

Gaza and aftermath of Annapolis

KHALED KHALEFEH

It currently seems as though the Israeli decision makers are conducting two different policies towards the Palestinians; the first towards the Palestinian Authority and Abu Mazen and the second towards Hamas in the Gaza Strip. As a matter of fact, however, the Israelis are conducting one policy for both entities, that of continuing to confront instead of real negotiations with both parts of the Palestinians.

Concerning Abu Mazen and the intensive talks before the Annapolis gathering, the Israeli strategy is to continue talking with Abu Mazen in order to isolate and contain Hamas. It is quite certain that the negotiations with Abu Mazen will lead to a kind of amorphous declaration, which will be very comfortable for Israel and the Bush Administration, without any timetable for implementing the hard-core issues of this declaration.

In addition, there are also great doubts about the future of Ehud Olmert as Prime Minister. There is a high probability that he will resign immediately after the Annapolis Summit, using his illness as an excuse. He can claim that he has brought Israel to the "Road of Peace", and by accomplishing that his role as Prime Minister is complete. By conducting this step he can gain moral popularity, a step that will divert attention from the Vinograd Commission and the police investigations against him. Consequently, he can get more sympathy from Israeli public opinion and many might forget his great fiasco of the Lebanon War. If not, Tsipi Livni or another figure from Kadima might replace him. Annapolis will have no real meaning. All that will remain will be the photo opportunities for all the partners who are supposed to be supporting and helping the Bush Administration in its global war against Iraq and Afghanistan.

The next Israeli leader will be the same kind of tactician as his predecessor Olmert. He or she will waste more time adjusting to the position and learning the new political circumstances. Ehud Barak, meanwhile, will not comment on any agreement or non-agreement with the Palestinians. He will continue to perceive Gaza as the real and concrete threat to Israel. The next Prime Minister, with the assistance of the US, will continue to use the same formula of General Keith Dayton in the West Bank; to separate the West Bank from Gaza and to continue to perceive the Gaza Strip as a hostile entity and as a matter for treatment by the Israeli security forces.

Concerning the West Bank, Israel and its security forces will continue its incursions into the heartland of the West Bank, while at the same time they will agree to go along with the Dayton Plan of deploying Palestinian police in some of the Palestinian urban areas, such as Nablus and Ramallah. These forces will be allowed to work in cooperation and coordination with Israel's security forces. These Palestinian forces will have a limited mandate of keeping the order and of arresting some wanted figures for treatment by the Israeli security forces.

Mahmoud Abass (Abu Mazen) has given a complete mandate to the US security coordinator Keith Dayton to control and deploy the Palestinian police in the West Bank. These forces have the task of maintaining the security regime of Abu Mazen and containing Hamas in the West Bank. The main fear of the Fatah regime is the rising of Hamas in the West Bank.

However, in a televised speech on 4 November on Al-Jazeera, PM Ismael Haneya accused the Palestinian Authority of conducting a massive campaign of cracking down on Hamas activities in the West Bank with the cooperation of the Israeli IDF. Haneya accused Abass of cooperating with Israel in implementing a siege on Gaza and of carrying out large-scale bombardments against

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Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, which has caused the killing of 174 Palestinian civilians in the last two months.

Haneya described the situation in Gaza as catastrophic. There are no exits or entrances, even for Moslem Pilgrims and ill people. Gaza's fruits and vegetables are left in refrigerators with-

out any possibility for export. He urged the Egyptians and the European Union to do something concerning this issue.

Haneya ignored Abass and his agreement with the Americans by declaring that even if the talks lead to a declaration of principles, "we need immediate withdrawal from the West Bank and

Gaza Strip", and not a declaration of principles which will continue forever.

Haneya's argument is that the Annapolis meeting will lead to nowhere. However, its main task is to consolidate more states against Iran and locally support Abu Mazen in containing Hamas with the Israeli forces.

Annapolis Prospective

The Palestinian Prime Minister asked Abu Mazen not to take part in attacking Palestinian civilians in West Bank with Israel, because by doing so, he will gradually lose his legitimacy among the Palestinians. However, the Palestinian authority will continue with its policy of containing Hamas in the West Bank with Israel's cooperation and with American's assistance.

At the same time, Hamas will try to revive the Palestinian Parliament by receiving authorization from the arrested parliamentarians of Hamas to hold a session of Parliament. As a result, Abu Mazen will lose more of his legitimacy while he is directing negotiations with Israel.

Abu Mazen will also continue to lose support because the opposition is growing against him and because Israel will not stop the attacks against the West Bank and the bombardment against Gaza. Mahmoud Abass has not succeeded in convincing Israel to dismantle any outposts from the West Bank or to stop constructing the Wall.

Israeli political leaders are not capable of making any concessions to Abu Mazen. As a result, the chances of any success at the Annapolis gathering are very slim. The security analysis of Amman (The IDF military intelligence) is therefore predicting the total failure of the Annapolis conference (Haaretz, 7 November 2007).

Consequently, the failure of this international gathering will lead to the collapse of the Abu Mazen regime, and at the same time, will affect his status as the leader of the Palestinian Authority and as the Head of the PLO.

His disappearance from the scene, however, will create a vacuum in the leadership of the Palestinian forces, which are currently cooperating and coordinating efforts with both the US and Israel. As a result, Israel's policy will again repeat the same terminology of "no partner" on the Palestinian side and the

urgent need to contain Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In an interview with the Jerusalem Post published on 13 August 2007, Martin Indyk, a former US ambassador to Israel argued that "the Bush Administration would be wrong to believe that it could secure a permanent Palestinian-Israeli accord in the final year or so that it has left in office." Indyk's argument confirms the main concept that Ms. Rice is supportive of the restoration of talks between the two sides due to her inability to push forward on any issue other than the failure of the Administration in Iraq or any possible attack against Iran.

Regarding the conference in Annapolis and the Middle East, Rice wants to achieve something for the Bush Administration before the occurrence of a catastrophe. The US Administration, has therefore, identified the weak factor in the regional Middle Eastern system as Abu Mazen, and he will be made to pay the price for the Americans in order to promote their Middle East national interests. Abu Mazen, however, will gain nothing for himself or for his Fatah Movement or for the Palestinian.

The result might be the destabilization of the area and a circle of bloodshed between the two sides for a long time. It does not seem logical that Israel will succeed in controlling Gaza and then later bring in multi-lateral European forces.

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military interests need to be preserved. The army has not been working much on preparing for this conference. Actually, none of the permanent military levels have received orders to prepare any policy papers for the Annapolis Conference.

Maj. Gen. Ido Nahshon, the head of the Planning Department in the IDF, is trying to define the strategic interests of Israel in the West Bank. What will therefore become obvious is that Abu Mazen will become weaker and weaker because of the Israeli perception and its unwillingness to discuss a comprehensive final solution with any Palestinian figure.

Abu Mazen is not the only weak leader. George Bush is also a lame duck who cannot impose a solution. He just wants to distract attention from Iraq by conducting a crisis policy with Iran and creating last opportunities for peace in the region.

Concerning Israel, the inherent permanent weakness of its leadership is mainly in dealing with the Palestinians. With any discussions that the Israeli leadership has to take part in, it suddenly becomes weak and unable to move and maneuver.

Olmer is currently ill and his support will soon diminish when the Vinograd Committee publishes its conclusions accusing him in the failed Lebanese adventure. Barak is the only person who is looking to take over the Prime Minister-ship if Tzispi Livni does not succeed. Olmer, Barak and some forces in the military establishment are already acknowledging the failures of Annapolis and Abu Mazen. They might try to attack Gaza. However, there are great doubts if such an attack can succeed because this kind of attack might be the bloodiest the region has ever known and the consequences will be the most disastrous not only on the human level but also on the military and strategic level.

The author is a journalist and member of The Arab Council for Foreign Relations.

Is Paris burning?

BILLY FAHIM

This write-up is not about 'Is Paris burning?' - the best-selling book by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre - but riots that have put the north Paris suburbs burning for two consecutive nights after the deaths of two Muslim immigrant youth, Moushin and Larimi, aged 15 and 16, in the north Paris suburb town of Villiers-le-Bel around 5 p.m. on Sunday, November 25. The youths were riding on a motorbike that was hit by a police car and were left for dead.

Residents of these suburban towns live in ghettos, which were built in the 1950s in imitation of Soviet social housing of Stalin era. People live in crammed conditions, sometimes several generations in a tiny apartment. Insults, criticism of Islamic practices, arbitrary arrests, and violence by police against immigrant youth and anyone who looks foreign are common in France.

Le Nouvel Observateur, in its November 26 article on the subject, also posted a video of Sarkozy criticizing Islamic practices, such as the slaughter of sheep during the festival of Eid. Sarkozy roughly comments: "One does not slaughter a sheep in one's bathtub."

The riots were sparked by the deaths of two teenagers in Villiers-le-Bel, in a collision between their motorbike and a police car. According to testimony of residents, the policemen fled the scene, leaving the two youngsters to die. The General Inspectorate of the National Police (IGPN) issued a report largely clearing the police of responsibility, but the report itself was found to be in contradiction with a video of the accident and the accounts given by Villiers-le-Bel's inhabitants.

Rioters set ablaze at least 60 cars, as well as a police station, library, and car dealership in Villiers-le-Bel, police said. The clashes had spread across six towns by Monday night, they said.

The accident and the ensuing violence revived memories of the deadly wave of riots in 2005 following the deaths of Bouna, 15, and Zayed, 17, of Muslim background who were electrocuted while fleeing from the police in the suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. There are some 4.5 million immigrants in France, according to estimates in mid-2006, with up to an additional half-million illegal migrants.

There is no official number of

people of Arab or African origin in France as laws ban census based on ethnic or religious grounds.

The 15 and 16-year-old boys killed in the Sunday evening wreck were both sons of African immigrants, police said. They died when their motorbike hit a patrol car in the town of Villiers-le-Bel, police said.

The angry protesters have thronged the crash site, demanding the "truth" about the accident.

"The truth should emerge or we will take the law in our own

"was not violence but an expression of rage," saying he wanted the police officers "responsible" for the accident to be brought to justice.

The basic details of the collision are not in dispute. According to the daily *Le Monde*, "the motorbike skidded for over twenty meters" while "the police car's front was smashed and the bumpers torn off; the windshield caved in deeply." The policemen promptly fled the scene on foot.

Marie-Thérèse Givry, the

first aid. When the neighborhood kids arrived, she said, "It's over, they're dead." She was all alone, the cops were gone."

There are substantial suspicions that the incident was deliberate. According to reporters for the daily *Libération*, "Media use of the term 'involuntary homicide' was particularly infuriating [to residents of the area], many of whom are convinced that the collision was deliberately provoked by the police squad."

Libération added: "There was

tions with other European heads of state.

Libération journalist Jean Quatremere wrote on November 19 that Nicolas Sarkozy "gave a real anti-Muslim diatribe before his guests. According to my sources, the head of state [i.e. Sarkozy] launched into a confused, twenty-minute speech [...] against the overly large number of Muslims present in Europe." He mentioned that Sarkozy repeatedly spoke of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and Europe.

Opposition politicians wasted no time in blaming the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy for the renewed rioting.

Sarkozy, when serving as interior minister during that wave of unrest, provoked controversy by referring to the rioters as "scum" -- language that served only to inflame the vandalism.

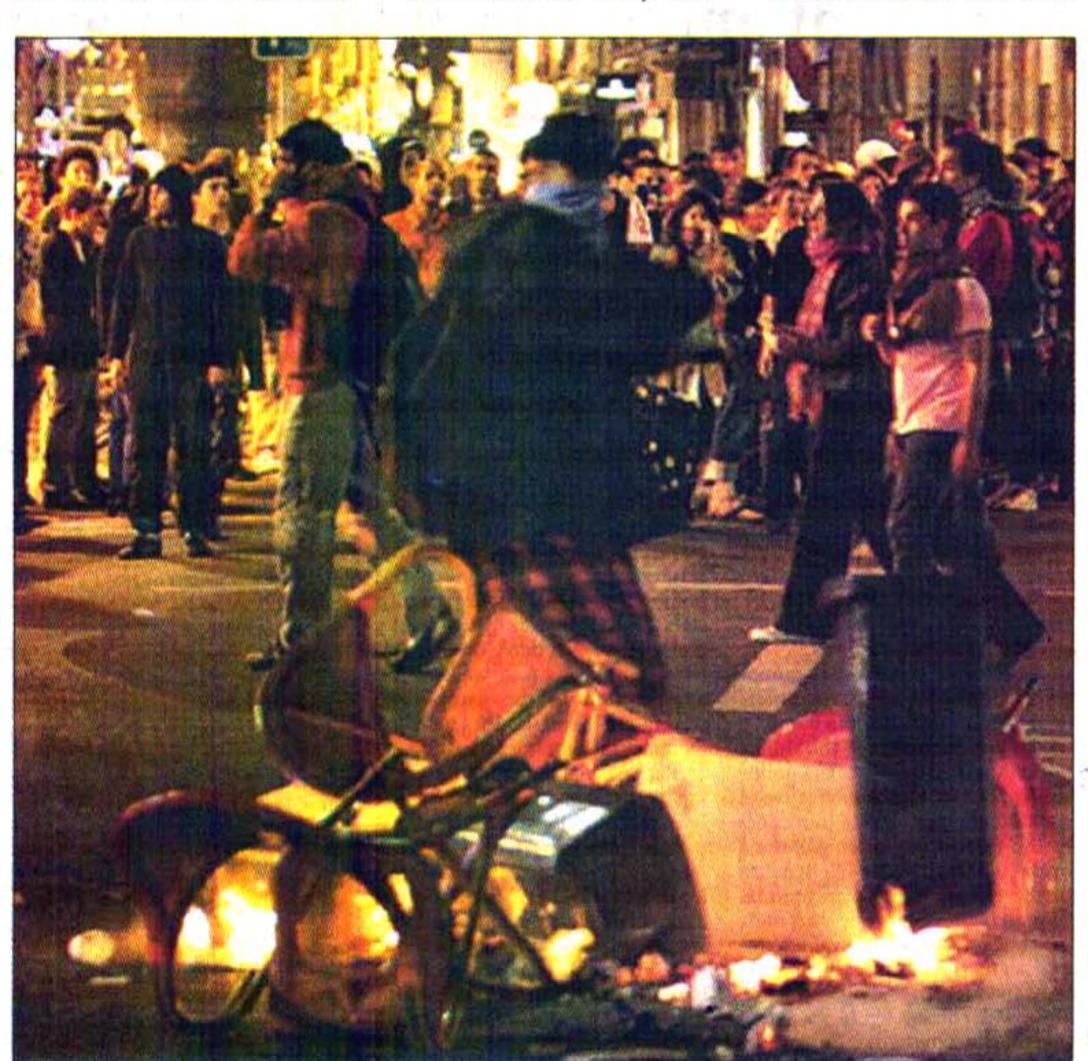
The use of language reminiscent of French colonialism's struggle against the masses of Algiers in the 1950s is no accident. The policy of forming large-scale police authorities capable of rapidly mobilizing large numbers of cops for police raids in poor neighborhoods was championed by Sarkozy as Interior Minister in 2003 has helped transform the relations between inhabitants and police into a constant, low-level war that erupts every time the police kill someone, unintentionally or otherwise.

Every time a major mass struggle has been called off in recent years, e.g. in 2003 against then-Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin's pension cuts and in 2006 against Dominique de Villepin's First Job Contract reform, the government has sought to appeal to racist or religious prejudices against Muslims and immigrants, who make up a large portion of the population in poorer suburbs. In 2003, Raffarin prepared a bill that banned Islamic headscarves in French public buildings. In 2006, the Villepin government passed a tough anti-immigrant bill shortly after the end of the First Job Contract demonstrations.

The eruptions are the product of desperate poverty, mass unemployment and a vicious, openly racist law-and-order campaign.

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The author is a columnist and researcher.



hands," some of them warned the police.

Omar Sehhouli, the brother of one of the two victims, accused the police of ramming the motorbike and of failing to assist the injured teenagers.

"This is a failure to assist a person in danger... it is a 100-percent (police) blunder. They know it, and that's why they did not stay at the scene," he told France Info radio.

Sehhouli told AFP the rioting

Pontoise district prosecutor, said that the policemen left the area and did not begin investigations until that night because of "the danger that their presence in that area would have posed." She did not explain her comment further, but it is clear that they feared being caught by enraged inhabitants. Several media outlets, including *Libération* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, have recently carried articles paraphrasing apparently vulgar anti-Muslim rants by Sarkozy in diplomatic negotiations.

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What does it take to be a good neighbour?

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

The oriental philosophy speaks constantly of a unifying principle which gives meaning and guidance to human interaction; it is the key concept for understanding human conduct. This unifying principle is manifested in "benevolence", "magnanimity", "virtue", "compassion", and "human-heartedness".

On a personal level, a good neighbour is when the neighbour rushes in to help in case of need, prompted by compassion and magnanimity.

Does the same yardstick apply between the states?

In recent days, Bangladesh's biggest neighbour India has come out in a big way to help Bangladesh face the devastation caused by cyclone Sidr on 15th November.

Visit of India's external affairs Minister

India's external affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee's daylong visit on 1st December to Bangladesh testifies India's assistance to efforts in mitigating the sufferings of the victims. He came to Dhaka in an Indian Air force plane carrying more than 36 tonnes of relief goods including ready-to-eat meals, milk powder, medicines, water filters and blankets.

Mukherjee handed over the relief materials to the Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr. Iftekhar Choudhury at the Zia International Airport. During his visit he met with the Chief Adviser of the Caretaker government, Dr. Fakhrul Islam.

Mukherjee assured that India had lifted the ban on rice exports to the tune of five lakh tonnes to help Bangladesh deal with its food shortage and also to pay for the full rebuilding of 10 villages affected badly by the cyclone. India has provided 20,000 tonnes of rice as direct relief.

Mukherjee visited two of the worst cyclone-hit areas, Sharankhola and Patharghat. This has demonstrated his keen desire to have a first-hand experience to witness the devastation caused in the southern districts of Bangladesh.

Indo-Bangladesh relations

The Indo-Bangladesh partnership is far too important for either side to let partisan politics interfere with the proper conduct of the relationship.

Living with "big brother" has spawned for Bangladesh what some have called a post-modern approach to diplomacy -- one that is becoming more common in an internet age and at a time when nations must increasingly compete with the integrating forces of the world economy -- and when traditional borders as geographic markers are becoming less obvious.

Bangladesh is not the only country that has a very big neighbour. Consider New Zealand, with a population roughly one fifth that of Australia, or France and Switzerland who live side by side. How about Uruguay, for which Brazil represents the dominant export market? And there are many similar cases around the world.