

Israel and the Palestinians

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An interview with Michel
Warshawsky
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WHAT IS RABIN doing? What does he hope to get out of the current situation?

The only thing Prime Minister Rabin is interested in is to get the Israeli army out of the day-to-day life of the Palestinians, but not out of its duty to protect the settlements. He believes the settlements must remain. This is his aim.

He plans some sort of autonomous areas inside territory controlled by the Israelis, some Palestinian enclaves, within which the Palestinians will administer their internal affairs, under an Israeli veto.

Doesn't Rabin have a real problem? Having made this agreement, which looked as though it was running towards a Palestinian state, all he is achieving is to discredit the secular nationalist leadership of the Palestinians?

This is totally true, but Rabin has never been able to think one step ahead.

Even if Rabin is just a simple military man, the big Israeli capitalists also backed the deal.

The big capitalists had another dream. This dream motivated the people who elaborated the Oslo Agreement. It is to put all their energies into a normalisation with the Arab world, and into doing business in the Arab world. For that they need a rapid solution to the Palestinian question, including some kind of statehood in most of the Occupied Territories.

But this was not the way the Israeli gov-

ernment interpreted the agreement and tries to apply it.

With Israel's actions helping the growth of the Muslim traditionalist movement is there not a chance of a civil war? How can the Israeli government gain from this?

Civil war among the Palestinians is part of the Israeli agenda. They are pushing Arafat towards a civil war. They think by doing this the whole Palestinian cause will be weakened.

Secondly, the loosening of the authority of the PLO leadership and the strengthening of the Islamic opposition is a fact, and

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a fact which will remain.

The Israeli bourgeoisie's more intelligent representatives have made some warnings about the Islamic growth, but this is not the way the military junta which is leading the country — Rabin and the general staff — see the matter. They see it in military terms: we will smash Hamas and demand that Arafat smashes Hamas, and everything will be in order.

Surely the whole lesson of Algeria from 1992 onwards is that it is very hard to deal with these people by bureaucratic-military methods.

You have Algeria in mind, they have Syria as a model. The Assad regime smashed the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982. 20,000 died, but it worked.

Assad had a much more powerful state machine, fully under his control.

That is true. But Rabin believes that the Israeli army, together with the Palestinian police will be able to crush Hamas by way of a bloodbath in which they will kill tens of thousands. But this is not a problem for Rabin: on the contrary, it is his objective.

Are the police fully under Arafat's control?

At one point or another there will be a split in the Palestinian administration and armed forces. One part will be a type of Southern Lebanese Army in Palestine, that is, a direct puppet of Israel.

In Gaza it is Hamas. What sort of pace are things moving at in the West Bank? Don't be mistaken. The radicalisation on the West Bank is also an Islamic radicalisation. It has not yet reached the dimensions of Gaza, but the process is the same.

There is a layer of middle class, educated, secular Palestinians. What are they saying? Surely they will be appalled at the prospects of an Islamic government.

Though many of them are genuinely terrified about the future, there is an open admiration too. The Islamic groups are the resistance to Israeli occupation today and they are totally against any attempt to smash, or even disarm Hamas. In the eyes of the huge mass of the people they are the legitimate — and only — opposition to Israeli occupation.

What is the PLO's strategy now? In order to get out of the mess they need lots of money from abroad and political progress.

Yes. And they hope that at some point there will be international pressure on Israel to force it to abide by its signature on the agreement. They say it openly, that they have no other choice but to go on with the process which they still believe will lead to a Palestinian state. That is something which, today, I doubt. ■

● Michel Warshawsky of the Israeli Trotskyist organisation, Matzpen, was talking to Mark Osborn.

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