
Chapter Two
The Camp David Negotiations: Myths and Facts

The Camp David Summit of July 2000 has been perceived as a turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The Israeli perspective, shared by both doves and hawks, was that Barak "broke every imaginable taboo" and offered concessions that no Israeli prime minister offered before, or could possibly offer again in the future. According to this version of the story, Barak offered to return 90 percent of the occupied West Bank and all of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. All he wanted in return was to annex 10 percent of the land with the big settlement blocs, where 150,000 Israelis already had their home. Regarding the most sensitive issue of Jerusalem, to which the Israelis feel particularly attached, he took an enormous risk, agreeing to divide the city and recognize part of it as the capital of the future Palestinian state. However, according to this version of the story, the Palestinian negotiators rejected these generous proposals, and failed even to come up with constructive counterproposals. Thus, they not only missed another historical opportunity, but also betrayed their rooted unwillingness to accept the existence of the Jewish state, or live in peace with it. Hence, according to this version of things, Israel's new war of defense against the Palestinians was inevitable.

To date, that version of history is the one that has been adopted by the United States and reinforced by Western media. The power of constant repetition has given it the status of objective truth in many people's minds. The first cracks in the story began to appear a year later when U.S. official Robert Malley's revelations were published. Malley was special assistant for Arab-Israeli affairs to President Bill Clinton from 1998 to 2001 and participated in the Camp David negotiations. He took extensive notes at the time, and after a year of observing the silence of the West regarding Israel's brutality toward the Palestinians, he went public in a series of articles published in the *New York Times*. Malley wrote:

> Many have come to believe that the Palestinians' rejection of the Camp David ideas exposed an underlying rejection of Israel's right to exist. But consider the facts: The Palestinians were arguing for the creation of a Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967, borders, living alongside Israel. They accepted the notion of Israeli annexation of West Bank territory to accommodate settlement blocs. They accepted the principle of Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem—neighborhoods that were not part of Israel before the Six Day War in 1967. And, while they insisted on recognition of the refugees' right of return, they agreed that it should be implemented in a manner that protected Israel's demographic and security interests by limiting the number of returnees. No other Arab party that has negotiated with Israel— not Anwar el-Sadat's Egypt, not King Hussein's Jordan, let alone Hafez al-Assad's Syria—ever came close to even considering such compromises.  

Apart from the facts, the biggest distortion in the dominant perspective of Camp David has been the symmetry it imposes on the two sides—that they were both facing equal sacrifices that the rejectionist Palestinians were not willing to undertake. The Western world has great sympathy for the difficulties of Israel. In the eyes of Israel giving up even an inch of the occupied territories is an enormous sacrifice. It means renouncing dreams about the historical promised land where the ancestors of the Israeli people lived two thousand years ago. It is also a huge political sacrifice. Anybody willing to give up anything is risking right-wing agitation, and the Palestinians should understand this fragile dynamic ruling all Israeli governments.

What has gained far less attention and sympathy is the sacrifices of the Palestinian people. Their historical ties to the land are much more current than ancient biblical times. Up until 1948, the Palestinian people lived in the whole land of Palestine/Israel. Many who remember their childhood
homes there are still alive, and many others grew up with dreams and memories passed on by their parents. Still, they agreed to give up 78 percent of the homeland of their parents and elders. As I mentioned, the division of the country along the lines of the pre-1967 border would leave the Palestinians with 22 percent of what they view as their original land. They accepted that division in 1988, and reconfirmed it in Oslo. Since Oslo, mainstream Palestinian society has given up on armed struggle and even on political struggle to regain that land. For seven years the Palestinians kept waiting for Israel to carry out its pledge to return their 22 percent of the land. And during the wait, all the Palestinians would hear echoing from Israel and the West was that their sacrifice was still not enough.

Now let's look at the facts. Did Barak really offer—at Camp David or in later negotiations—what is attributed to him by the dominant Western view? To begin with, official claims about Barak’s offers come with no documentation to substantiate them. As Akiva Eldar, a senior analyst at Ha’aretz, pointed out, “Hardly anyone has any idea what those understandings are. No one has seen the paper summarizing these understandings, because no such paper exists. Veteran diplomats cannot recall political talks whose content was not put down on paper.”

This is also confirmed by Malley’s documentation:

If there is one issue that Israelis agree on, it is that Barak broke every conceivable taboo and went as far as any Israeli prime minister had gone or could go...Even so, it is hard to state with confidence how far Barak was actually prepared to go. His strategy was predicated on the belief that Israel ought not to reveal its final positions—not even to the United States—unless and until the endgame was in sight. Had any member of the U.S. peace team been asked to describe Barak’s true positions before or even during Camp David—indeed, were any asked that question today—they would be hard-pressed to answer.... The final and largely unnoticed consequence of Barak's approach is that, strictly speaking, there never was an Israeli offer.... The Israelis always stopped one, if not several, steps short of a proposal. The ideas put forward at Camp David were never stated in writing, but orally conveyed. They generally were presented as U.S. concepts, not Israeli ones; indeed, despite having demanded the opportunity to negotiate face to face with Arafat, Barak refused to hold any substantive meeting with him at Camp David out of fear that the Palestinian leader would seek to put Israeli concessions on the record. Nor were the proposals detailed. If written down, the American ideas at Camp David would have covered no more than a few pages. Barak and the Americans insisted that Arafat accept them as general "bases for negotiations" before launching into more rigorous negotiations.10

Nevertheless, despite this smoke screen, much information that was omitted from the official history was leaked to the Israeli press. These leaks enable us to examine what Barak was actually willing to offer.

**Point of Departure: The Beilin – Abu Mazen Plan**

Barak’s proposal at Camp David was based on a document known as the Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings.11 This document was completed, after extensive secret negotiations, in the last week of October 1995, just days before a Jewish law student assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.12 In Israeli discourse, the plan was described as a far-reaching concession, one that no Israeli prime minister was willing to accept, until Barak.

In fact, the Beilin-Abu Mazen Plan is a shameful document that leaves all the settlements untouched. On the eve of the Camp David summit—June 21, 2000—then Justice Minister Yossi Beilin presented the document to the cabinet meeting of the Israeli government. Its content, as summarized in Ha'aretz, was that Israel would withdraw from 90 to 95 percent of the West Bank: "About 130 settlements will remain under Israeli sovereignty, 50 will stay within the Palestinian state. In the Jordan Valley, which will be under Palestinian sovereignty, Israeli military forces will be posted. The Palestinian state will recognize Western Jerusalem s the capital of Israel, while Israel will recognize that the [portion of the] area defined as 'Al-Quds' prior to the six days war which
exceeds the area annexed to Israel in 1967 will be the capital of the Palestinian state...Temple Mount [Al-Aqsa complex] will be given to Palestinian Sovereignty..."\(^{13}\)

Read briefly, the text may seem to include some Israeli concessions. What gives this impression is the statement that Israel will recognize Palestinian sovereignty over 90 to 95 percent of the West Bank. But a closer reading reveals a different picture. The question is what precisely Israel means by "sovereignty." Inside the Palestinian "sovereign area," fifty Israeli settlements will remain intact and Israeli forces will remain in the Jordan Valley. As we shall see directly, the complex language describing "Al-Quds" means that the Palestinian capital will be the remote village of Abu-Dis. A better picture of the plan can be drawn from how Beilin himself described it in an interview in March 1996:

> As an outcome of my negotiations, I can say with certainty that we can reach a permanent agreement not under the overt conditions presented by the Palestinians, but under a significant compromise [on their side]...I discovered on their side a substantial gap between their slogans and their actual understanding of reality—a much bigger gap than on our side. They are willing to accept an agreement which gives up much land, without the dismantling of settlements, with no return to the '67 border, and with an arrangement in Jerusalem which is less than municipality level.\(^{14}\)

A charitable interpretation of these understandings would be that its authors entertained the hope that, assuming the establishment of a real, independent Palestinian state in the future, it would be possible for the residents of fifty Jewish settlements to live in peace, as citizens of the new state, accepting its laws, and restricting themselves to the land they already sit on, just as Palestinians live within the green line as citizens of Israel. If so, it would take a blatant ignorance of the history of Israel and its recent politics to believe that Israel will give up the "defense needs" of these settlers, their land reserves, and the bypass roads connecting them to Israel. In fact, leaving these settlements intact would entail that 40 to 50 percent of the newly created state would consist of areas that Palestinians would have no access to.

The Israeli press described the cabinet meeting at which the Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings were presented as a historic event: "This was a dramatic moment in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations...For the first time, the top governmental forum has received a full report of the details of the understandings between the person who is considered Arafat's top confidant, and the person who was considered at the time Peres' top confidant. Though parts of the agreement were leaked before, it was the first time the cabinet members were given a chance learn its full details."\(^{15}\)

As with anything surrounding the Camp David negotiations, the overall Israeli perception was that in accepting the line of the Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings, Israel was entering an era of unprecedented concessions. It is therefore interesting to observe the reaction of Nathan Sharansky, one of the most outspoken right-wing members of the government, who was notably against any concessions. Apparently surprised by how much the Palestinians were willing to give up, "Sharansky asked Beilin if he was sure that Abu Mazen shared these understandings, to which [the] Justice Minister answered: 'take your car, go half an hour to Ramallah and find out with him.'"\(^{16}\)

This of course did not stop Sharansky from resigning later in protest of Israel's "concessions."

As we shall see, Barak's proposal at Camp David was just a worsened version of the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan. As far as it is known, this plan had already been approved by Arafat at the time it was conceived—though it is not clear to what degree Palestinian society was aware of its details. As with all other rounds of negotiations since Oslo, such details were carefully concealed from the Palestinian people. Information readily available in the Israeli press did not—and does not—make it to the Palestinian media, which is heavily censored by the Palestinian Authority.

That Arafat approved this shameful plan is not entirely surprising. His road of defeat and collaboration had started long before, on the eve of Oslo. Still, the implementation of the plan leaves much to the goodwill of Israel, and it is possible that Arafat hoped he would get a more favorable implementation of the plan than that which Barak tried to force on him at Camp David.
What Barak Offered at Camp David

The crucial turning point at Camp David was that Barak demanded that the sides sign a "final agreement," accompanied by a Palestinian declaration of an "end of conflict." Had the Palestinians signed such a declaration, they would have lost all legal standing for future claims based on UN resolutions. Of course, Barak’s demand was clothed in language that was hard to disagree with, as when he said, "If the Palestinians want to establish a state, they must first declare that the century-old Jewish-Arab conflict has come to an end." It is only the finale that clarifies that this is, in fact, a threat: "The alternative," Barak added, "is a bloody confrontation that would bring no gain."

Up to the present, the abiding legal basis for negotiations has been UN resolutions—most notably Resolution 242, passed on November 22, 1967, which requires the "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," but also Resolution 194 of December 11, 1948, regarding the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, and other resolutions passed over the years. If the Palestinians declare an "end of conflict" and sign a final agreement as Barak demanded, then, formally, it is this new agreement that will be legally binding in the future, and previous UN resolutions will be nullified.

Further information gathered from three recent books published by Israeli politicians involved in the negotiations—Gil’ad Sher, Shlomo Ben-Ami, and Yossi Beilin—reveal that Barak specifically demanded that the new agreement legally replace UN Resolution 242. In a review of these books in Le Monde Diplomatique, Amnon Kapeliouk briefly summarizes this point:

The Palestinians took care to base all negotiations with Israel on Resolution 242...This was the reason for Barak's declared intention of bypassing this resolution by turning the agreement he wanted to sign with the Palestinians into "an agreed-upon interpretation of 242" (Sher, p 21). Ben-Ami proposed transforming "the Clinton parameters "...in to a special Security Council resolution that would be defined as an accepted translation of 242 (Ben-Ami, p 345). Beilin is the only one of the three writers who conies out against this trickiness. He criticizes Barak's foolish attempt several months before the Camp David summit to stipulate that Resolution 242 does not apply to the border between Israel and the Palestinians. These statements, writes Beilin "...aggravated the distrust before and during the Camp David talks" (p 249).

Beilin, in an article from November 2001, emphasized further this difference between the original Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings and what Barak tried to force in Camp David: "The understandings did not include an explicit declaration of the end of the conflict, although that was implicit in their content." Beilin also argues that contrary to standard claims, "the Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings were never proposed by Israel.... On May 19, 2000, during Ehud Barak's term as prime minister, two months before the Camp David summit, Sandy Berger, the national security adviser for President Bill Clinton, visited Israel and met with Abu Mazen and with me in order to discuss the 1995 understandings." Based on Berger's conclusions, "Clinton accepted the proposal and wanted to put forward the understandings at the opening of the summit meeting at Camp David. Barak objected vehemently and insisted on an explicit reference to the end of the conflict."

Under the conditions that Barak put for the final agreement, an end of conflict declaration was not something that Arafat could have accepted, nor something he could have concealed from his people.

Coverage of the conflicts that emerged during and after the Camp David negotiations focused primarily on symbolic issues—the holy sites in Jerusalem and the right of return. But the debates surrounding these issues only mask the real problem: that in concrete matters of land and resources, Barak offered nothing at Camp David, except the preservation of the existing state of affairs. Let us review, then, the details of his offer, as revealed in the Israeli media.
The Central Settlement Blocs

The only undisputed fact about Barak's offers at Camp David is that he proposed that the big settlement blocs—in which 150,000 of the settlers are concentrated—be annexed to Israel in the final agreement. In the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan, only the settlements themselves were to be annexed to Israel, achieved by drawing up a rather winding map that surrounds these settlements but includes no land on which Palestinians are living. Israel's strategy in doing it this way was to avoid the need of giving any Palestinians Israeli citizenship, and thus any accompanying social rights such as health care, or the right to vote. That, however, was not good enough for Barak, who "straightened" the maps, thus expanding the areas to be annexed. The annexation proposed at Camp David also includes the areas between the settlements, containing approximately 120,000 Palestinian residents. Barak's solution to the "citizenship problem" was not Israeli citizenship, since "they will vote for the Palestinian state." This enables annexing of the land without giving any rights to the annexed Palestinian residents.

Jerusalem

One myth repeated over and over is that Barak, whose campaign promises included a "unified Jerusalem as the capital of Israel for ever," agreed at Camp David to divide Jerusalem. This belief is shared by both right- and left-wing Israeli, and was the center of many political storms and right-wing demonstrations. In fact, there is not a grain of truth to this contention.

When one hears "the division of Jerusalem," the idea that comes to mind is that East Jerusalem—the part of Jerusalem that was conquered by Israel in the 1967 war—will be Palestinian, and will serve as the capital of the future Palestinian state. Or at least those areas of East Jerusalem still populated by Palestinians will be Palestinian. East Jerusalem has always been the center of Palestinian society, not just because of its religious and symbolic status, which is so emphasized, but also because it sits at the juncture connecting the different regions of the West Bank. East Jerusalem hosts many Palestinian institutions. Along with the famous Orient House, there are myriad welfare and research organizations dealing with health, water, housing, culture, and ecology. The infrastructure for a functioning capital already existed there, and many believed, following the solemn promises of Oslo, that it would indeed develop into such.

However, it is not East Jerusalem that Israel offered as the Palestinian capital. Let us look again at the clause about Jerusalem in the summary of the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan, cited above: "Israel will recognize that the [portion of the] area defined as 'Al-Quds' prior to the six days war which exceeds the area annexed to Israel in 1967 will be the capital of the Palestinian state...." This whole formulation rests on a verbal trick. The municipal borders of Jerusalem, under Jordanian rule, were broader on the southeast side than the municipal borders defined by Israel when it annexed East Jerusalem. They also included the village Abu-Dis and two neighboring villages. It is in fact this neighboring village of Abu-Dis that is designed in the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan to serve as the capital of the Palestinian state. The verbal trick was that Abu-Dis would be named Al-Quds—the Arab name of Jerusalem, meaning "the holy city." It is only through this deceptive use of definitions that Israel can claim that it proposes that the city be divided into the Jewish part, "Jerusalem," and the Palestinian part, "Al-Quds."

In fact, this part of the Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings has been long accepted by all parties. Behind the smoke screen of declarations regarding the liberation of Jerusalem, Arafat had already expressed his agreement with the Israeli position. For example, Akiva Eldar of Ha'aretz reported as early as 1998 that "Yasser Arafat accepts the idea that the capital of the Palestinian state will be Abu-Dis, neighboring Jerusalem, and sees the understandings included in the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement as a realistic option for the final agreement with Israel.... In a meeting with the Middle East section of the Foreign Affairs Council whose center is in New York...Arafat was asked if it is possible to reach an agreement with Israel also on the question of Jerusalem. Arafat: 'Certainly, it is possible to accept the idea of Abu-Dis, which belonged to Al-Quds also under Jordanian rule.'"
All previous Israeli governments agreed that Abu-Dis would be Palestinian, and would serve in the future as the capital of the Palestinian entity (which some agreed to call a state, and others did not). Israel's condition was that Palestinian institutions would move from East Jerusalem to Abu-Dis. The Palestinians were authorized to build their future parliament house and government offices there, and these buildings were essentially completed long before Camp David. Here is a May 2000 report, from the *Independent* (UK), on the realities of Abu-Dis:

"Palestinian Authority: Economics Studies Centre," reads the grimy Arabic sign high on the wall of the imposing new [parliament] building rising on a rocky, ragged hillside in the West Bank village of Abu Dis.... Abu Dis is one of three neighboring Arab villages that the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, is planning to deliver to full Palestinian self-rule as a "down payment" towards a Palestinian state. Optimistic Israelis suggest that Mr. Arafat could call it Al Quds (Arabic for Jerusalem) and establish his capital there.... So, the spin goes, Palestine would have its capital in Al Quds, as Mr. Arafat promises his people daily, and Israel would retain Jerusalem as the 'eternal, undivided capital of the Jewish people.' Except that, as Othman Muhamad Qurei, the 72-year-old mukhtar (village headman), explains: "We are proud that we are going to have a parliament here, but we are not proud that they say this is Jerusalem. Abu Dis is a suburban village," he says, "Jerusalem is where you go if you want to buy shoes."24

The Palestinians believed that Abu-Dis and its neighboring village Al-Azaria were to be included in the "second redeployment" that was agreed upon in Sharm-A-Sheich in September 1999, namely that they would be transferred into full Palestinian control (area A). "For six months I am being promised that I will get Abu-Dis, and nothing happens," Arafat complained in May 2000. However, Barak kept denying that, and refused the transfer. On the eve of Camp David, Barak announced that he was willing to transfer Abu-Dis and two neighboring villages "as a gesture before the summit," but still he reneged. This is confirmed in Hussein Agha and Robert Malley's report in the *New York Review of Books* (quoted above): "When Barak reneged on his commitment to transfer the three Jerusalem villages to the Palestinians—a commitment the Prime Minister had specifically authorized Clinton to convey, in the President's name, to Arafat—Clinton was furious. As he put it, this was the first time that he had been made out to be a 'false prophet.'"27

In retrospect, it is clear why Barak withheld the transfer. He strove to make the fulfillment of an old obligation a central part of his new peace deal, in return for which the Palestinians would declare an end of conflict, renouncing previous claims and UN resolutions. Dragging out old commitments and presenting them as gigantic new breakthroughs has been Israel's consistent policy since Oslo.

In any case, the big "historical concession" behind Barak's willingness to "divide Jerusalem" is nothing but willingness to consider implementation of the long-standing Israeli commitment regarding Abu-Dis using the verbal trick offered in the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan. Let us look at one example of how this "historical breakthrough" was reported in the Israeli media. The Jerusalem Post of July 27, 2000, announced in its main headline: "Source: Barak was ready to divide Jerusalem." In the body of the text, we find the following: "Prime Minister Ehud Barak, at the end of the Camp David summit, had been willing to consider the possibility of creating a Palestinian 'Al-Quds' beside the Jewish capital, effectively dividing Jerusalem, a senior official aboard his return flight confirmed yesterday." In spelling out this far-reaching concession, the text adds that the proposal involves "allowing several neighborhoods outside Jerusalem's eastern border to be annexed to the future Palestinian state." The willingness to call "neighborhoods outside Jerusalem's eastern border" Al Quds equals willingness to divide Jerusalem. That's how it went every day in every paper in Israel and in the Western world. That's how a myth becomes accepted as fact.

As for the real issue of East Jerusalem, Barak had not moved an inch since he pledged that Jerusalem would remain "the unified capital of Israel forever." East Jerusalem was annexed by Israel shortly after its occupation in 1967 (reaffirmed in a Knesset resolution in 1980), and ever since then Israel has been appropriating land and building new settlements there. All Israeli
governments have declared that this is not negotiable, and that East Jerusalem will remain Israeli. Over the years, various plans commissioned by the different governments have been prepared for future arrangements for the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. Though they differ in some details, they are all based on the assumption that the sovereignty in Jerusalem will remain Israeli, but the Palestinian neighborhoods will retain some sort of municipal control—what Beilin called "an arrangement which is less than a municipality level."28

In the creative spirit that has flourished since Oslo, the Israelis are attempting to find language that would make it look as if the Palestinians have more control in their quarters than just restricted control over municipal affairs, control that does not even include the power to authorize the construction of new buildings. An example of this issue is seen in the following Reuters story:

A senior Israeli official said Tuesday that diplomatic language was the key to resolving the Jerusalem dispute blocking an end to 52 years of conflict with the Palestinians: Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, an architect of Israel's seven-year-old talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization, said the sides were looking for constructive language for narrowing the differences. "The main point is what to call the status quo because everyone knows there will be no real change in the status quo," Beilin told Israel's Army Radio.29

"Autonomy" and "authority" were some of the favorite terms. The Jerusalem Post article cited above concludes its announcement of Barak's willingness to divide Jerusalem with the statement that the proposal "also included giving Arafat far-reaching administrative authority in most of Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods."30

In an article analyzing the details of the Israeli positions in preparation for the summit, the very well-briefed Akiva Eldar31 defined the position regarding East Jerusalem as "maintaining the existing sovereignty status, and allowing a municipal autonomy to the Arab neighborhoods, subordinate to a higher joint Palestinian-Israeli municipality." He further specified that "Israel agrees that Palestine will provide education, health, welfare, and even apply its juridic system to the 200,000 Arabs in Jerusalem." This illustrates the same concept that Barak proposed to apply to the Palestinians living in areas to be annexed by Israel: that the responsibility for Palestinian welfare and health will remain Palestinian. Although the Palestinian residents of the annexed East Jerusalem are formally Israeli citizens and their land will remain under Israeli sovereignty in the Camp David proposal, Israel will be exempt from providing them any welfare or social services.

The U.S. team at Camp David and later negotiations was viewed publicly as a tough group of moderators who tried to force both sides into more concessions. In fact, the U.S. position on Jerusalem corresponded precisely to the Israeli positions as outlined above. "The Israeli side, according to Sher's briefing, agreed to the ideas presented by Clinton in the final stages of the Camp David summit.... Clinton proposed that the [Palestinian] neighborhoods that encompass the city [i.e., Abu-Dis] be turned over to full Palestinian sovereignty. This would be done in return for the annexation of 11 Israeli settlement blocs, including Ma'alé Adumim, Givat Ze'ev and the Etzion Bloc [to Israel]." As for the rest of the Palestinian areas in Jerusalem and the Old City, the proposal was that the Palestinians receive "autonomous control over the Moslem, Christian and Armenian quarters...."32 Recall that "autonomous control" is one of the creative names invented over the years to describe the Palestinian management of municipal affairs in its quarters.

It is hard to understand how so many have swallowed the story about Barak's willingness to divide Jerusalem. The facts about Israeli proposals were amply available in the Israeli press (I cited only a minute sample here). But they were packaged with huge headlines about Barak's unprecedented new vision, and apparently this is sufficient to shape people's perception of reality.

The Rest of the West Bank and Gaza

The biggest fraud of Barak's plan, which did not receive any attention in public debate, was the fate of the Gaza Strip and of the rest of the West Bank—the 90 percent that was supposedly designated to belong to the "Palestinian state" after Israel annexed the big settlement blocs. The real question here is the fate of the settlements in these areas. Recall that approximately one-third
of the Gaza Strip is occupied by six thousand Israeli settlers, including the military bases and bypass roads needed to protect them, and that one million Palestinians are squeezed into the other two thirds. Similar proportions are also found in the "90 percent" residue of the West Bank. The remaining settlements dotted outside the big settlement blocs in these areas were purposely built over the years in the midst of the Palestinian population to enable future Israeli control of these areas.

As a result, two million Palestinians in the West Bank are crowded into four isolated enclaves that together consist of about 50 percent of the West Bank's land, and the other 40 percent are blocked by the defense array of some 40,000 settlers. The lands surrounding the settlements were confiscated during the occupation years as Israeli "state lands." These include not only the settlements themselves, but also the hills surrounding them, some of which are occupied by a single settler's caravan. As in Gaza, large areas were confiscated to construct special bypass roads for the settlers, "security zones" surrounding these roads, and army posts for their protection. Other parts of the presumed "Palestinian state" are large military and "fire zone" areas, particularly in the Jordan Valley. Israel has made it clear that these will remain military areas, as required by "security needs."

To get a sense of the current situation in the West Bank, let us look at a map (page 43). This is the only map that Barak actually presented to the Palestinians. He did so in May 2000, as a proposal for the final agreement. (Recall that the "generous Camp David offers" were not accompanied by maps or any other documentation.) First, the map reflects the fact that the West Bank is already divided into four completely isolated cantons, with no direct links to each other, or to Jordan. The white areas in the map contain the big settlement blocs, and are to be annexed to Israel, on this plan. The green areas (appearing here with stripes) are defined as "temporary Israeli security" areas, and the Palestinians will have no access to them. It is the brown areas that were presumably proposed for immediate Palestinian sovereignty. They consist of approximately 60 percent of the West Bank, not even close to the 90 percent claimed by the Israelis. (Presumably, in subsequent Israeli plans the white areas were reduced and the brown areas expanded, though no official maps exist to corroborate this.) The small map at the left [Jon watch for directional] reflects the future of the Palestinian state on this plan: five isolated cantons (including Gaza) inside Israel—with no external borders with any other country.

But the crucial point is to examine the situation inside the brown areas of supposed Palestinian sovereignty. The map also reflects the present situation in these areas: There are still approximately forty isolated Israeli settlements there (marked with white triangles). These settlements, and the roads surrounding them, further isolate the Palestinian areas into smaller enclaves, which are marked with a darker shade. In fact, before the current Intifada the Palestinians already controlled these darker areas of the map (areas A and B). If the Israeli settlements stay in these areas, the situation will remain as it is in this map, where the Palestinians control only the present areas A and B, which are together about 42 percent.

We already saw that in the Beilin-Abu Mazen plan no settlements will be dismantled; instead they will "stay under Palestinian sovereignty." The public perception was that Barak made a different offer, which includes dismantling those settlements that will not be formally annexed to Israel. But as in all other aspects of his proposal, this impression is based only on tricks of language. Consider the example of how Gil'ad Sher, an aide to Barak at Camp David described the offer: "Regarding the Gaza Strip, the parties agreed that the strip in its entirety would be handed over to the Palestinian State. The settlements there would be evacuated unless the settlers decided to live under Palestinian sovereignty." It all sounds so promising. Who would pay attention to the last clause that leaves the ultimate choice to the settlers? Precisely the same option was offered to the isolated settlements in the West Bank.

Left to decide on their own, the settlers will stay, particularly since not one Israeli government has actually given them a choice. The policy since Oslo has been to refuse all requests of settlers to relocate with compensation for the property they leave behind. Shortly after Oslo, the nonideological settlers of the Dugit settlement in the Gaza Strip sat on strike in front of the Government House in Jerusalem demanding to leave with compensation. But Rabin said "Not now!" Thousands
of others in the West Bank registered in an office that Parliament Member (PM) Hagai Merom opened for settlers wishing to relocate, but the government refused. Based on past experience, not only will the settlers stay, but the settlements will be expanded. And if the settlements stay, of course the Israeli army will stay as well to protect them, and thus the situation will remain as it is now—namely, the Palestinian "state" will consist of 42 percent of the West Bank.

Just as before, unofficial rumors were spread in the Israeli media that Israel intended to evacuate some settlements in the future, but these rumors were baseless. All relevant government offices clarified repeatedly that no plan was being prepared for the evacuation of even a single settlement. Thus, Aluf Benn of *Ha'aretz* reported that:

> According to a diplomatic source, the Barak government has not formulated a plan to evacuate isolated settlements in the framework of a unilateral separation or an agreement with the Palestinians. "There is no list of settlements intended for evacuation," the source said, adding that only general models regarding the future of the settlements had been discussed. "They will remain, will be moved into the blocks or will be evacuated. The meanings of the various alternatives have been examined, but no map or evacuation plan [sic] have been drafted. No one dealt with a plan for physical evacuation and no one will take a chance on dealing with it. We dealt only with blocks that will be annexed to Israel," the senior source said.

Israel's policy has always been that first the Palestinians need to prove that Israel's imposed arrangements work, and then "we will of course discuss and consider."

A simple gesture Israel could make, if it intended any real agreement, is to announce the scheduled dismantling of a single tiny settlement, say the four hundred settlers of Hebron who are ruining the life of an entire city. In February 1994, after Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein massacred Palestinian worshippers in a mosque near Hebron, eight ministers—a majority in the Israeli government—voted to evacuate the Hebron settlers, who then numbered less than two hundred. But Rabin said, "Not now!—such decisions should wait for the final agreement." But when the time for the final agreement had supposedly come, what Israel stated at Camp David, according to Gil'ad Sher, was that "Israel wants to retain control of Hebron for a period of thirteen to fifteen years. The Jewish residents of the city would be removed some time during this period. Kiryat Arba would remain under Israeli sovereignty. Regarding the Cave of the Patriarchs, Israel wants to introduce religious arrangements there that would resemble those on the Temple Mount."

Both Hebron and Kiryat Arba settlements are in the areas presumably designated to be moved to Palestinian "sovereignty," as they re outside the big settlement blocs that were to be annexed. Still, Kiryat Arba (included in the green area in the map discussed above) will stay Israeli forever, and the Palestinians will not have control over their holy sites even in the lands they presumably own. As for Hebron, it's the good old "not yet" tactic that the Israelis are using. The Palestinians are to trust that in thirteen to fifteen years, after the total number of settlers has tripled and a third generation of Israeli children has been born there, the conditions will be more ripe for the settlement to finally be evacuated.

Similar arrangements were proposed for the Jordan Valley. Along with the 10 percent that Israel wanted to annex, Israel stated that "12 additional percent of the land, in the Jordan valley, will remain under Israeli security control for ten to twenty years" (see again the green areas in the map). In any case, Barak clarified on several occasions that the settlements in the Jordan Valley would not be dismantled. Thus, in a meeting with settlers from the Jordan Valley, "Barak told them that in any settlement [with the Palestinians] Israel would maintain a 'security and community foothold in the area.'"

The language trick underlying both the Beilin-Abu Mazen and Barak proposals is that while the situation stays as is, the language includes some sort of Palestinian declaration of sovereignty over the land that the Palestinian Authority can present as a victory. It will even be allowed to "declare a state." White South Africa, at the peak of apartheid, offered the same to the blacks in the Bantustans. It even sought UN recognition of these Bantustans as independent states.
This means then, that if Israel annexes 10 percent of the West Bank, "leaving the Palestinian state with 90 percent of the land," 40 of the 90 percent of their "state" is land confiscated and fully controlled by Israel — areas in which Palestinians are not allowed to build, settle, farm, and, in the case of the large military areas in the Jordan Valley, even pass through.

These details correspond to an earlier Israeli plan that received more honest reporting in the Israeli media. Under the headline "A State for Annexation," the front page of the March 10, 2000, edition of *Ha'aretz* announced "the prime minister's 10-40-50 plan: 50 percent of the West Bank for the Palestinians, 40 percent under debate, and 10 percent to Israel." The plan includes a third redeployment that will increase area A—the autonomous area under the control of the Palestinian Authority—to about 50 percent of the West Bank. (As mentioned, areas A and B together comprised 42 percent of the West Bank at that time.) In this 50 percent of the land, the Palestinians will be allowed to declare a state. "The proposal will leave unresolved the status of about 40 percent of the West Bank, as well as Jerusalem and the right of return," said the *Ha'Aretz* article. That is, in return for Arafat's consent to Israel's formal annexation of the entire center of the West Bank, Arafat would be allowed to declare a Palestinian state on 50 percent of the West Bank, and to sell to his people the idea that all the other issues are still being discussed.

That March Plan is, in fact, quite old; it is an extended version of the Alon plan—labeled since Oslo as the "Alon Plus" plan—which robs the Palestinians of half of the West Bank's land. It is precisely the same March Plan that Barak offered at Camp David, but with one crucial difference: No one in the Israeli power system believed that the Palestinians would willingly accept the Alon plan and surrender half of the West Bank, which is why Barak proposed first to leave the 40 percent undecided. But at Camp David, backed by the United States, he tried nevertheless to force this as the final agreement. As mentioned, he demanded that the Palestinians declare an "end of conflict," thus renouncing all past UN resolutions and future claims—nothing would remain open for even a pretense for future negotiations. At the same time, Barak prepared the Israeli army to strike against the Palestinians, in case they refused.

The myth of generous Israeli offers at Camp David, then, is nothing but a fraud perpetuated by propaganda. The Palestinian negotiators contributed to the smoke screen around Israel's offers, as they always have. They do their best to hide from their people how little they have managed to gain after years of negotiation. The crisis with Israel's right wing on the eve of the Camp David summit contributed further to the false impression that Barak made an unprecedented offer. The fringe right wing always objects to plans to leave the Palestinians with any amount of land. In the eyes of the far right, "transfer" of the Palestinians off the land is the only solution. But other segments of the right wing were perhaps victims of the Camp David propaganda. When the headlines announced that Barak was willing to divide Jerusalem and give up 90 percent of the territories, how could they know it was a lie? In any case, right-wing fury always helps to substantiate the propaganda. Today the right wing is protesting about Sharon's "restraint" in oppressing the Palestinian uprising.

**The Right of Return**

If we need to single out one issue in the Camp David negotiations that has really convinced the majority of Israelis that peace with the Palestinians is impossible, it is the issue of the Palestinian refugees' right of return. The Israeli perception, fed as usual by massive repetition of the theme in the media, was that now that the Palestinians were finally about to get their state, they also wanted to flood Israel with waves of returning Palestinian refugees, thus leading, in effect, to two Palestinian states. Let us therefore examine this problem.

Israel's birth was in sin. As was mentioned in the introduction, during the war of 1948, 730,000 Palestinians, more than half of the Palestinian population of 1,380,000 at the time, were driven off their homeland by the Israeli army. This is an open wound that needs to be faced. It is obvious that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires resolving the issue of the Palestinian refugees.

Given natural population growth over more than fifty years, the present number of refugees is 3.7 million, as estimated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in
the Near East (UNRWA). Other estimates are even higher. Most of the refugees are in various neighboring Middle Eastern countries, and many are still in refugee camps. Twenty-two percent of all Palestinian refugees are currently in the Gaza Strip. The international community long ago established their right to return to their homeland or receive compensation. Most notable in this respect is the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of December 11, 1948. Article 11 of this resolution states that the General Assembly "Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return...."

Given the option of compensation, it is not known how many of the refugees will actually wish to return after more than fifty years in exile. Nevertheless, it is clear that the principle of their right to return should be part of any future settlement. The question debated in the negotiations is the implementation of this principle. Let's examine the issue in a broader context.

Over the years, two views emerged for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (I am talking here only about approaches based on recognizing the rights of both peoples, ignoring "Jewish only" and "Palestinian only" extremes.) One view is that Israel/Palestine should become one multi-ethnic state in which both peoples are citizens, with equal rights for all. The other is that in the historical land of Palestine two ethnically based states will be formed: Israel and Palestine. This second solution is the one that has gained the support of the majority of both peoples. The Israelis are perhaps expressing most loudly their preference for a Jewish-based state, but this second solution is also the preferred solution of the majority of the Palestinians. Even at the beginning of the present Intifada, polls showed that about 80 percent of the Palestinians still wanted a two-state solution. Although the first solution presents a deeper vision, it appears that the two peoples are not yet ready for it.

These two views also entail different conceptions regarding the implementation of the right to return. In the first view, the returning Palestinian refugees can settle anywhere on the land, including areas that are dominantly Jewish, just as Jewish immigrants can settle in areas that are dominantly Palestinian. (In both cases, this would be, of course, subject to practical considerations and human sensitivity.) But the second view—that of two states—entails that the majority of the Palestinian refugees choosing to return will settle in the Palestinian state, and that the majority of the Jewish settlers will leave the occupied territories and return to Israel.

Palestinian representatives have accepted this consequence of the two-state view for years now, at least implicitly. They considered it crucial that a number of Palestinian refugees would return to Israel proper, as part of Israel's recognition of its responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem and the principle of the right of return. However, it was understood that this number would be determined in consideration of Israel's sensitivities. Though no specific number was openly discussed, there has been ample information in both Palestinian and Israeli media about the principled readiness of the Palestinians to compromise. The Palestinians viewed the Oslo Accords of 1993 as an Israeli commitment to withdraw from the occupied territories within five years, at which point an independent Palestinian state would be formed in those territories. This newly formed Palestinian state would be free to absorb all refugees wishing to return (in addition to the smaller number returning to Israel). The others would be compensated for their suffering and the property they left behind. The assumption has been that along with Israel's contribution, there would be international assistance on this issue.

However, as the years passed by after Oslo, it became obvious that Israel did not intend to implement this commitment. The number of Israeli settlers doubled, along with the percentage of land appropriated by Israel. The situation on the ground left no space for absorbing Palestinian refugees in the future. Furthermore, as we just observed, all versions of Israel's proposals insist that even if a "final agreement" is signed, Israeli settlers will not be obliged to leave the Palestinian land.

The assumption since Oslo has been that the Palestinians are expected to keep all their commitments and concessions, while Israel is not only exempt from implementing its signed agreements, but at the same time can expand its hold on the occupied land. By the summer of
2000, grassroots Palestinian protest over this inequality began to peak. The sentiment in the streets, in the refugee camps, and in the Palestinian diaspora, was that the refugees' rights were being trampled through a process of endless negotiations and false promises, and that if Israel breached all of its commitments, the Palestinians should also return to their original demand that returning refugees can settle anywhere. They argued that if Jewish settlers can stay on Palestinian land, so should Palestinian refugees return to their homeland on Israeli soil, perhaps in the context of one multiethnic state. This protest translated into political platforms, with many organizations demanding immediate attention to the tragedy of the refugees.\textsuperscript{44}

It was in this setting of increasing Palestinian protest that Barak demanded Arafat sign an "end of conflict" declaration that would entail that the Palestinians have no further demands regarding the right of return. Arafat was expected to tell his people that it was time to let go of forever the dream of returning to their original homeland. With what vision of a new page in history could Arafat possibly convince the Palestinians that this was the right thing to do at that time? First, let us examine what a hypothetical mainstream Israeli leader, genuinely interested in ending the conflict, could have proposed.

Central to all Israeli proposals has been the demand that the big settlement blocs in the center of the West Bank (with about 150,000 settlers) will be annexed to Israel. This is already a serious deviation from the basis—declared as agreed upon by both sides—that an end of conflict entails Israeli withdrawal to the June 1967 borders, as specified in UN Resolution 242, but the hypothetical Israeli leader could argue that the process that took place in these areas is no longer reversible. However, as a modest compensation for the Palestinian loss he would offer that at least an identical number of Palestinian refugees would be allowed to return to comparable areas of their choice in the state of Israel, areas as close as possible to where the Palestinian centers were before 1948. This would be a very modest and minimal offer, which provides compensation only for what Israel took from the Palestinians after 1967. Even with bigger numbers of returning Palestinian refugees, Israel would still maintain its Jewish majority. However, I am not talking here about what I believe is both right and possible, but about what a mainstream Israeli leader could have proposed.\textsuperscript{45}

There are two levels to address when striving to solve the refugees' problem: the practical, which we have already touched upon, and the symbolic. The symbolic level involves "the narrative" of the refugee issue. An Israeli leader seeking reconciliation on the symbolic level would first recognize Israel's responsibility for creating the problem. Opening a new page in Israeli-Palestinian relations and initiating a process of healing first requires acknowledging the painful history.

Commenting on Israel's recognition of its role in the refugee situation, Uri Avneri, a leading Israeli peace activist, said:

Such acknowledgement must be explicit. It must be acknowledged that the creation of the refugee problem was an outcome of the realization of the Zionist endeavor to achieve a Jewish national renaissance in this country. It must also be acknowledged that at least some of the refugees were driven from their home by force after the battle was already over, and that their return to their homes was denied. I can imagine a dramatic event: the President or Prime Minister of Israel solemnly apologizes to the Palestinians for the injustice inflicted upon them in the realization of the Zionist aims, at the same time he emphasizes that these aims were mainly directed towards national liberation and saving millions from the Jewish tragedy in Europe. I would go further and propose the setting up of a truth committee, composed of Israeli, Palestinian and international historians, in order to investigate the events of 1948 and 1967 and submit a comprehensive and agreed report that can become part of both Israeli and Palestinian school curriculum.\textsuperscript{46}

An actual Israeli leader interested in ending the conflict has yet to materialize. It certainly was not Barak. Based on a detailed survey that appeared in \textit{Ha'aretz} a year later,\textsuperscript{47} let us just review briefly what he did offer.

On the practical level of implementing the right of return, Barak hardly offered anything: Regarding the return of Palestinians to Israel proper, Barak demanded to keep this issue to the
"sole discretion" of Israel. He insisted that "the declaration of the termination of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not be dependent on the conclusion of the process of rehabilitating the refugees. At no stage of the negotiations did Israel agree to take in more than 10,000 refugees."  

Israel's core idea was that it would be the responsibility of the international community to solve the refugees' problem. "The idea was that the international community would contribute $20 billion over a period of 15 to 20 years to settle all the refugees' claims. The funds would be given as compensation to refugee households and as an aid grant to countries that would rehabilitate refugees. The refugees would be given three options: to settle in the Palestinian state, to remain where they were, or to immigrate to countries that would voluntarily open their gates to them, such as Canada, Australia and Norway."  

The Palestinians demanded that independent of the international funds, and prior to their establishment, Israel should offer its own, even symbolic, contribution to the restitution of lost Palestinian property. Negotiations regarding a possible amount have never taken place, as Israel objected to the mere idea.  

Apart from suggesting the charity of the international community, the only commitment that Barak's "generous offer" seemed to include was the option mentioned in the quote—that those refugees wishing to return would be free to settle in the entity to be called the "Palestinian state." However, there is ample indication that Barak never intended to allow even that much. In separate discussions, Israel demanded full supervision of the borders of the "Palestinian state" with Egypt and Jordan, precisely to control any infiltration of "would-be immigrants." In Chapter X, we will see that the same demand was maintained in the later "Clinton parameters" and the Taba negotiations of January 2001.  

We are left with the symbolic level of the narrative—whether or not Israel is willing to acknowledge responsibility for the refugee problem. Resolving this issue would be of no physical cost to Israel. The least Barak could offer, if he aimed for an "end of conflict," is this acknowledgment. Creating a spirit of reconciliation does not endanger any of the declared interests of Israel. Nevertheless, even this symbolic gesture was too much for Barak. He refused, and insisted instead on vague formulations that recognized Palestinian suffering, but not Israel's historical responsibility for it.  

Based on these facts, the myths and illusions of Camp David are more transparent; one can only conclude that at Camp David Barak was neither aiming for reconciliation nor genuinely attempting to move closer to an end of conflict.

Notes

11 Beilin-Abu Mazen refers to the Israeli and Palestinian representatives Yossi Beilin and Abu Mazen (or Mahmoud Abbas). The complete text of the Beilin-Abu Mazen Plan is available online at: www.us-israel.org/jsource/Peace/beilinmazen.html.
13 Ha'aretz, main headline, June 23, 2000. (Author's translation.)
14 Interview by Lili Galili, "I Want to Entangle the Likud with as Much Peace as Possible," Ha'aretz, March 3, 1996. (Author's translation.)
15 Uzi Benziman (analysis), Ha'aretz, June 23, 2000. (Author's translation.)
16 Ibid.


The projected maps of Barak's plan and the Beilin Abu-Mazen's plan for the settlement blocs to be annexed are presented and analyzed in Danni Rubinstein, "Two maps which are hard to accept," *Ha'aretz*, January 28, 2000.

Nahum Barnea, *Yediot Aharonot*, June 30, 2000: "The Arabs living in the settlement blocks which will be annexed to Israel will have the same rights as the Israelis living in Palestine: They will vote to the Palestinian state and will live by its laws."

*Ha'aretz*, May 5, 1998. (Author's translation.)

For example, some headlines in the Israeli press: "Netanyahu Did Not Object to the Possibility That Abu Dis Will Be the Capital of Palestine" (Akiva Eldar, *Ha'aretz*, March 3, 2000); "Abu Dis Under Palestinian Control Also in Sharon's Map" (Akiva Eldar, *Ha'aretz*, May 1, 2000).


Interview by Lili Galili, "I Want to Entangle the Likud with as Much Peace as Possible," *Ha'aretz*, March 3, 1996. (Author's translation.)


The map was presented in the Eilat-Taba negotiations in May 2000, and was printed in *Yediot Aharonot* on May 19, 2000. Its English version here is taken from the July-August report of the Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington, Vol. 10, No. 4 (www.fmep.org).


Gil'ad Sher was Barak's bureau chief, and was considered his confidant. He served as a top Israeli negotiator in the years 1999 through 2000. (See footnote 14.)


For information on the Bantustans arrangement in South Africa, see the Appendix.

These are the numbers officially acknowledged in Israel, found, for example, in Uriya Shavit and Jalal Sana's "Everything you wanted to know about the 'right of return' but were too afraid to ask," *Ha'aretz* Friday Magazine, July 6, 2001. In other versions, the actual number of 1948 Palestinian refugees was higher.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)'s web site is at: www.un.org/unrwa/.

The complete text of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 is available at: www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/docs/A_RES_194.htm.


Uri Avneri notes that "it is also worthwhile to remember that in 1949 the government of David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett offered to take back 100 thousand refugees. Whatever the
motives that inspired that offer, and even if this was merely a diplomatic maneuver, the offer is an important precedent. In relation to the Jewish population in Israel at that time, this number equals 800 thousand today. In relation to the number of refugees at that time, the number equals half a million now. The decisive question is: How many can be brought back? Minimalists may speak about 100 thousand, maximalists about half a million. I myself have proposed an annual quota of 50 thousand for 10 years. But this is a subject for negotiations, which must be conducted in a spirit of good-will with the intent of putting a successful end to this painful issue, always remembering that it concerns the fate of living human beings who deserve rehabilitation after tens of years of suffering." ("The Right of Return." See following footnote.)


47 Uriya Shavit and Jalal Bana, "Everything you wanted to know about the 'right of return' but were too afraid to ask," Ha'aretz Friday Magazine, July 6, 2001.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.