

CENTRAL ASIA

## What Israel has done

EDWARD SAID

DESPISE Israel's effort to restrict coverage of its extraordinarily destructive invasion of the West Bank's Palestinian towns and refugee camps, information and images have nevertheless seeped through. The Internet has provided hundreds of verbal as well as pictorial eyewitness reports, as has Arab and European TV coverage, most of it unavailable or blocked or spun out of existence from the mainstream US media. That evidence provides stunning proof of what Israel's campaign has actually (has always) been about: the irreversible conquest of Palestinian land and society. The official line (which the US, along with nearly every American media commentator has basically supported) is that Israel has been defending itself by retaliating for the suicide bombings that have undermined its security and even threatened its existence. That claim has gained the status of an absolute truth moderated neither by what Israel has done nor by what in fact has been done to it.

Plucking out the terrorist network, destroying the terrorist infrastructure, attacking terrorist nests (note the total dehumanisation involved in every one of these phrases): the words are repeated so often and so unthinkingly that they have therefore given Israel the right to do what it has wanted to do, which in effect is to destroy Palestinian civil life with as much damage, as much sheer wanton destruction, killing, humiliation, vandalism, purposeless but overwhelming technological violence as possible. No other state on earth could have done what Israel has done with as much approbation and support as the US has given it. None has been more intransigent and destructive, less out of touch with its own realities, than Israel.

There are signs, however, that the amazing, not to say grotesque, nature of these claims (its "fight for existence") is slowly being eroded by the harsh and nearly unimaginable devastation wrought by the Jewish state and its homicidal prime minister, Ariel Sharon. Take this front-page report, "Attacks Turn Palestinian

Plans Into Bent Metal and Piles of Dust" by the New York Times's Serge Schmemmann (no Palestinian propagandist) on 11 April: "There is no way to assess the full extent of the damage to the cities and towns -- Ramallah, Bethlehem, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Nablus, and Jenin -- while they remain under a tight siege, with patrols and snipers firing in the streets. But it is safe to say that the infrastructure of life itself and of any future Palestinian state -- roads, schools, electricity pylons, water pipes, telephone lines -- has been devastated." By what inhuman calculus did Israel's army, using 50 tanks, 250 missile strikes a day, and dozens of F-16 sorties, besiege Jenin's refugee camp for over a week, a one square kilometre patch of shacks housing 15,000 refugees and a few dozen men armed with automatic rifles and with no defences whatever, no leaders, no missiles, no tanks, nothing, and call it a response to terrorist violence and the threat to Israel's survival? There are reported to be hundreds buried in the rubble Israeli bulldozers are now trying to heap over the camp's ruins.

Are Palestinian civilians, men, women, children, no more than rats or cockroaches that can be killed and attacked in the thousands without so much as a word of compassion or in their defence? And what about the capture of thousands of Palestinian men who have been taken off by Israeli soldiers without a trace, the destitution and homelessness of so many ordinary people trying to survive in the ruins created by Israeli bulldozers all over the West Bank, the siege that has now gone on for months and months, the cutting off of electricity and water in all Palestinian towns, the long days of total curfew, the shortage of food and medicine, the wounded who have bled to death, the systematic attacks on ambulances and aid workers that even the mild-mannered Kofi Annan has decried as outrageous? Those actions will not be pushed so easily into the memory hole. Its friends must ask Israel how gain its peace, acceptance and security.

A monstrous transformation of an entire people by the most formidable

and feared propagandist machine in the world into little more than "militants" and "terrorists" has allowed not just Israel's military but its fleet of writers and defenders to efface a terrible history of suffering and abuse in order to destroy the civil existence of the Palestinian people with impunity. Gone from public memory are the destruction of Palestinian society in 1948 and the creation of a dispossessed people; the conquest of the West Bank and Gaza and their military occupation since 1967; the invasion of 1982 with its 17,500 Lebanese and Palestinian dead and the Sabra and Shatila massacres; the continuous assault on Palestinian schools, refugee camps, hospitals, civil installations of every kind. What anti-terrorist purpose is served by destroying the building and then removing the records of the Ministry of Education, the Ramallah Municipality, the Central Bureau of Statistics, various institutes specialising in civil rights, health and economic development, hospitals, radio and television stations? Is it not clear that Sharon is bent not only on "breaking" the Palestinians, but on trying to eliminate them as a people with national institutions?

In such a context of disparity and asymmetrical power, it seems deranged to keep asking the Palestinians, who have neither army, nor air force, nor tanks, nor defences of any kind, nor functioning leadership, to "renounce" violence, and to require no comparable limitation on Israel's actions. Even the matter of suicide bombers, which I have always opposed, cannot be examined from a view point that permits a hidden racist standard to value Israeli lives over the many more Palestinian lives that have been lost, maimed, distorted and foreshortened by long-standing Israeli military occupation, and the systematic barbarity openly used by Sharon against Palestinians from the beginning of his career in the 1950s until now.

There can be no conceivable peace, in my opinion, that does not tackle the real issue: Israel's utter refusal to accept the sovereign existence of a Palestinian people that is entitled to rights over what Sharon and most of the people supporting him consider exclusively to be the land of Greater Israel, i.e. the West Bank and Gaza. A profile of Sharon in the 6-7 April issue of the Financial Times concluded with this extremely telling extract from his autobiography, which the FT prefaced with "he has written with pride of his parents' belief that Jews and Arabs could live side by side." Then the relevant quote from Sharon's book: "But they believed without question that only they had rights over the land. And no one was going to force them out, regardless of terror or anything else. When the land belongs to you physically... that is when you have power, not just physical power but spiritual power."

In 1988, the PLO made the concession that the partition of historical Palestine into two states would be acceptable. This was reaffirmed on numerous occasions and certainly again in the Oslo documents. But only the Palestinians explicitly recognised the notion of partition. Israel never has. This is why there are now over 170 settlements on Palestinian lands, why a 300-mile network of roads connecting them to each other and totally impeding Palestinian movement exists (according to Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, it has cost \$3 billion and has been funded by the US), why no Israeli prime minister, from Rabin on, has ever conceded any real Palestinian sovereignty to the Palestinians, and why of course the settlements have increased on an annual basis. The merest glance at a recent map of the territories reveals what Israel has been doing throughout the peace process, and what the consequent geographical discontinuity and shrinkage in Palestinian life has been. In effect, then, Israel considers itself and the Jewish people to own the land of Israel in its entirety: there are land ownership laws in Israel itself guaranteeing this, but on the West Bank and Gaza the network of settlements, roads, and no concessions whatever on sovereign land rights to the Palestinians serve the same function.

What boggles the mind is that no official -- US, Palestinian, Arab, UN, European, or anyone else -- has challenged Israel on this point, which has been threaded through all of the Oslo documents, procedures and agreements. That is why, of course, after nearly 10 years of "peace negotiations," Israel still controls the West Bank and Gaza. They are more directly controlled (owned?) by over 1,000 Israeli tanks and thousands of soldiers today, but the underlying principle is the same. No Israeli leader (and certainly not Sharon and his Land of Israel supporters who are the majority in his government) has either officially recognised the occupied territories as occupied territories or gone on to recognise that Palestinians could or might theoretically have sovereign rights -- that is, without Israeli control over borders, water, air, security on what most of the world considers Palestinian land. So to speak about the "vision" of a Palestinian state, as has become fashionable, is mere vision alas, unless the question of land ownership and sovereignty is openly and officially conceded by the Israeli government. No Israeli government ever has made this concession and, if I am right, none will in the near future. It needs to be remembered that Israel is the only state in the world today that has never had internationally declared borders; the only state not the state of its citizens but of the whole Jewish people; the only state where over 90 per cent of the land is held in trust for the exclusive use of the Jewish people. That it is also the only state in the world never to have recognised any of the main provisions of international law (as argued recently in these pages by Richard Falk) suggests the depth and structural knottiness of the absolute rejectionism that Palestinians have had to face.

This is why I have been sceptical about discussions and meetings about peace, which is a lovely word but in the present context simply means that Palestinians will have to stop resisting Israeli control over their land. It is among the many deficiencies of Arafat's terrible leadership (to say nothing of the even more lamentable Arab leaders in general) that he never made the decade-long Oslo negotiations focus on land ownership, and thus never put the onus on Israel to declare itself constitutively willing to give up title to Palestinian land; nor did he ever ask that Israel be required to deal with any of its responsibility for the sufferings of his people. Now I worry that he may simply be trying to save himself again, whereas what we really need are international monitors to protect us, as well as elections to assure a real political future for the Palestinian people.

The profound question facing Israel and its people is this: is it willing juridically to assume the rights and obligations of being a country like any other, and forswear the kind of impossible land ownership assertions for which Sharon and his parents and his soldiers have been fighting since day one? In 1948 Palestinians lost 78 per cent of Palestine. In 1967 they lost the last 22 per cent, both times to Israel. Now the international community must lay upon Israel the obligation to accept the principle of real, as opposed to fictional, partition, and to accept the principle of limiting Israel's untenable extra-territorial claims, those absurd Biblically-based pretensions, and laws that have so far allowed it to override another people completely. Why is that kind of fundamentalism tolerated unquestioningly? But so far all we hear is that Palestinians must give up violence and condemn terror. Is nothing substantive ever demanded of Israel? Can it go on doing what it has without a thought for the consequences? That is the real question of its existence: whether it can exist as a state like all others, or must always be above the constraints and duties of all other states in the world today. The record is not reassuring.

Courtesy: Al-Ahram Weekly.

WORLD CUP COUNTDOWN

## Smile, please

PARK MOO-JONG

THE most popular sporting event in mankind, the World Cup finals, is just weeks away, with its opening ceremony to be held at Seoul's Sangam Stadium on May 31. It cannot be overemphasised that the global soccer championship is a golden opportunity for the nation to upgrade its international prestige as well as boost tourism, which is dubbed "the industry without smokestacks."

The tournament, held every four years, has an enormous effect in terms of tourism, as proved by the previous ones, including the 1998 France World Cup. Around 600,000 foreign visitors are expected to come here from all over the world to see the matches and experience Korea. As the people count down the days until kick-off, organisers assert that the country is fully ready to provide hospitality to guests from abroad.

It seems that the nation is, at least, prepared materially, but there is still something preventing us from welcoming foreigners from the bottom of our hearts.

In short, we Koreans look too serious in the eyes of people from overseas. It is hard to see Koreans smile, not only at foreigners on streets, subways, elevators and elsewhere, but at their fellow citizens as well.

In a city with skyscrapers and high-rise apartments, citizens have to use elevators several times a day. The typical scene in any lift would testify to the serious facial expressions of Koreans.

At any bustling multi-story building, when an elevator arrives at the first floor, passengers have difficulty getting out because they are blocked by others who are trying to get in.

Over the past several years, people have changed their elevator

etiquette, but there are still many people who enter the elevator before passengers get out. What is worse is that people are surprisingly accustomed to such behaviour, and accept it as normal. Similar conduct can easily be seen at subway stations.

A more serious problem occurs inside the elevator. Passengers seldom look at each other, talk or smile, especially if they are total strangers. What they often do is look up awkwardly at the lighted num-

beral services.

The situation here is no different on streets and at other places. Many Korean-Americans who visited Seoul for the first time in many years complain that they felt a tense atmosphere on the streets, as the pedestrians seemed to be too busy and aggressive. Few Koreans say "sorry" or "excuse me," when they bump into foreigners by accident.

A foreigner quipped that Koreans must be skilled gamblers, judging from their poker faces.



bers that indicate its location. From time to time, I feel suffocated by such an atmosphere during the ride, though short.

Even in apartment elevators, neighbours seldom exchange greetings, as if they are engaged in silence contests.

It is needless to say that foreigners, particularly Westerners, smile when they meet others, except maybe for sad occasions like

Frankly speaking, Korea is a very "tough" country for foreign visitors.

There are not many people who can speak English, even if the language is taught for more than 10 years at various levels of school.

There are few lodging facilities like B&Bs in Britain, where foreign tourists can stay at reasonable rates.

There aren't enough road signs in English to guide foreign visitors,

## RUSSIA-CHINA

# Trade disputes coming to a boil

JOHN HELMER

AS TRADE disputes threaten to multiply out of control, Russia and China say they have agreed on a consultative mechanism to try to resolve trade problems before they reach the stage of anti-dumping penalties.

The initiative came from the Russian Union of Metal Exporters, which proposed the idea several months ago during talks with their Chinese counterparts. There was no response at the time from the Chinese, however, who instead began an anti-dumping action against imports of Russian cold-rolled steel products. Russian producers are facing penalty duties of up to 16.07 percent if Beijing rules in favor of the local steelmakers.

Last week, however, during the visit to China by Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko, Chinese officials said they would agree to consultations, on the condition that the new mechanism does not intervene in the current steel dispute. Viktor Chervyakov, an analyst with the Union of Exporters, said that the new mechanism "will not be able to prevent the conclusion of the anti-dumping investigations, which have already been opened. But it may be effective for discussion of potential problems that arise in bilateral trade and prevent the opening of new anti-dumping investigations."

Chervyakov said there is suspicion in Moscow that Chinese steelmakers are planning a new anti-dumping move against imports of Russian hot-rolled steel. He believes the new committee "may enable producers of the two countries to head this off".

Sources in the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade confirmed that the idea of the working group has been accepted by Beijing and that the Chinese said they want "to hear Russian proposals on the status, composition and principles of work of the working group". Most likely, a ministry official said, "groups will be established by the representatives of various

industries that are worried about the potential problems with access of their goods to the Chinese market, and will meet wherever producers feels the need to discuss particular problems". Such working groups may be established in various industries, the source said, "but so far it is the Russian steel makers who feel the most urgent need for such a mechanism".

Other Russian industry sources were more skeptical of what exactly the Chinese government has agreed to, if anything. They noted that Chinese industry representatives are much keener on using protectionist measures against Russian steel than the government in Beijing. They also noted that an inter-government committee already exists, and has been meeting regularly - without being able to do anything at all about the spate of recent trade disputes.

According to a Russian Trade Ministry source, Russian exporters first get information from their traders in China about potential problems for imports. This is where current concerns about Chinese anti-dumping action against hot-rolled coils have originated. According to Chinese (and Russian) trade legislation, government agencies that should carry out anti-dumping investigations are not authorized to disclose information about petitions until after they have been received and investigations started.

One Russian source told ATO that he doubts Chinese steel makers will agree to negotiate with their Russian counterparts over import disputes if they believe they can lobby their own government for action, and if Chinese trade officials are likely to be more partial to their own constituents than to the Russians.

The details of the consultative mechanism will be on the agenda of the Moscow session of the Sino-Russian government sub-commission on trade and economic cooperation, scheduled to meet on May 22.

A Russian government source said that similar

proposals were made to India for several years, but no agreement was reached. India currently applies penalty duties on imports of some Russian steel products. An Indian official told ATO that problems of negotiating with Russians are "chronic. There is virtually no progress, except in arms deals."

The Russian Trade Ministry also conceded that it "doesn't feel like dictating to [Russian] steel producers what they should do and won't force them to adopt voluntary quantitative restrictions, unless the producers themselves feel that this is necessary".

Sergei Schetnikov, a spokesman for Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Combine, said his plant is willing to accept voluntary quotas if this is the price for preserving access to the Chinese market. Magnitogorsk is the single largest Russian steel exporter to China, and its sales comprise roughly 30 percent of Russian cold- and hot-rolled steel exports to China. Last year, these totaled about 700,000 metric tons, and 2.3 million tons, respectively; Magnitogorsk says it shipped about 1 million tons.

In addition to the pending or threatened Chinese investigation of Russian imports, the Russian government has opened investigations of imports of Chinese bearings and silicon. Non-trade measures include a Russian ban on Chinese meat imports.

In the only formal anti-dumping case China has pursued against Russian steel to date, penalty duties were imposed on transformer steel in September 2000. Until China's recent accession to the World Trade Organization required changes in Beijing's trade protection procedures, Russian steel imports were regularly restricted by import licensing.

Courtesy: Asia Times Online Co., Ltd.