

'Peace Process' Prospects

Noam Chomsky

The latest AP report from Camp David (evening, July 25) begins: 'The Middle East peace talks at Camp David collapsed Tuesday over rival claims to East Jerusalem. Disappointed, President Clinton said he tried several approaches but could not come up with a solution.' Clinton expressed hope that the process would continue to a resolution of the East Jerusalem problem, at which point the fundamental outstanding issue would have been overcome.

To have a sense of what is taking place, it is useful to back off a few steps and to look at the immediate events from a somewhat broader perspective.

Any discussion of what is called a 'peace process' – whether the one underway at Camp David or any other – should keep in mind the operative meaning of the phrase: by definition, the 'peace process' is whatever the US government happens to be pursuing.

Having grasped that essential principle, one can understand that a peace process can be advanced by Washington's clearly-proclaimed efforts to undermine peace. To illustrate, in January 1988 the press reported Secretary of State George Shultz's 'peace trip' to Central America under the headline 'Latin Peace Trip by Shultz Planned.' The subheading explained the goal: 'Mission Would Be Last-Ditch Effort to Defuse Opposition on Contra Aid.' Administration officials elaborated that the 'peace mission' was 'the only way to save' aid to the contras in the face of 'growing congressional opposition.'

The timing is important. In August 1987, over strong US objections, the Central American presidents had reached a peace agreement for the bitter Central American conflicts: the Esquipulas Accords. The US acted at once to undermine them, and, by January, had largely succeeded. It had effectively excluded the sole 'indispensable element' cited in the Accords: an end to US

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support for the Contras (CIA supply flights instantly tripled, and Contra terror increased). Washington had also eliminated the second basic principle of the Accords: that the human rights provisions should apply to US clients as well as to Nicaragua (by US fiat, they were to apply to Nicaragua alone). Washington had also managed to terminate the despised international monitoring mission, which had committed the crime of describing truthfully what had been happening since the adoption of the plan in August. To the consternation of the Reagan Administration, Nicaragua nevertheless accepted the version of the accords crafted by US power, leading to the Shultz 'peace mission,' undertaken to advance the 'peace process' by ensuring that there would be no backsliding from the demolition operation.

In brief, the 'peace mission' was a 'last-ditch effort' to block peace and mobilize Congress to support the 'unlawful use of force' for which the US had recently been condemned by the World Court.

The record of the 'peace process' in the Middle East has been similar, though even more extreme. From 1971 the US has been virtually alone in the international arena in barring a negotiated diplomatic settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict: the 'peace process' is the record of these developments. To review the essentials briefly, in November 1967, under U.S. initiative, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 242 on 'land for peace.' As explicitly understood by the US and the other signatories, UN 242 called for a full peace settlement on the pre-June 1967 borders with at most minor and mutual adjustments, offering nothing to the Palestinians. When President Sadat of Egypt accepted the official US position in February 1971, Washington revised UN 242 to mean partial Israeli withdrawal, as the US and Israel would determine. That unilateral revision is what is now called 'land for peace,' a reflection of US power in the domain of doctrine and ideology.

The AP report on the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations, cited above, notes that the final official statement, 'in a gesture to Arafat,' said that 'the only path to peace was resolutions adopted by the U.N. Security Council after Middle East wars in 1967 and 1973. These call for Israel to relinquish territory won from the Arabs in exchange for secure borders.' The resolution of 1967 is UN 242, calling for full Israeli withdrawal with at most minor and mutual border adjustments; the 1973 resolution merely endorses UN 242 without change. But the meaning of UN 242 has crucially changed since February 1971, following Washington's dictates.

Sadat warned that the US-Israeli rejection of UN 242 would lead to war. Neither the US nor Israel took him seriously, on remarkable triumphalist and racist grounds, later bitterly denounced in Israel. Egypt did go to war in October 1973. It turned out to be a near disaster for Israel, and for the world: the prospects of a nuclear exchange were not slight. The 1973 war made it clear even to Henry Kissinger that Egypt was not a basket case that could simply be disregarded, so Washington shifted to the natural back-up strategy: excluding Egypt from the conflict so that Israel, with mounting US support, could proceed to integrate the

occupied territories and attack Lebanon. That result was achieved at Camp David in 1978, hailed ever since as the grand moment of 'the peace process.'

Meanwhile the US vetoed Security Council resolutions calling for a diplomatic settlement incorporating UN 242 but now also including Palestinian rights. The US also voted annually against similar General Assembly resolutions (along with Israel, sometimes one or another client state), and otherwise blocked all efforts at a peaceful resolution of the conflict initiated by Europe, the Arab states, or the PLO. This consistent rejection of a diplomatic settlement is the 'peace process.' The actual facts were long ago vetoed from the media, and have largely been barred even from scholarship, but they are easy enough to discover.

After the Gulf War, the US was finally in a position to impose its own unilateral rejectionist stand and did so, first at Madrid in late 1991, then in the successive Israel-PLO agreements from 1993. With these measures, the 'peace process' has advanced towards the Bantustan-style arrangements that the US and Israel intended, as should have been obvious to anyone with eyes open, and is entirely clear in the documentary record and, more important, the record on the ground. That brings us to the present stage: Camp David, July 2000.

Throughout the several weeks of deliberations, it was regularly reported that the main stumbling block is Jerusalem. The final report reiterates that conclusion. The observation is not false, but it is a bit misleading. 'Creative' solutions have been proposed to permit symbolic Palestinian authority in Jerusalem – or as the city is called in Arabic, Al-Quds. These include Palestinian administration of Arab neighbourhoods (as Israel would prefer, if rational), some arrangement for Islamic and Christian religious sites, and a Palestinian capital in the village of Abu Dis near Jerusalem, which might be renamed 'Al-Quds,' with a little sleight-of-hand. Such an endeavour might have succeeded, and might still succeed. But a more intractable problem arises as soon as we ask a basic question: What is Jerusalem?

When Israel conquered the West Bank in June 1967, it annexed Jerusalem – not in a very polite fashion; for example, it has recently been revealed in Israel that the destruction of the Arab Mughrabi neighbourhood near the Wailing Wall on June 10 was done with such haste that an unknown number of Palestinians were buried in the ruins left by the bulldozers.

Israel quickly tripled the borders of the city. Subsequent development programmes, pursued with little variation by all governments, aimed to extend the borders of 'greater Jerusalem' well beyond. Current Israeli maps articulate the basic plans clearly enough. On June 28, Israel's leading daily, *Ha'aretz*, published a map detailing 'Israel's proposal for the permanent settlement.' It is virtually identical to the government's 'Final Status Map' presented a month earlier. The territory to be annexed around the greatly expanded 'Jerusalem' extends in all directions. To the north it reaches well past Ramallah, and to the south well past Bethlehem, the two major nearby Palestinian towns. These are to be left under Palestinian control, but adjoining Israeli territory, and in the case of Ramallah, cut off from Palestinian territory to the east. Like all Palestinian

territory, both towns are separated from Jerusalem, the centre of West Bank life, by territory annexed to Israel. To the east, the territory to be annexed includes the rapidly growing Israeli town of Ma'ale Adumim and extends on to Vered Jericho, a small settlement bordering on the town of Jericho. The salient extends on to the Jordanian border. The entire Jordanian border is to be annexed to Israel along with the 'Jerusalem' salient that partitions the West Bank. Another salient to be annexed farther north virtually imposes a second partition.

The intensive construction and settlement projects of the past years have been designed to 'create facts' that would lead to this 'permanent settlement.' That has been the clear commitment of the successive governments since the first 'Oslo agreement' of September 1993. Contrary to much commentary, the official doves (Rabin, Peres, Barak) have been at least as faithfully dedicated to this project as the much-condemned Binyamin Netanyahu, though they have been able to conduct the project with less protest; a familiar story, in the United States as well. In February of this year the Israeli press reported that the number of building starts increased by almost one-third from 1998 (Netanyahu) to the current year (Barak). An analysis by Israeli correspondent Nadav Shragai reveals that only a small fraction of the lands assigned to the settlements are actually used for agricultural or other purposes. For Ma'ale Adumim, for example, the lands assigned to it are 16 times the area used, and similar proportions hold elsewhere. Palestinians have brought petitions to the Israeli High Court opposing the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim, but they have been rejected. Last November, rejecting an appeal, one High Court judge explained that 'some good for the residents of the neighbouring [Palestinian] villages might spring from the economic and cultural development of Ma'ale Adumim,' effectively partitioning the West Bank.

The projects have been carried out thanks to the benevolence of US taxpayers, by a variety of 'creative' devices to overcome the fact that US aid is officially barred for these purposes.

The intended result is that an eventual Palestinian state would consist of four cantons on the West Bank: (1) Jericho, (2) the southern canton extending as far as Abu Dis (the new Arab 'Jerusalem'), (3) a northern canton including the Palestinian cities of Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarm, and (4) a central canton including Ramallah. The cantons are completely surrounded by territory to be annexed to Israel. The areas of Palestinian population concentration are to be under Palestinian administration, an adaptation of the traditional colonial pattern that is the only sensible outcome as far as Israel and the US are concerned. The plans for the Gaza Strip, a fifth canton, are uncertain: Israel might relinquish it, or might maintain the southern coastal region and another salient virtually dividing the Strip below Gaza City.

These outlines are consistent with the proposals that have been put forth since 1968, when Israel adopted the 'Allon plan,' never presented formally but apparently intended to incorporate about 40% of the West Bank within Israel. Since then specific plans have been proposed by the ultra-right General Sharon,

the Labour Party, and others. They are fairly similar in conception and outline. The basic principle is that the usable territory within the West Bank, and the crucial resources (primarily water), will remain under Israeli control, but the population will be controlled by a Palestinian client regime, which is expected to be corrupt, barbaric, and compliant. The Palestinian-administered cantons can then provide cheap and easily exploitable labour for the Israeli economy. Or in the long run, the population might be 'transferred' elsewhere in one or another way, in accord with long-standing hopes.

It is possible to imagine 'creative' schemes that would finesse the issues concerning the religious sites and the administration of Palestinian neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. But the more fundamental problems lie elsewhere. It is not at all clear that they can be sensibly resolved within the framework of nation-states that has been imposed throughout much of the world by Western conquest and domination, with murderous consequences within Europe itself for centuries, not to speak of the effects beyond until the present moment.