

"Land For Peace" and Other Twisted Fantasies

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The \$10 billion in US loan guarantees for Israel to build houses for immigrants has become an election issue in the United States and in Israel since the Bush administration is using it as a way of coercing Israel to stop all settlement activity outside the green line. Some good has come out of the debate: it sheds light on a few delusions, among them the convoluted idea of trading "land for peace," which simply means that Israel is to give up land in exchange for some illusory promises.

Israel has been seeking the \$10 billion in US loan guarantees to be able to borrow money from commercial banks at favorable rates to finance the absorption of Jews fleeing the former Soviet Union. "Without such financing the refugees face even greater hardship. The Bush administration enlisted the support of some powerful allies in Congress, including Vermont Democrat, Senator Patrick Leahy, chairman of the Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee, who, however, proposed a compromise. Leahy warned that, in principle, unless Israel was willing to halt settlement activity after the first year, as the President insisted, "loan guarantees will be dead for 1992."

Leahy described the choice of "national priorities" supposedly facing Israel: "What is more important, receiving full assistance to resettle the [Soviet] immigrants or continuing to build settlements at the cost of aid?"

This is not the choice confronting Israel. Its foremost priority is to prevent turning Israel into a virtual death trap for its citizens and for the coming waves of refugees from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, or anywhere else. Israel cannot be drawn into a "peace process" that is likely to lead to the "peace of a graveyard." Those who have doubts as to what would happen if the Arabs were to overrun Israel should ask the Jews from Arab countries who were lucky to escape. Or the Kurds who fled from Saddam Hussein only to die by the thousands in the mountains; or the "Arab brothers" who might have survived Hafez el-Assad's brutal crushing of an "intifada" in the Syrian town of Hama. They should recall the "Palestinian roof-dancing" when Saddam's scuds hit Tel-Aviv.

The *New York Times* in an editorial, 6 February 1992, praised the administration for making the freeze a "condition" for loan guarantees, arguing that it would help "nudge this difficult peace process forward." This argument puts the truth upside down. American coercion of Israel could only encourage Arab intransigence: it will simply tempt them to attack Israel for the fifth time.

As to the Soviet Jews, Israel will meet the needs of their absorption with or without the loan guarantees, as it has done in absorbing previous waves of refugees. It cannot accept "linkage" between the purely humanitarian problem of refugee absorption and the political issue of its borders, which is what the "freeze on settlements" is all about.

The Jews of the former Soviet Union will continue to flee to Israel despite the hardships they face there. They

are caught in the crossfire of ethnic and religious violence that is sweeping the former "evil empire." A million of them, possibly two million (no one really knows how many), are "sitting on their luggage," fearing an impending pogrom. They realize the hardship that awaits them in starting a new life in Israel. They listen to the distorted echo of the loan guarantees debate, which reinforces their indecision. But they also heard Boris Yeltsin's warning on 6 February 1992 in which he said that if his reforms fail, "I can already feel the breath of Red Shirts and Brown Shirts on our necks."

The Jews, too, feel the breath of Communist and Fascist thugs; they know the only escape route leads to Israel. When the American people see this mass exodus on their TV screens, they will reject the use of the guarantees as a stick to beat Israel into swapping security for empty peace promises.

President Bush's policy towards Israel changed after the Gulf War. In his victory speech in Congress he said that Israel must reach a "comprehensive peace" with its neighbors by "trading territory for peace" to secure "legitimate Palestinian political rights." Bush said "anything less would fail the twin test of fairness and security." He sent Secretary of State James Baker to the Middle East to arrange an Arab-Israeli peace conference. This was Baker's first visit to Israel. Since then he has gone there many times, arguing that the Gulf victory had opened a "window of opportunity" and that the settlements in the "occupied territories" were an "obstacle to peace," though no longer, at least, "illegal."

In his 31 July 1991 press conference with Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow, Bush said the United States and the Soviet Union would act as "cosponsors" in the Arab-Israeli talks. By then the Soviet Union was a fragmented and dying empire, resembling a terminal patient with atomic bombs stocked under its bed. In inviting the Soviets as cosponsors Bush deviated from the policies of his Republican predecessors, Nixon, Ford and Reagan.

"Land for peace" is an old Soviet scheme. President Nixon in 1973 rejected Brezhnev's plan for a Soviet-American "peace settlement" to be based on the Soviet "principle" of forcing Israel to retreat from all the "occupied territories." "There was no way I could agree to such 'principles' without prejudicing Israel's rights." President Nixon wrote in his memoirs.

Jimmy Carter was the first to accept this Soviet scheme. Bush and Baker, by accepting Brezhnev's "principles," revived Carter's anti-Israel policy. Perhaps they thought of making their mark on history as great Middle East peacemakers, if only they could repeat what has been advertised as "Carter's Camp David triumph." But this "triumph" is a myth that must be dispelled.

It was Carter who soon after his inauguration began to proclaim the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" and to demand the creation of a "Palestinian homeland or entity," saying that Israel "must withdraw to the

1967 borders with minor adjustments." It was Carter who first described the settlements as "illegal" as well as an "obstacle to peace." He accused Menahem Begin of "reneging" on his word not to build new settlements. Begin denied he had ever made such a promise. In his 29 July 1978 press conference. Carter had to admit that. "Mr. Begin did not give me any promise about his action on the settlement question."

Begin always described the settlements as "legal, legitimate and essential," and rejected Carter's idea of calling a Geneva peace conference with the Soviets as cosponsors, fearing another "Munich." a scheme to drag Israel, kicking and screaming, to Geneva and to force it to agree, to the "self-determination of the Palestinian people."

Begin said that in Munich Hitler had demanded "self-determination" for Sudeten Germans and then dismembered Czechoslovakia. "May I state that never again will the concept of self-determination be misused," said Begin, "because we'll remember the '30s. the late '30s, and the result of this misuse." He said that a "Palestinian homeland or entity" was a euphemism for a Palestinian Arab state. "Such a Palestinian state would have extinguished any prospect of peace and would have created a danger to the very existence of the Jewish State," declared Begin's cabinet. "There has never been a government in Israel that would agree to such conditions, nor will there be."

It is strange to see the roots of the Bush administration's Mideast policy in Carter's misconceptions. Yet it was under Carter, early in his administration, that an amazing development took place: Carter and the Soviet chief Brezhnev announced the Joint Soviet-American Declaration (1 October 1977) calling for an Arab-Israeli peace conference in Geneva to start "no later than December 1977." and for Soviet-American joint action to "guarantee peace." This ultimatum triggered Carter's bitter confrontation with Israel and its supporters in the United States. "I'd rather commit suicide, political or otherwise, than hurt Israel!" Carter told members of Congress, who went to the White House the next day to protest the Joint Soviet-American Declaration. These words were characterized by the media as a strong proof of Carter's unwavering support for Israel. Certainly his words were strong — much too strong to be real, especially in view of his escalating hostility to Israel. Faced with the uproar, he negated the Joint Declaration as an "innocuous document." Earlier he had called it an "achievement of unprecedented significance."

Carter never abandoned his scheme to force Israel to retreat to the 1967 borders. He sent a letter to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, in which he insisted on a "Palestinian homeland or entity" and revealed his agreement with the Soviets to "guarantee peace" jointly. Syrian dictator Hafez el-Assad received a similar communication from Carter. The Soviets told Assad and their other ally, Yasir Arafat, to attack Israel and to ensure that Sadat would join them in the war. Arafat arrived in Cairo on 9 November 1977. declaring that the time was ripe for "military action." The same day Assad sent a "special envoy" to Sadat with the request to get ready for war. Sadat realized that "the Soviet Union was starting its own tricks with the Syrians and the Palestinians." He also learned that

the war was to start within a few days. "There was only one week or ten days, something like that." he was to recall. He feared that it was going to be a "terrible, terrible war and that Israel, having lost the support of its American ally, would defend itself 'with all the means at its disposal including the nuclear option. Sadat feared a calamity that would benefit only the Soviets, who intended to intervene militarily not to "guarantee peace," but to pick up the pieces of what would be left of Egypt.

Some backstage diplomacy (conducted, through Moshe Dayan) had secretly informed Sadat of a way out: Begin had sent him an invitation, and that same day, 9 November, Sadat made a long emotional speech in the Egyptian parliament, announcing, "I am ready to go to the Israeli parliament itself!"

Sadat's plane touched down at Ben-Gurion Airport ten days later. The war was averted. The two leaders announced their goal: a separate peace treaty.

The Camp David Accord took a year to sign due to Carter's demands for unacceptable concessions from Israel. Sadat had to support some of these demands in order not to appear less pro-Arab than Carter. Begin agreed to return Sinai — it is a natural buffer no matter who holds it. This is not true of Judea, Samaria. Gaza and the Golan Heights.

Bush and Baker may have hopes for an Arab-Israeli peace, but their policy actually provokes war. The advocacy of "Palestinian political rights" leads toward an artificial creation of a 23rd Arab country. incompatible with the security of Israel. This indeed would guarantee the failure of what President Bush called "the twin test of fairness and security." His rival, Patrick Buchanan, made the "self-determination of the Palestinian people" by the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories an issue of his campaign.

For all their eagerness for peace with the 200-million strong Arab world, a growing majority of Israelis reject the idea of trading "land for peace." recognizing in it a mere stepping-stone to the creation of a hostile state. Benny Begin observed that the idea that the Palestinians are a separate nation is the greatest hoax of the 20th century since the hoax of Nazism:

People imply that there is a basic injustice when Israel denies the Palestinian nation its right to self-determination. Actually, there is no group of Arabs west of the Jordan River that is distinct from other Arabs and that is eligible for self-determination.

"The "Palestinian people" speak the same language practice the same religion and share the same history and tradition with Arabs in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and other Arab countries that occupy the huge expanse between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans. Israel is a tiny speck in the colossal Arab world: 10,000 square miles at best, compared to 5 million square miles.

No "Palestinian people" ever existed: it emerged in 1969-70. For two millennia Palestine was a province of the Roman, Arab and Ottoman Empires. For a brief period before 1948 it was under the British mandate. The only states that have ever existed there were the Hebrew kingdoms in Biblical times and Israel today within the

borders recorded in the Bible, They must remain the same not because they are sanctified by the Bible. but because the Bible recorded the geopolitical and strategic realities of ancient Israel, the realities still valid today.

The "obstacle to peace" argument is based on the assumption that the settlements make peace with the Arabs impossible. But the opposite is true. The settlements are obstacles to the Arabs in waging war on Israel to destroy it. thus to deny to the Jewish people its right to self-determination in the only land to which it has a valid title, recorded in history thousands of years ago. The settlements are not obstacles to Arab self-determination, which is realized in 22 existing states. There is no great tragedy in the fact that less than 1% of the .Arab people would live in a Jewish state. For those few who might, consider this an unbearable tragedy, there is a way to alleviate the pain — they have 22 Arab countries to choose from and to where they can immigrate and live among and be governed by the same Arabs as they are; to be absorbed in these Arab lands with the help of a fraction of the oil billions that they have wasted on acquiring weapons to destroy Israel while butchering themselves. They will not have the problem of learning a foreign language or adopting to a strange culture, as have millions of other immigrants around the world, the Jews among them.

Reducing Israel to 1967 borders, even "with minor adjustments," would make it easier for the Arabs to overrun Israel's amputated terrain. Lieutenant-General Thomas W. Kelly, former director of Operations of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, pointed out that, "the West Bank mountains, and especially their approaches, are the critical terrain. If an enemy secures those passes. ... all of Israel is only eight miles wide at its narrowest point, making it indefensible." Trading this terrain for an illusory peace is an absurdity. Syrian President Assad, the "butcher of Damascus,^{1*} can least of all be trusted with honoring his own signature under any treaty. King Hussein of Jordan is a hostage of his Palestinian subjects, who worship Saddam Hussein as their hero. The King is Saddam's virtual puppet. Lebanon, a country drowned in blood and anarchy, is Syria's appendix and cannot be a reliable party' to any agreement. Bringing in the Soviets' successors as "cosponsors" of such a "peace" does not make it less ludicrous.

Some words retain their symbolic significance for millennia, and Palestine is one of them. After the Romans destroyed the Jewish State in 135 CE, they gave the name "Palaestina" to the vanquished country, intending to erase ail memory of Jewish statehood which had flourished there for more than a thousand years. The name was taken from the Biblical references to the Philistines. enemies of the Jews before King David. They had vanished long before the Roman conquest, as had so many other peoples of antiquity. The "Palestinian people" are Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians who have no links whatsoever with the Philistines. They claim "Palestinian identity." because of its anti-Jewish symbolism. "Palestinian entity or homeland" and similar

euphemisms for a Palestinian state were invented only recently to deny the Jews their ancient birthright.

The unacceptable condition for the loan guarantees to Israel is only one of many misconceptions that have punctuated Bush and Baker's foreign policy. Bush's standing in the polls has sharply declined. Many observers have asserted that while his mishandling of the domestic economy is the obvious reason for this, his foreign policy has been his "strong suit." They cite the collapse of the Soviet Empire and Bush's triumph in the Gulf War for that matter as his personal victory. But Bush's drop in popularity might well be the consequences of a visceral, poorly articulated confusion, a kind of palpable unease that American people feel about Bush's leadership not only in handling the domestic economy, but also in shaping events abroad,

Bush's mishandling of foreign policy has been startling. He spent almost half a year building an Arab coalition against Saddam while his regime was raping Kuwait. Having loaded Saudi .Arabia with American armor so that, as one US general put it, the peninsula almost went under, Bush allowed that Iraqi dictator to remain in control of his vanquished people. Having incited rebellion against Saddam, Bush, to "preserve die integrity of Iraq," allowed Saddam to massacre the Kurds, who indeed deserved self-determination as a people with a distinct language, culture and history. In this Bush was accommodating Gorbachov, who wanted to save Saddam from total defeat in order to use him again as a Soviet proxy.

As the debate on the guarantees unfolds, the Bush administration seems to have become more and more stubborn about linking the loan guarantees with the settlements in Judea and Samaria. It is true that it has abandoned the old legal position of the Carter administration, corrected already during Reagan's first term — that the settlements were "illegal," but the formula that has replaced this — that they are "an obstacle to peace" — while in principle more flexible, is politically even less so.

From the viewpoint of peace, after all, the chief obstacle for the Bush administration, is the existence of Israel, and Baker's own growing hostility toward Israel makes it impossible for him to see further. Just as they built up Saddam Hussein, both Bush and Baker are still intent on building up Hafez al-Assad, the Syrian dictator, whose technical and strategic view is a simple one: Israel must return all the territories lost in the 1967 war, including East Jerusalem.

Baker's exposure to foreign affairs began only with his present four years in office: He saw Israel for the first time a year ago. But he is not a novice at engineering "linkages" between incongruous issues. On 29 January 1991, just before Bush was to deliver his State of the Union address, Baker and the last Soviet Foreign Minister. Alexander A. Bessmertnykh. issued a Soviet-American communique, in which they linked the Gulf War to "the sources of conflict, including the Arab-Israeli conflict." They also agreed to pursue jointly "a meaningful peace process" and "mutual US-Soviet efforts to promote Arab-Israeli peace and regional stability," working for "a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East." This communique produced an outcry in

this country and Israel against the "linkage" between the Gulf War and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Baker's anti-Israel animus struck all observers during his recent testimony in the Congress on loan guarantees. It was evident that Bush and Baker had decided "to play hard ball" by using this issue to influence the Israeli elections in June, hoping that Israelis might accommodate them by electing the Labor leader Yitzhak Rabin, suppos

edly a "dove." in order to get the loan guarantees. But Rabin is no "dove" on security matters; no significance can be read into this distinction between "political" and "strategic" settlements. Still, even if the Bush administration is right in its perception of his "softness" on this issue, and Labor wins this June, it may discover that the Labor Part will not be so different from the Likud as Bush and Baker had thought.