

OUTLOOK

Peace in Israel and Palestine is principally possible but under the current circumstances not very likely to materialize. A lasting peace can only emerge if the principle of justice is honored. Currently, belief in the opposite seems to prevail - injustice shall create peace - and we are witnessing a 'peace process' that is not intended to lead to Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty but to the surrender of the Palestinians and their permanent subjugation.

The most important condition for a just and lasting peace was formulated by the journalist Arnold Hottinger in the preface to my book *Frieden ohne Gerechtigkeit?* (Peace Without Justice?): "The Palestinians cannot be treated 'justly' as long as one denies before oneself, before them and before the entire world how they have suffered and continue to suffer until the present day. This is not only a moral but also a basic political question. Real peace will not and cannot exist as long as the Israelis keep telling themselves and the rest of the world that they have always acted morally and in a politically sound, just and clean manner. Only if they recognize that they have inflicted a huge injustice on the Palestinians is there a possibility that a lasting peace with their current subordinates and future neighbors (?) can emerge." These sentences, written down in April 1994, have not lost any of their validity and justifiability.

Peace in the region can only be established on the fundamentals of International Law, never, however, on the basis of the hegemony and dominance of the United States or Israel. The preamble of UN Security Council Resolution 242 states "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war." This implies that when the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land comes to an end, the Palestinian right to self-determination will be recognized, a sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital will be created, the refugees will return in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, and the dismantling of the settlements in the occupied territories will have been decided upon. Both Palestinians and Israelis would benefit from such a solution. Although more than three decades of occupation have harmed the Palestinians far more than they have harmed the Israelis, the mental effects on the Israeli society should not be underestimated.

The Palestinians must comprehend that the agreements threaten their aspirations regarding an independent state. It was pure self-deception when they tried to make the world believe that they would regain 90 percent of the Occupied Territories. The Israeli side has never made such pledges and the agreements offer no basis for such a claim. Arafat and his advisors bear the sole responsibility for the disappointment of the Palestinians, which is now bigger than ever. There is hardly any difference between the Likud version of 'autonomy' and the Labor concept of a 'Palestinian state'.

South Africa is an example of the fact that a people cannot be suppressed permanently and be exiled in Bantustans. Israel should spare itself from making such an error because it will only lead to more suffering on both sides. However, currently the Netanyahu Government was miles away from magnanimity and farsightedness. Whether Barak will treat the Palestinians more generously is doubtful. A sovereign Palestinian state would be in the interest of Israel as it would be the only thing capable of leading to justice and real peace.

To accept the above requires courage. However, since the Israeli society, due to its historic experience, is still obsessed with existential fears, it seems neither ready nor prepared to dare take a step towards real peace. As long as the Israelis believe that the entire world is against them and that they are the eternal victims, there is no place for trust and confidence building. The Holocaust is still a collective trauma for the Israelis. However, if the Israeli society still derives its political behavior from the past, determines its current situation and wants to form the future by relying on this behavior, it will endanger its own democracy and create the mental atmosphere for violence. Perhaps the violence *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians and the failure of the peace process, among other factors, could be put down to this mentality.

A major obstacle on the path to a real and lasting peace is the belief of the United States and the European Union (EU) that the Oslo Accords are just and therefore do not need to be improved upon. In the United States and Western Europe, the impression is that the Palestinians have already obtained their freedom. Only if the people there realize that this 'peace process' will not lead to peace will the daily violence in the autonomous areas and in Israel decrease.

The American bias regarding Israeli security interests in particular will in the long term contribute to destabilization and continued injustice in the region. The United States and Israel impede any progress being made on the path to Palestinian self-determination. The fateful strength of the American influence in the region results largely from the political weakness of

the EU, which resembles a 'screaming mouse' in the conflict. The much discussed possibility of a Camp David-style conference is not a way out of the current stalemate, and certainly not under the present Clinton government. Given the current balance of power, such a strategy would most likely result in just another agreement being forced upon the Palestinians.

The former and the present Israeli government does not strive for a just solution in regard to the conflict with the Palestinians. Those who had the say were the nationalist and religious-fundamentalist forces that attribute a 'holy' status to the Occupied Territories. Some of the former government coalition parties reject a secular Israeli state due to their religious beliefs, and it is obvious that these forces will not develop a positive approach to reaching a solution *vis-à-vis* the Middle East conflict. What is aggravating is that in the past 50 years of a state of siege, a militaristic culture has evolved in Israel. It is nightmarish to imagine that Israeli nuclear weapons would one day come under the control of fanatical rabbis who want to turn Israel into a *Halachic* God-state. The control of weapons of mass destruction should therefore be considered very much in the interest of the West.

Only a new beginning can give the completely muddled peace process new life. Such a new beginning could only materialize within the framework of an international peace conference under the participation of the UN, the EU, Russia, and the United States, as well as all conflicting parties - Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians - if it is to succeed in securing a stable peace in the region. However, the United States and Israel vehemently object to this suggestion because holding such a conference would have a negative effect on their power.

The Palestinians have no reason to be optimistic following the election of Ehud Barak. The signals he sent to them are discouraging. Barak is not a promoter of peace *per se*, and he was critical of the peace process and Rabin's handling of it. Did he not once say: "High fences make good neighbors"? Primarily, he wants to strike a deal with Syria in order to get the Israeli army out of Lebanon. Having reached this goal Barak will undoubtedly attempt to push Arafat to the wall. The final status agreement will be the last Israeli dictate, which will 'finish' the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore the future does not look bright for the Palestinians. Of course, things could also turn out in a completely different way, as history is always unpredictable.