

► compromises. She herself was politically strong at the time, the foreign minister, considered leadership potential, negotiating with a moderate, compromise-inclined side headed by Abbas.

In the course of the negotiations, which included dozens of meetings with Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala), she usually said the following:

1. Nothing is leaking from the talks, which proves they're serious.
2. All the issues are on the table; we're talking about everything.

After the negotiations concluded, the following facts emerged:

1. True, nothing leaked – not because it was serious, but for the simple reason that there was nothing to leak. The negotiations were fruitless and pitiful.

2. Not all the issues were on the table. That declaration by Livni at the time was rooted in a very specific political context. The ultra-Orthodox political party Shas had stated publicly: We will not be part of a government that negotiates about Jerusalem. Livni supposedly made it clear she couldn't give two hoots about that political demand, and she was talking about everything. She fooled us. It turned out afterward that she did not talk about Jerusalem. She just wasted a year with fruitless talks.

To conduct negotiations on a final-status settlement without talking about Jerusalem is like trying to sell a house without discussing the price. There were some meetings in which Abu Ala raised the subject and talked about it. Israel's foreign minister, the representative of the peace camp to the negotiations, just sat silently. Didn't respond. She wasn't allowed. It could have been a hilarious skit on the satirical TV program "A Wonderful Country," but, alas, it was Livni's "serious" negotiations.

Livni's circus of illusions continued under Netanyahu. Meetings about meetings. No leaks. It's serious. An offer to the Palestinians? Have you lost your mind? Present a map? Demarcate a final settlement in Jerusalem? A creative solution to the refugee problem?

Now carefully follow the convoluted logic that tries to portray Abbas as the recalcitrant rejectionist.

All of the negotiations' energies were focused on working on a paper, which actually expressed the position of the United States. The paper was to include different ideas, not fully baked, for a solution to the conflict. The ideas would not oblige the parties. So why did the Americans need to discuss ideas with the Israelis that did not oblige them and would, in any event, be articulated in the U.S. paper?

Oh, wait. It was on the basis of that paper that the parties would agree to go on conducting the negotiations. So it was serious? Well, not really. The parties (i.e., Netanyahu) were allowed to object to the ideas put forward in the paper. These ideas did not oblige the parties. For example, you could write that the borders will be the 1967 lines, but Netanyahu might say he objects to that.

What did we achieve? Nothing. Other than that the parties must not specify their objections publicly. Do you get it? No one but Netanyahu can concoct things like that, and no one but Livni could agree to sell them. And it was their luck to find a good guy, in the bad sense of the word, in the person of John Kerry, who agreed to go along with this madness.

In the end they devised a paper – "they" being Livni, Netanyahu and Kerry. The Palestinians? They can just wait patiently. When we finish with Netanyahu, and it's to our satisfaction, we'll talk to them. But when the blacks – sorry, the Palestinians – arrived, they were offended and didn't want to play the game. A bunch of recalcitrant rejectionists.

In public interviews, Livni pinned the blame on Abbas. If this is how the supposed leader of the center-left behaves, should we be surprised that nothing remains of what was once the peace camp?

(At this point you're probably dying to know about the brilliant ideas I suggested to her. Well, there's nothing brilliant about them. They appear in the 2003 Geneva Initiative and in Olmert's offer, which was made when he was already a political dead duck.)

Resolving the refugee issue

On the refugee issue, Livni said that Israel will not take in a single one. I once asked her what would be so terrible about doing that. She

replied that in an interview she gave to the BBC, the interviewer drew a connection between that readiness and the justification for Israel's existence. Wow! That's the way to achieve peace. Would it be so awful if Israel were to include a couple of sentences in the agreement showing empathy for the suffering that was inflicted on the refugees? Let's say something along the lines of, "In the 1948 War of Independence, Jews were uprooted from their homes in the Arab states and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were uprooted from their homes, sometimes against their will." Will the country fail because of that? Afterward, the problem of the precise number of refugees would have to be resolved.

In backrooms (the refugees committee at the Taba Summit of 2001; Abbas in negotiations with Olmert), the Palestinians spoke in terms of a six-digit number: between 100,000 and 150,000 refugees to return, over a 10-year period. Let's say Israel would agree to 100,000 refugees (a number that's come up in diplomatic discussions since the Lausanne Conference of 1949, when Israel agreed to take that exact number) over a 15-year period, as was suggested in the secret talks of the Olmert initiative. Will the country go down the tubes? About 7,000 refugees a year for 15 years, to be defined as "family unification," with Israel to have the right to decide who enters and who doesn't. Will they cause Israel's destruction?

As part of the political agreement, some 300,000 Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem will leave Israel. It's true that they are defined as residents, not citizens, and therefore can't vote in Knesset elections. But the suggested solution for the refugees is still something Israel is strong enough to handle easily, especially when the goal is to reach a peace settlement.

Regarding the Temple Mount, does the status quo that allows Israelis a few short hours a day to visit – without praying, heaven forbid – justify the madness? The Temple Mount and Al-Aqsa Mosque are not under our control today. We control only the difficult and thankless burden of security. Will it really hurt the existential interest of anyone here if that status quo, with those visiting hours, remains intact, but with security entrusted to a multinational force of some kind and a stipulation in the peace agreement that the site is under Palestinian sovereignty?

I am not belittling the scale of the decisions that need to be made. The most difficult, I believe, involve the evacuation of the settlers and the security arrangements. There will, apparently, be no agreement in which Ariel remains as is – not even Olmert was able to persuade Abbas of that – and there will be no agreement under which we will be able to snatch a wanted person from the Nablus casbah. That's a major security risk and can be discussed for months, rightly.

But Livni deluded us twice into thinking she was conducting serious negotiations, when in reality she was just wasting precious time that might never return – and that also helped persuade her camp that Abbas is not a partner for a diplomatic settlement. For that, she has to pay the political price.

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Ariel Rubinstein

Our lot is not with them

I agree with the right. I, too, hear about the Israel Conference on Peace and picture an event in which a group that fancies itself the best of Israeli society assembles in a plush Tel Aviv hotel and listens empathetically to a token Palestinian speaker and cheers some retired foreign leader who recycles a bunch of old advice. If

I were a rightist, I wouldn't even bother protesting against it. I'd just sit back and enjoy the show of uselessness.

I agree with the right. I, too, chuckle when I hear David Grossman "clinging to the hope that despair is not a path," or Shimon Peres preaching that "the Book of Books commands us to follow the path of peace," or Tzipi Livni intoning that "there is no other way." Despair is a standard human way of responding to a dire situation. As for the Bible, it also contains commands about decidedly less friendly paths. And clearly there is another way other than the path of peace. How about the path that Israel chose of its own freewill: inch after inch, hilltop after hilltop, and then the other side, and for dessert probably a service on the Temple Mount?

I agree with the right. I'm not so sure the occupation is an economic burden. Not if you take into account the profits that derive from this colonialist enterprise. We seized control of land in the middle of the country – a resource "more precious than gas" in a state this size. The Arab cantons in the territories are the backyard to which the exploited day laborers who are making our country bloom return. How lovely that these workers have no decent social rights, that their wages are meager and their children don't mix with our children. Add to that the profit from the captive Palestinian market and the conclusion is clear: The occupation is not a bad business deal at all.

I agree with the right. It faces no real opposition. If I were a settler, I would vote for Likud and Labor alternately. It's enough for Likud only to be in power some of the time, since Labor can also be counted upon to expand settlements and expropriate land (just for security purposes, of course). Besides, Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni are so good at fooling the world into thinking Israel has a more sympathetic face than that reflected by the political portraits of Benjamin Netanyahu, Naftali Bennett and Avigdor Lieberman.

I agree with the right. I have no illusions that genuine peace between us and the Palestinians could be made if only the sides would show "a little" flexibility in their positions. Deep-seated conflicts, like the one between the Jews and the Palestinians, don't tend to be resolved by negotiations just because, suddenly, one fine day, the parties get fed up of being angry at each other.

Israel is happy and quite wealthy, with most of the public accepting the status quo (which contains some seasonal quarrels) as the realization of both the Zionist and middle-class dream. Real peace requires real catastrophe – the kind that led France and Germany to establish the European Union.

I agree with the right that the wheels of history are propelled by force. Not necessarily physical force. There are other forces – economic, social, moral. Force is effective if the strong achieves total control over the weak. Force is also effective when one side, even if it's the weaker one, is prepared to sacrifice something to achieve its goals while the other side, even if it is right, is not prepared to take risks and suffer losses.

But I don't agree with the right about the most important thing: I completely deny that it is our right to continue the occupation. I was brought up in a neighborhood that produced many right-wingers. When I was 18 I voted for a party to the right of Habayit Hayehudi. But I have become sober and view the settlement enterprise as nothing less than despicable. I am still a patriotic person, and as such I feel that the occupiers and settlers are chasing me out of my homeland and ancestral home.

Where the right goes wrong

The anti-settlement and anti-occupation camp isn't really fighting. Conferences, op-eds and sad songs are just a salve for the conscience, fostering an illusion of action in a time of futility. If the movie "The Gatekeepers" didn't crack the right, no public diplomacy move will help. The camp is devoid of energy and unwilling to sacrifice any of its comforts in order to achieve its goals.

In the 1970s, we still had a certain amount of influence because we filled a prominent number of combat positions in the army, which made something like the "officers' letters" possible. That power is faded now, too. All that's left is a bunch of whiners, myself included.

As the right says, you can't be politically effective without leveraging some kind of force. If that's true as far as Israel-Palestine goes, it's also true for the left-right divide. I can think of only one relevant source of leverage that could be used against the extreme nationalists: casting doubt on the unity of the Jewish people.

The flagship issues for the religious-Zionist camp are unity of the people and unity of the land. They are getting all of the land via the settlements and the occupation. And they're getting all of the people for free because most of us are addicted to the mantras of unity and refrain from speaking the truth: almost a half-century of occupation and settlement is separating us, the "faithful of the Jewish people," from them, the "faithful of the Land of Israel."

Our lot is not with them. There is no place for false groveling or shows of reconciliation. This false unity is enabling the settlers to achieve all their goals. Instead of searching for common ground, we should be declaring our glaring differences. The Israeli right also only understands credible threats. The religious-Zionist public will be compelled to reexamine its positions if it is made to understand that spiritual redemption is not around the corner, and that fealty to the unity of the land is going to shatter the unity of the people.

And if this last force is of no help, all that will be left to do (for me, at least) is stay here, observe with horror the oppression of the Palestinians, watch as a society whose values I don't respect takes shape and await – with trepidation – the catastrophe, after which everything will, probably, be different.

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Alan M. Dershowitz

Global community is to blame

Why should the Palestinian leadership make peace with Israel, when the international community seems willing to recognize a Palestinian state without requiring its leaders to make the kinds of compromises that are essential to a viable two-state solution?

The Israelis offered the Palestinians a generous two-state solution under the leadership of then-prime ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert. Now, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is urging them to sit down and begin unconditional negotiations. The Palestinian leadership have accepted none of these offers, because they foolishly believe they can get what they want without giving what they must.

The major fault for this impasse lies squarely on the shoulders of the international community, including the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, the international media and many individual governments. They have led the Palestinian leadership to believe that if they can maintain the impasse with Israel by refusing to make the kinds of compromises required for a two-state solution, the international community would come to their rescue and impose such a solution on Israel.

The international media, the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement and student protests against Israel all contribute to disincentivizing the Palestinians from entering into real negotiations that will require compromise.

Even this newspaper, Haaretz, by placing virtually all the blame for the impasse on Israel, discourages the Palestinians from coming to the negotiating table. Because they believe they are win- ▶