

# CAN ISRAEL MAKE PEACE?



Can Israel and her neighbors get off the treadmill of attack and counterattack? A leading Israeli, experienced in both war and diplomacy, argues that the end of the cold war has created the conditions for a comprehensive Mideast settlement. Eight observers of the Mideast scene reply; we shall publish more comments (and invite a response by General Tamir) in a future issue.

ABRAHAM TAMIR

**T**HREE MAJOR stages characterize the rise and fall of empires throughout history: an empire rises as a result of a vacuum left by declining empires; military force and aid to client regimes then establish central rule over the whole empire and even extend its control beyond the imperial borders; and, finally, unable to maintain central control in the face of both nationalist and liberation struggles internally and the pressures of rival powers externally, the empire declines and collapses.

Developments in the Soviet bloc have followed just such a course and have had a corresponding impact on the world's geopolitical map. The vigor and intensity of once-hidden impulses for change were shown by the USSR's opening toward the U.S. and its attempt to secure American assistance in return for the removal of the Iron Curtain. The USSR has been prepared to reach agreements for dismantling strategic weapons, and to resolve regional conflicts that in the past were fertile ground for Soviet expansion. Thus the attitude of the superpowers toward the Arab-Israeli conflict is no longer determined by their old rivalry, but by a willingness to cooperate in resolving the conflict for the sake of world and regional peace.

The parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict—the central conflict in the Middle East now that the Iran-Iraq war has ended—must therefore reconsider what is best for their people. Reconciliation for the sake of peace? Or continuous political stalemate, which would mean end-

less bloodshed and the investment of resources for war rather than welfare?

Israeli negotiations with prominent statesmen in the Arab world began as early as 1970. Only after the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, however, did an Arab party begin to consolidate in favor of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict by peaceful means. War had by that time shown itself to be politically meaningless as well as inflicting unbearable casualties.

But from 1974 onward (the year in which partial agreements with Egypt and Syria were signed), the superpower contest for influence and strategic footholds in the area placed obstacles in the way of a comprehensive resolution of the conflict. The USSR prevented the success of a peace process under American auspices through its client states in the region, notably Syria, while the U.S. was not willing to allow the USSR to increase its influence in the area through involvement in the peace process. The U.S., through its mediating efforts, succeeded in leading the parties to interim agreements between Israel and Egypt and Syria, and to a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. However, even the Camp David agreements could not serve as the basis for a comprehensive and lasting peace.

**S**INCE 1988, however, the necessary conditions for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace have been created. It is no longer possible to argue that the superpower contest in the Middle East is a major obstacle, or that no Arab party favors a comprehensive peace, or that the establishment of a Palestinian state will inflict a disaster upon Israel, or that a substitute for the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people can be found, or that the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip can simply be suppressed, or that it is possible to maintain the separate peace

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*General Tamir played a major role in the peace process with Egypt and has been instrumental in developing the infrastructure for Israel's national security throughout his career as chief of the Strategic Planning Branch in the Israel Defense Forces, National Security Advisor, and Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office and of the Foreign Ministry.*



with Egypt indefinitely, or, finally, that the involvement of the USSR in the peace process might result in the extension of its strategic footholds in the area.

Despite their military strength and widespread international support, the Arab states have not yet succeeded in enforcing terms upon Israel either by military or by political means. Nor, indeed, will they succeed in the future. Nor will the PLO and its international terrorist allies. It should be equally clear, however, that Israel cannot enforce peace terms upon the Arab states or the Palestinian people either.

Thus the resolution of the conflict depends, in the first instance, upon the will of Israel, Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian people. If agreement is achieved among these parties, it will gain the support of the rest of the Arab world. There is today an Arab party, which includes Syria and Iraq, seeking peace, and the superpowers are willing to assist the combatants to achieve it. The major problems that have to be resolved in order to do so are: the drawing of borders between Israel and its neighbors, and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

We have learned that a comprehensive peace is much more desirable than interim agreements that arise from an unwillingness to confront the fundamental problems of Israel's borders and a Palestinian state. Interim agreements cannot remove the threat of war. That requires a comprehensive peace, which in turn requires the framework of a common strategic and economic regional system, such as exists in Western Europe and, doubtless, will soon exist elsewhere.

As long as there are threats of war and terrorism, Israel must maintain the security borders on the Jordan River and on the Golan Heights. Yet no Arab party can make peace on the basis of such security borders. We must therefore reach the sort of compromise that is only possible within the framework of a community of nations with a common market, open borders, and mutual security arrangements. Such arrangements would include the demilitarization of unconventional weapons in the area, substantial reductions in conventional forces and, especially, strategic weapons, the holding back of conventional forces from both sides of the border, demilitarization of military forces and infrastructure in the future Palestinian state, and common systems to fight terrorism and to supervise security provisions. The formation of such a system would also solve the border problem, since the borders would be of an administrative character rather than fortified lines with electrified fences erected in the face of the threats of war and terrorism (the so-called security borders).

As for the Palestinian problem, let us recall the failure of all attempts since the peace treaty with Egypt to resolve this by solutions that fall short of a Palestinian state. No fewer than four American initiatives seeking to resolve the Palestinian issue within a Jordanian framework ended up failing: the first Reagan plan of 1982, the second Reagan plan of 1985 (following the Hussein-Arafat agreement), the London agreement between Hussein and Peres (which was achieved through American mediation), and the Shultz plan of 1988.

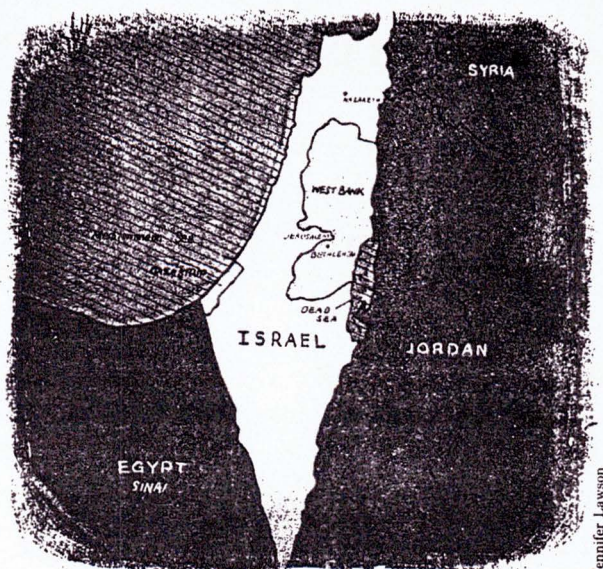
We are now witnessing the problems provoked by the latest American initiative, which was itself based on Prime Minister Shamir's peace plan. Neither negotiations with the PLO nor any compromise over the territories was ever among the real objectives of this plan. That reduces the plan, in effect, to free elections in the territories to choose Palestinian representatives who would then hold negotiations with Israel.

But the negotiations themselves are highly problematic since they require contacts with the PLO, whether direct or indirect. And even if a representative body were to be successfully elected, it would not be possible to hold negotiations for an interim settlement of the Palestinian problem if that settlement was never allowed to touch on the fundamentals of a permanent settlement, the first of which is a territorial compromise in return for peace.

For it is increasingly obvious that there is no prospect of a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors, or even of a separate peace with Jordan and the Palestinian people, on the basis of resolving the Palestinian problem either under Israeli rule (the Likud's interpretation of the Camp David agreement on autonomy), or under Jordanian rule (the real meaning of a Jordanian-Palestinian federation), or under an Israeli-Jordanian condominium. Therefore, the only solution left is the establishment of a Palestinian state.

**I**SRAEL cannot afford to agree to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state as long as the risks of war and terrorism require security borders. But a Palestinian state established within the framework of a security and economic regional system in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and based on the security arrangements specified earlier, would not threaten Israel's security.

The time has come for the U.S., assisted by the USSR and Egypt, to initiate a comprehensive peace rather than pursue interim agreements that offer no lasting political or security benefits. An American initiative should seek to establish an international conference



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under American-Soviet auspices, initially to promote direct negotiations among Israel, its neighbors, and the PLO, but with the ultimate aim of a comprehensive peace.

To sum up, a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace must be based on the following principles:

1. A security and economic regional system—a Middle East community patterned after the Western European community.

2. A state for the Palestinians established on the basis of a territorial compromise in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

3. Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, as also the capital of the Middle East community, with the Muslim sacred places under the protection of the community's institutions.

4. The determination of the international border between Israel and Syria on the basis of a territorial compromise in the Golan Heights.

5. Economic assistance provided by the world's major

industrial states in order to stabilize the economic condition of states in a region that suffers from severe economic problems.

As long as peace is not achieved in the Middle East, a state of war will continue to prevail, leading to an intensification of the arms race in missiles and unconventional weapons, and posing a threat to the very existence of nations, no matter where their frontiers may be located. Is this the state of security we yearn for in a world where other walls of hostility are being everywhere knocked down?

After more than forty years of unsuccessful war, the Arabs have a clear interest in peace with Israel. And Israel should equally prefer the peace-borders of a Jewish state living in amity with its neighbors, to the war-borders of a state ruling over a Palestinian people that is increasing in number and is in constant revolt. If self-interest is their guide, the two sides should be capable of establishing a regional system that will provide welfare and security to all nations in the Middle East. □

## RESPONSES

### DANIEL PIPES

**G**ENERAL TAMIR combines faulty history with erroneous assumptions about Arab willingness to make peace. The result is a hopeless mélange of wishful thinking and political impetuosity.

First a little history: It is nonsense to intimate that, had it not been for the great powers, Middle Easterners would have made peace after 1974. The last 15 years have witnessed the rise of Palestinian terrorism and PLO political prominence, both widely supported by Arab states. This genuine expression of Arab rejectionism cannot be blamed on U.S. or Soviet diplomacy.

Second, General Tamir's assumptions are questionable. How does he know that the Soviets wish to resolve the conflict "for the sake of world and regional peace"? That the Syrian and Iraqi governments are part of "an Arab party . . . seeking peace"? That Arabs as a whole "have a clear interest in peace with Israel"? General Tamir puts forward contentious interpretations as matters of simple fact; they are not.

Third, General Tamir's policy prescriptions are terrible. If the U.S. Government abandoned its pursuit of interim agreements in favor of a comprehensive peace, as he suggests, it would thereby offer to those least interested in reconciliation a veto over the peace process.

The five principles for a peace settlement defy logic or common sense.

1. What does it mean to call on Middle Easterners to resemble Western Europeans? This is preposterous: Are Lebanese to emulate Norwegians? Iraqis, Belgians?

2. A sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be inherently unstable. If it survived the predations of its Arab neighbors, the irresistible urge to expand beyond constricted borders would lead to war with Israel. That war would, I wager, leave Palestine or Israel standing, but not both.

3. The Jerusalem issue cannot be so easily finessed; Palestinians demand that it be their capital, not Israel's or that of some fictive "Middle East community."

4. Territorial compromise in the Golan Heights defies experience; and it presumes changes in Syrian attitudes that have not occurred.

5. It is glib to assert that industrial countries will subsidize an Arab-Israeli peace. But assume they will: since when are Arabs or Israelis willing to call off their bitter struggle for the sake of cash?

These bad ideas appear to reflect the frustration and political weakness of Israeli's Labor Party. General Tamir, you have worked so long for a real peace settlement—compel yourself to wait a little longer. □

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