THE CENTER FOR POLICY ANALYSIS ON PALESTINE

Special Report

Number 5
Fall 1996

Netanyahu's Peace

Editor's note: The following remarks are excerpted from a presentation given by Ms. Laura Drake, an Advisory Board Member of Solidarity International for Human Rights and former Director of Research for the Council for the National Interest. The address was delivered at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, in Washington, D.C, on July 18, 1996.

Let me begin by saying a few words about Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's world view and his political program. From here, I will go into his strategy and where we can expect him to go from here in what has been known until now as the "peace process." It is important that I discuss briefly Netanyahu's perception of Israel's immediate surroundings, because before we can discuss what he is going to do or what he wants to do to the Palestinians, we must understand his conception of what a Palestinian is.

Netanyahu's core environment essentially consists of a single geographic unit called Palestine: it is a strictly geographical term that has no political context whatsoever. The geographical area of Palestine includes the entire area of the British Mandate, or present-day Israel, Jordan, and the Occupied Territories. There are two peoples in this container of Palestine: Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews. It is, therefore, very important to understand Netanyahu's conception of the term "Palestinian Arab," because he does not mean the same thing by it as we do. For him, the Palestinian Arab is someone who comes from a particular geographic area. Therefore, the term includes both the Palestinians and Jordanians.

In his thoughts regarding the role of Jordan, Netanyahu is a political disciple of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, as his father was a committed Jabotinskyist. Netanyahu believes that Jordan is a lost region of Palestine; he often refers to it in his writings as "eastern Palestine," which he believes was supposed to be set aside in its entirety as part of the Jewish national homeland by the Balfour Declaration. Until now, in his writings, he constantly bemoans the loss of Jordan. This is important because in Netanyahu's mind, he has already made his concession to the "Palestinian Arabs."

With respect to his political program, Netanyahu's territorial program is essentially the same as Oslo II, but without the B areas and the security subcontracting function of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Netanyahu, like [former Israeli Prime Minister] Rabin, is a pragmatist; he understands that the Israeli army can no longer take responsibility for the daily lives and actions of the Palestinians in their cities. This was the lesson of the *intifada*. Therefore, he has settled on an idea he calls the autonomy of "self-managing counties," centered around four small enclaves that are included now in Area A. Those areas are four of the seven regions of Area A, namely, the municipalities of Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, and Hebron, and that is very important right now because he is talking about whether or not to withdraw from Hebron.

If one visualizes the map of Oslo, it is obvious that the elements of Netanyahu's own program would only need to undergo a slight adjustment from what was agreed on in the previous Oslo II agreement. The adjustments would then become a matter of Israel adapting itself to the larger number of cities that have been designated to Area A and, of course, the fact that the Palestinian police would be allowed to stay in place since they have already been accepted by Israel. However, this plan with these adjustments is not interim; rather, it is Netanyahu's vision for the final status.

According to Netanyahu, if the Palestinians were to behave through all of this time, which he refers to as a "cooling off period of 20 years," he might consider offering some of them Israeli citizenship, provided they agree to be loyal to the state and to serve it. If they do not want to take that oath of loyalty, then they would be able to remain in Israel as what he calls "resident foreign nationals." The Palestinians would be allowed to live in Israel, he says, "much as the millions of foreign residents of the United States who hold green cards." So what is his rationale for concession? Netanyahu's arguments tend to be centered around the concept of living space. He talks about Israel's cities dying of suffocation if they are not allowed to expand outward into their "suburban areas;" to grow, to develop, and to stretch out. He states that in order to nourish the cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem it is necessary to have the space to expand out into the suburbs. Now, of course, "suburb" is just another name for "settlement." Netanyahu compares it to the situation of the people of the United States who live in New Jersey and commute to New York