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# THE PALESTINE PROBLEM IN PUBLIC DEBATE

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*This section is devoted to short reports of conferences, meetings, symposia and other events dealing with topics directly related to, or which have implications for, the question of Palestine.*

## **The League of Arab States, International Symposium on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Arab Territories, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., 22–24 April 1985.**

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This Arab League symposium constituted the first such international gathering to focus exclusively on the question of Israeli settlements. The conference was intended to evaluate international efforts exerted to date to resolve the settlement issue and to inspire guidelines to protect the Palestinian people and support their struggle for the attainment of their legitimate rights. Three hundred representatives of the UN, international organizations and non-governmental agencies as well as journalists participated in the two and a half day program.

The symposium hosted numerous distinguished political figures. Secretary General of the League of Arab States, Chedli Klibi opened the symposium. Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan then addressed the conference by video. Coverage of the various aspects of the settlement issue was exhaustive. Panel titles included: "Israeli Settle-

ments in Historical Perspective," "Israeli Settlements in International Fora," "Jerusalem: Israeli Concepts, Policies and Practices," "Economics of Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories," "Palestinian Resistance to the Israeli Settlements," and "Impact of Israeli Settlements on Peace Efforts."

In an attempt to capture the attention of a Western audience, those who presented papers as well as those who chaired sessions and served as discussants were, with only a few exceptions, American and European scholars, political figures and activists. Among the many well-known personalities who either spoke or chaired panels were: Sean MacBride, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Lord Caradon, Bruno Kreisky, Prof. Jacques Berque and Vanessa Redgrave.

The 300 participants in the symposium included numerous members of the Washington diplomatic community. Conspicuous in its absence, however, was any official US government representation. (The American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) yearly conference was held concurrently and captured substantial US congressional and official attendance.) The symposium's failure to attract government

representatives, in the US capital, despite its careful planning and impressive execution, underscored the difficulties involved in trying to change US Middle East policy, especially its approach to the Arab-Israeli dispute. It was noted in the closing session that the onus for modifying US policy is largely on the Arab states. Until they make continued US support for Israeli settlements politically or economically costly, the US has no reason to change its policy course.

### **The Twenty-Sixth Annual Policy Conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Crystal City, Virginia, 21–23 April 1985.<sup>1</sup>**

Fourteen hundred people (including 450 student activists from 126 different college campuses) attended the conference which provided AIPAC an opportunity to report to its membership on its legislative activities over the past year and to outline the legislative agenda for the coming year. The panels and workshops held during the conference were designed to familiarize AIPAC members with the issues of foreign aid, Israel's economic crisis, and arms sales to the Arab world, all in preparation for presenting AIPAC's case to their senators and representatives.

Executive Director Tom Dine set the tone for the three-day conference in his "State of AIPAC" address. He praised the Reagan administration's pro-Israeli stance. "For one bright moment it appears that an American administration has come to understand the realities of the Middle East and has fashioned its policies accordingly."

<sup>1</sup>This report is adapted from a longer article published by MEPARC, the Middle East Policy and Research Center, Washington, D.C.

According to Dine, "The 99th Congress is proving to be the most pro-Israel ever, and it follows the superb record of the 98th Congress."

Secretary of State George Shultz used his address<sup>2</sup> to the conference to restate the Administration's policy in the Middle East. He called the creation of the state of Israel an "historic and blessed event which marked the entrance onto the world stage of a new democracy, a new defender of liberty, and a new nation committed to human progress and peace."

The conferees broke up into four separate workshops to discuss "The Issues and the Issue Makers." Each workshop consisted of a regional chairman of AIPAC, a congressman, and a member of AIPAC's legislative staff. The aim of the workshops was to develop the art of effective lobbying.

M.J. Rosenberg, editor of the *Near East Report*, AIPAC's newsletter, and Jonathan Kessler, AIPAC's "leadership development coordinator" spoke at a panel entitled "Two Battlefields: The Press and the Campus." Rosenberg remarked that media coverage of Israel had changed for the worse over the past thirty-five years, particularly after 1967, when the focus shifted to coverage of Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza. Since 1977, the press coverage has deteriorated even further.

Kessler described American college campuses as "battlegrounds" between "anti- and pro-Israel" forces. The main source of anti-Israel "propagandists" are the 90,000 Arab and Iranian students studying in the US. Groups such as the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS), the Muslim Student Association and the Organization of Arab Students

<sup>2</sup>For full text of Shultz's speech see "Special Documents" this issue of *JPS*.

are, according to Kessler, financed and controlled by "terrorist groups in the Middle East." These students are particularly dangerous because they try to confuse Jewish students and render them politically inactive. In addition, pro-Israel students have let the "anti-Israel actors" set the parameters of discussion by not combating the "propaganda" on campus. Kessler urged students to work harder so that AIPAC can eliminate the anti-Israel elements from campus.

Arthur Chotin, deputy executive director of AIPAC gave the last major address before the conferees went to Capitol Hill to lobby. He noted that AIPAC was getting younger, more dynamic and stronger. Only five years ago, AIPAC had a budget of \$1 million. Today it has a budget of \$5 million and a membership of 50,000. Today AIPAC is able to publish monographs, train students for future leadership roles, help Congress establish a US-Israel Free Trade Agreement, and get increased aid for Israel. In closing, he urged the membership to continue planning and acting.

**Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Tenth Annual Symposium, Washington, D.C., 25–26 April 1985.**

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Entitled "The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures," the CCAS symposium brought together some of Georgetown's Middle East scholars as well as other Middle East experts from the US and the Arab world. Professor Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, Dr. Nawal Sa'dawi, and novelist al-Tayyib Salih, were but three of a distinguished gathering of men and women whose papers projected political, economic, social and cultural scenarios for the next Arab decade.

Dr. Hisham Sharabi, Professor of History at Georgetown, outlined what

emerged as some of the basic themes of the conference in his keynote address. He described the Middle East today as characterized by a socio-political structure which he termed neo-patriarchy, a social formation "which is . . . corrupted patriarchy wedded to distorted modernity." In setting the stage for the predictions of the papers and panels which followed, Dr. Sharabi suggested that rather than accepting the path of the past, the Arab ruling class might substantially brighten the outlook for the next decade by pursuing the following objectives: dismantling systems of internal oppression; introducing rationality into economic behavior by treating national wealth as a social possession; establishing a minimum basis of inter-Arab cooperation based on pan-Arab interest; maintaining a common Arab front in all international dealings; and acting collectively to end the Iraqi-Iranian war and to resolve the Palestine question.

The challenges and obstacles involved in achieving these objectives, however, were reflected in the pessimistic scenarios presented by the panels. Panel VI, "The Arab-Israeli Conflict" was no exception. Professor Joel Beinin of Stanford University presented a paper on Israel and its future as a garrison state: a political formation in which the military is the central social institution. He noted that both the Labor and Likud leadership have roots in the Israeli military, an institution whose status has increased dramatically. The erosion of Labor Zionism and the rise of religious, chauvinist sentiment in Israel is—and will likely continue to be—influenced by Israel's military role in the Middle East. Consequently, in Beinin's view, the likelihood of another Arab-Israeli war is strong.

Professor Naseer Aruri of Southeastern Massachusetts University presented a similar picture in his paper "The Palestinian

*Impasse: Constraints and Opportunities.*" Dr. Aruri discussed developments since 1967 by dividing the period into three parts. The first, 1967–1973, witnessed the rise and fall of the Palestinian revolutionary current. The years 1973–1977 ushered in increased diplomatic efforts and oil wealth. The final period, 1977–1982 brought what he termed the "Israeli counter-offensive."

Military analyst Anthony Cordesman's presentation "The Implications of Current Trends in the Arab-Israeli Balance" discussed the ratios of military hardware and effectiveness among regional actors and concluded that although the Syrian military remains inferior to the Israeli military in many respects, the meaning of the "Arab-Israeli military balance" has, in fact, come to mean the "Israeli-Syrian balance." Professor Seth Tillman of Georgetown University presented the final paper in which he criticized current US policy in the region. He contended a president with the courage and vision of an Eisenhower could produce a more positive US approach to the region. He concluded, however, that barring such a change, prospects for a peaceful resolution of the Palestine problem are dim.

### **The Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), Washington, D.C., 2–5 May 1985.**

Entitled "Making a Difference," the annual NAAA convention drew more than 600 participants from Arab-American communities around the country. In addition to a variety of political workshops the conference included several panels which dealt with current Middle East issues.

Most relevant to the Palestinian question was the panel "The Occupied Terri-

ories: How Many Minutes to Midnight?" which was preceded by a live televideo address by Jordan's King Hussein.<sup>3</sup> The panel included Hasan 'Abd al-Rahman, Director of the Jordan Information Office; Akram Barakat, Director of the Jordan Information Bureau; Talcott Seelye, former US ambassador to Syria; and Dr. Rafic Jouejati, Syrian ambassador to the US.

Mr. 'Abd al-Rahman stated that the primary struggle of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories is the struggle to maintain their identity in the face of Israeli policies. He accused the US of being an accomplice of the Israelis by, among other policies, placing restrictions on potential members of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

Ambassador Seelye traced the historical developments which he characterized as the legacy of the 1967 war. Among them he noted the emergence of the US as the major arms supplier to Israel; the increasing importance and growing international recognition of the PLO; the disintegration of Lebanon; the rise of right-wing elements in Israel; and the development of greater pragmatism in the Arab world as evidenced by the Camp David Accords, the Fez Peace Plan and the February 1985 Jordanian-Palestinian agreement.

Ambassador Jouejati deplored the fact that rule of force was stifling international law in the Middle East. He stressed that the Arab world will "not give up dignity, not accept injustice and will not tire in calling for a global solution" to the peace process under the auspices of the UN in Geneva.

Reflecting on the title of the panel,

<sup>3</sup>For full text see the speech of His Majesty King Hussein in this issue of *JPS*.

Akram Barakat countered that it was in fact eighteen years past midnight for the Palestinians. Despite the recent findings of the West Bank Data Project which reported that fifty-two percent of the West Bank has been officially taken by the Israe-

lis, Barakat insisted that the Palestinian residents of the occupied territories are an ineradicable fact. Rather than speculating about how many minutes remain before midnight the more appropriate question is "How many minutes to dawn?"