

“No other choice...”

The Israeli Consul General examines the Middle East peace process

Israeli Consul General Oren David spoke at the Jewish Student Federation portable Monday January 15. He discussed various aspects of Israel's latest peace plan and the Palestinians' reactions to it. Excalibur's *Dina Lebo* attended the session, and wrote the following report.

The Middle East peace process has become so complicated that only diplomats and specialists can follow its many twists and turns. The cast of characters is enormous, and with so many religious, political and economic factions, the public no longer knows who's who or what to think.

In 1977, there was the Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel. In 1988, Yasser Arafat declared in front of the United Nations that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) would recognize Israel's right to exist. Still, there is no peace.

Now, another peace initiative has emerged. Israel has produced a plan in which the most notable feature is a proposal for free democratic elections which would lead to the interim autonomy and self-rule of Arabs in the Occupied Territories. Israel's plan satisfied the United States, but the PLO (with which Israel will not negotiate) and the majority of Palestinians in the Territories would have nothing to do with it. According to journalist Sheldon Kirshner, it is a fig-leaf for maintaining the status quo.

In another bid for peace, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker unveiled his plan for starting an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue involving Egypt. Israel has accepted the American proposal. With the plan's acceptance by Egypt, the ball is back in the Palestinian court.

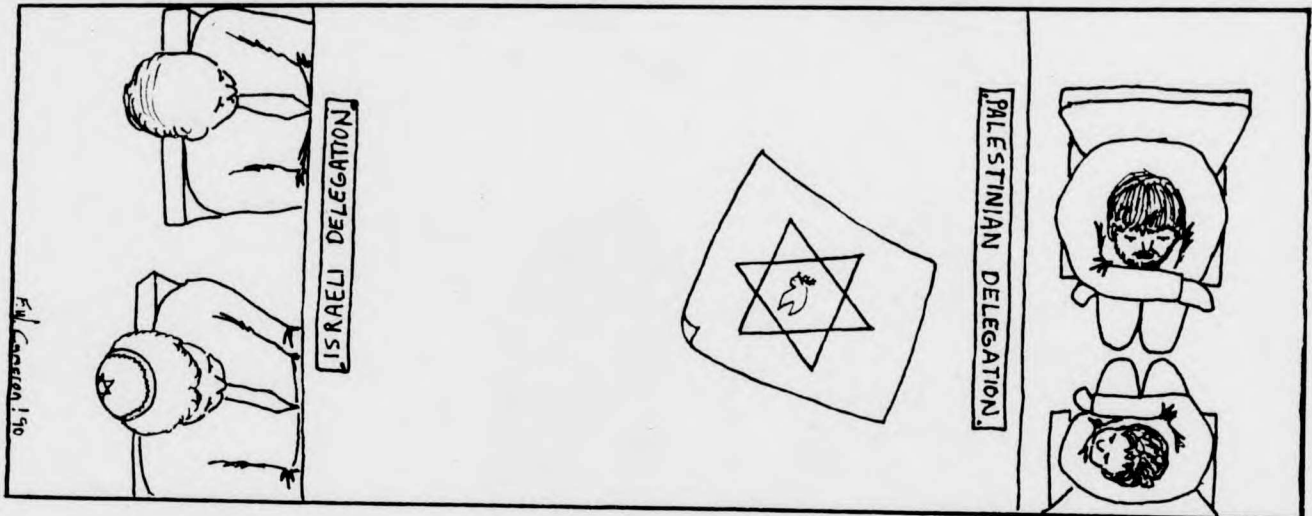
“We haven't heard anything yet from the PLO,” says Oren David, Canada's Israeli Consul General, “and this is a good sign. They haven't rejected it because they know that the people in the territories will not take it any more.” David spoke about the peace plan and Israel's hopes for both the short and long terms.

He opened the afternoon by explaining why Israel feels that the PLO cannot be a partner in the peace process. “We do want peace,” he said, “but what we want is peace with security. Look at the numbers and you will see that it is in our best interests to have peace. But, by its own actions, the PLO has shown itself to be the greatest obstacle to peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians,” David explained.

“Most of the PLO leadership lives outside the Territories and are based in Tunis and Lebanon. They are not interested in peace; they are interested in continuing the violence. Their actions prove it. They are not in a hurry to achieve a peaceful solution because they don't suffer the daily life of the conflict.

“The insiders, those who live in the territories,” he continued, “have a more urgent need for peace now — just as we do.” The Israeli Consul went on to say that for the last 25 years, the PLO has been involved in well-known terrorist activities. Actually, said David, since Arafat's announcement to the U.N. in Geneva which abandoned the armed struggle against Israel, Arafat has, in fact, escalated the conflict. Arafat, said David, even threatened to kill a local Palestinian leader, the mayor of Bethlehem, who supported an end to the violence so an atmosphere conducive to dialogue could emerge. David explained that scores of Palestinian Arabs have been murdered and many more wounded by the PLO for not towing the party line. The dead and injured have come from all walks of life; mayors, village leaders, religious leaders, public figures and even civil servants.

In fact, just recently, Amnesty International condemned the Palestinian leaders for endorsing the murder of Palestinians by fellow Arabs. The organization has stated that more than 120 Palestinians were brutally murdered between December 1987 and October 1989, dates which



“Well what do you think?”

coincide with the latest uprising in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Amnesty officials reported that the killings were carried out by special death squads intending to punish those people considered to be collaborating with Israeli authorities. “You see,” said David, “These people have no respect for human life, not even their own brethren. How can we negotiate with these people?”

A second reason Israelis give for not wanting to deal directly with the PLO is the Palestinians' insistence on their “right of return” to their land, which they fled in 1948. Israelis feel that this act of return would overwhelm the country with refugees and jeopardize security both internally and externally, said David.

Who are the Israelis willing to negotiate with? David said Israel stands ready to negotiate with those in the region who sincerely seek a peaceful end to the conflict and who would be fully

the preliminary stage — negotiating a list of Palestinian representatives, acceptable to both Israel and the Palestinians, with whom Israel can discuss the technicalities required for free democratic elections in Judea, Samaria and Gaza in the near future. In these elections, representation will be chosen so that the Territories will be able to pass into a transitional period of self-rule. This period will constitute a test for co-existence and co-operation, according to David, and will set the stage for the negotiation of a permanent solution during which all the proposed options for an agreed settlement will be examined.

This preliminary plan does not treat “final status” questions such as Israel's permanent departure from the West Bank. These questions will only be tackled after elected Palestinian representatives are in office and self-rule and autonomy have been a reality for at least three years. In reality, it is a plan conceived to facilitate the beginning of a dialogue rather than focusing on the final result as the Egyptian plan had tried.

“It's a shame,” says David, “because the same thing was proposed after the Camp David Accord in 1978. Ten years have elapsed since and these 10 years have seen untold violence and atrocities.” David hopes that “this time the Palestinians [will] stand up to the PLO and endorse the plan accepted by Egypt, the USA and Israel.

“Had the PLO allowed negotiations in 1979 when they were first proposed,” he said, “there would have been elections the following year. By 1982-83 there would have been autonomy and self-rule. It's unfortunate that the PLO would not allow an alternative leadership to evolve in the territories because, by now, we would have had a permanent solution. I hope that 10 years from now we still won't be in the same boat.”

Moslem students at the gathering asked David about the brutality attributed to the Israeli Defense Force. One of them, Mohammed, was a Lebanese born Moslem who had actually been involved in an incident with Israeli soldiers. “Israeli soldiers don't want to be in the territories,” said David. “They don't like policing and they are unhappy about the situation, but you have to understand that they are not dealing with peaceful placard-holding demonstrators, characteristic of Gandhi and Martin Luther King type demonstrations. The people that we are dealing with,” he continued “are violent demonstrators who throw Molotov cocktails, fire bombs, rocks and stones at Israeli citizens and their own citizens, as well as the Israeli Defense Forces.”

“I think that we've shown the utmost restraint given the situation,” David explained. “What other country has introduced rubber bullets in an attempt to enforce a No Kill policy. Other countries would have adopted much harsher methods much earlier to deal with such violent demonstrations. What do you think the U.S. would be doing if faced with such a situation? We fight terrorists . . . we are not terrorists . . . we have no other choice for the moment.”

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Israeli Consul General
Oren David

prepared to abide by the commitment to keep peace with Israel. “We will accept PLO sympathizers or Moslem fundamentalists,” he explained, “as long as they are not representatives of the PLO and as long as they live in the Territories.”

According to the Consul General, legitimate interests and needs of Jordan and the Palestinian Arabs in Judea, Samaria and Gaza are not necessarily incompatible with a genuine and durable peace that would also be based on Israel's needs and interests.

The Baker Plan is a proposal for talks between Israelis and Palestinians in Cairo. It is based on the Israeli peace proposal of May 1989 which includes free elections, negotiations for an interim solution and final status questions.

The American version, however, deals only with