilled at the sight of "statehood" which takes the form of Palestinian security forces, trained by General Keith Dayton, the US Security Coordinator for the Palestinians since 2005. "Anyone who has seen them knows that this is for all practical purposes a regular army. On Land Day demonstration, the Palestinian soldiers, with their helmets and khaki

uniforms, were deployed on the hill, while the Israeli soldiers, similarly attired, were deployed below. That was in Area C, [60 % of the West bank] which according to the Oslo Accords is under Israeli military control. Both armies used the same American jeeps, just differently colored."

What a cynical scene! A staged gesture by the Occupier allows a military unit of the occupied to parade in an area that is under Israel's full control on the day the Palestinian people commemorate the unabashed ongoing robbery of Palestinian lands both in Israel proper and the West Bank. And a famous Israeli peace struggler watches on with admiration?

The Zionist left has always supported US imperialism and its autocratic Arab allies, claiming that US policy seeks to enforce peace and democracy in the Middle East. This claim has likewise been the pretext for their support of the PA police state in the making. However, Uri Avnery's embrace of Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad's oppressive regime lays bare an appalling fact: the genuine Palestinian national movement has no partner, even within the most radical wing of Israel's so-called "peace camp."

1 See Avineri's support of the law which requires all newly naturalized citizens to take an oath of loyalty to the Jewish state Shlomo Avineri: A Substantive Oath of Allegiance, Haaretz 25.07.2010

2 Noam Comsky, "It's not radical Islam that worries the US –it's independence" guardian.co.uk, Friday 4 February 2011

3 The entire Palestine Papers archive is being made available online on the Al Jazeera English website: <http://english.aljazeera.net/palestinepapers/>.

4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/24/palestinian-negotiators-jewish-state-papers>

5 Ali Abunimah" [Cutting off a vital connection](#), Electronic Intifada " 25 January 2011

6 The Electronic Intifada, 26 January 2011

7 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/23/middle-east-peace-process-over-palestinians>

8 see Jonathan Cook: Can the Palestinian Authority survive?<http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2011-01-31/jonathan-cook-can-the-palestinian-authority-survive>.

9 Jonatan Cook, Ibid

10 [Avnery columns' archive](#) ,29 January 2011

11 See for example Steven Friedman and Virginia Tilley, **Taken for a Ride by the Israeli Left.**, In Electronic Intifada, 27 January 2007m(A Response to Uri Avnery"What Makes Sammy Run, 30, December, 2006

12 Aisling Byrne, "Businessmen Posing as Revolutionaries :General Dayton and the "New Palestinian Breed" ,A Conflict Forum Monograph at Beirut , November 2009 www.conflictsforum.org. In a paper presented in a Conference named "The Development of neo-colonial structures under the guise of 'state-building' , the Centre for Development Studies, Bir Zeit University and Ghent University, September 2010, Aisling Byrne added both update information and analysis to the 2009 monograph. The final version of her paper- "Building a Police State in Palestine" was published in Foreign Policy, January 18, 2011 <http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011>

13 Palestinian Support Wanes for American-Trained Forces, Charles Levinson, Wall Street Journal, 15 October 2009. See also Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, Michael Stein Address on US Middle East Policy, Program of the SOREF Symposium, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 7 May 2009;

14 Palestinian Security Sector Governance: The View of Civil Society in Nablus, Spotlight No. 1, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, May 2009 and
Palestinian Support Wanes for American-Trained Forces, Charles Levinson, Wall Street Journal, 15 October 2009

15 *Financed by the British taxpayer, brutal torturers of the West Bank*, David Rose, *Mail on Sunday*, 31 January 2009 (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1133032/Financed-British-taxpayer-brutal-torturers-West-Bank.html#>)

16 *The new political and security job for the duo – Fayyad-Dayton*, Yousef Shali, *Al Aser* On-line Magazine, 6 July 2009

17 *Anatomy of a Victory*, Nahum Barnea, Yedioth Ahronoth, 9 October 2009

18 *Abbas and the Goldstone Report: Our Shame is Complete*, Ramzy Baroud, *The Palestine Chronicle*, 15 October 2009

19 "Fayyad's Big Gamble", November 4 2010