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Breaking the Israel-Palestine deadlock

NOAM CHOMSKY

WHILE intensely engaged in illegal settlement expansion, the government of Israel is also seeking to deal with two problems: a global campaign of what it perceives as "delegitimation" -- that is, objections to its crimes and withdrawal of participation in them -- and a parallel campaign of legitimization of Palestine.

The "delegitimation," which is progressing rapidly, was carried forward in December by a Human Rights Watch call on the U.S. "to suspend financing to Israel in an amount equivalent to the costs of Israel's spending in support of settlements," and to monitor contributions to Israel from tax-exempt U.S. organisations that violate international law, "including prohibitions against discrimination" -- which would cast a wide net. Amnesty International had already called for an arms embargo on Israel.

The legitimization process also took a long step forward in December, when Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil recognised the State of Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank), bringing the number of supporting nations to more than 100.

International lawyer John Whitbeck estimates that 80-90% of the world's population live in states that recognise Palestine, while 10-20% recognise the Republic of Kosovo. The U.S. recognises Kosovo but not Palestine.

Accordingly, as Whitbeck writes in Counterpunch, media "act as though Kosovo's independence were an accomplished fact while Palestine's independence is only an aspiration which can never be realised without Israeli-American consent," reflecting the normal workings of power in the international arena.

Given the scale of Israeli settlement of the West Bank, it has been argued for more a decade that the international consensus on a two-state settlement is dead, or mistaken (though evidently most of the world does not agree).

Therefore those concerned with Palestinian rights should call for Israeli takeover of the entire West Bank, followed by an anti-apartheid struggle of the South African variety that would lead to full citizenship for the Arab population there.

The argument assumes that Israel would agree to the takeover. It is far more likely that Israel will instead continue the programmes leading to annexation of the parts of the West Bank

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that it is developing, roughly half the area, and take no responsibility for the rest, thus defending itself from the "demographic problem" -- too many non-Jews in a Jewish state -- and meanwhile severing besieged Gaza from the rest of Palestine.

One analogy between Israel and South Africa merits attention. Once apartheid was implemented, South African nationalists recognised they were becoming international pariahs because of it. In 1958, however, the foreign minister informed the U.S. ambassador that U.N. condemnations and other protests were of little concern as long as South Africa was supported by the global hegemon -- the United States.

By the 1970s, the U.N. declared an arms embargo, soon followed by boycott campaigns and divestment. South Africa reacted in ways calculated to enrage international opinion. In a gesture of contempt for the U.N. and President Jimmy Carter -- who failed to react so as not to disrupt worthless negotiations -- South Africa launched a murderous raid on the Cassinga refugee camp in Angola just as the Carter-led "contact group" was to present a settlement for Namibia.

The similarity to Israel's behaviour

today is striking -- for example, the attack on Gaza in January 2009 and on the Gaza freedom flotilla in May 2010.

When President Reagan took office in 1981, he lent full support to South Africa's domestic crimes and its murderous depredations in neighbouring countries.

The policies were justified in the framework of the war on terror that Reagan had declared on coming into office. In 1988, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress was designated one of the world's "more notorious terrorist groups" (Mandela himself was only removed from Washington's "terrorist list" in 2008). South Africa was defiant, and even triumphant, with its internal enemies crushed, and enjoying solid support from the one state that mattered in the global system.

Shortly after, U.S. policy shifted. U.S. and South African business interests very likely realised they would be better off by ending the apartheid burden. And apartheid soon collapsed.

South Africa is not the only recent case where ending U.S. support for crimes has led to significant progress.

Can such a transformative shift happen in Israel's case, clearing the way to a diplomatic settlement? Among the bar-

riers firmly in place are the very close military and intelligence ties between the U.S. and Israel.

The most outspoken support for Israeli crimes comes from the business world. U.S. high-tech industry is closely integrated with its Israeli counterpart. To cite just one example, the world's largest chip manufacturer, Intel, is establishing its most advanced production unit in Israel.

A U.S. cable released by WikiLeaks reveals that Rafael military industries in Haifa is one of the sites considered vital to U.S. interests due to its production of cluster bombs; Rafael had already moved some operations to the U.S. to gain better access to U.S. aid and markets. There is also a powerful Israel lobby, though of course dwarfed by the business and military lobbies.

Critical cultural facts apply, too. Christian Zionism long precedes Jewish Zionism, and is not restricted to the one-third of the U.S. population that believes in the literal truth of the Bible. When British Gen. Edmund Allenby conquered Jerusalem in 1917, the national press declared him to be Richard the Lionhearted, finally rescuing the Holy Land from the infidels.

Next, Jews must return to the homeland promised to them by the Lord. Articulating a common elite view, Harold Ickes, Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of the interior, described Jewish colonisation of Palestine as an achievement "without comparison in the history of the human race."

There is also an instinctive sympathy for a settler-colonial society that is seen to be retracing the history of the U.S. itself, bringing civilisation to the lands that the undeserving natives had misused -- doctrines deeply rooted in centuries of imperialism.

To break the logjam it will be necessary to dismantle the reigning illusion that the U.S. is an "honest broker" desperately seeking to reconcile recalcitrant adversaries, and to recognise that serious negotiations would be between the U.S.-Israel and the rest of the world.

If U.S. power centers can be compelled by popular opinion to abandon decades-old rejectionism, many prospects that seem remote might become suddenly possible.

Noam Chomsky's most recent book, with co-author Ilan Pappé, is *Gaza in Crisis*. Chomsky is emeritus professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass.

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A column about endings

MANY people think murdering their parents is a bad thing. In general, it's a lifestyle choice which gets a bad rap.

The issue never popped up in my mind at all, except for the 40 or 50 times when I was being punished as a small child. A teacher once told me I would eventually "irritate someone to death." But despite my prodigious skills in that area, I failed to kill a single person by this method. (Not for want of trying.)

A grim topic for this usually light column, but we have to take life as it comes. The above memory popped into my head recently when my beloved 88-year-old mother, known to the family as Granny, summoned me to her bedside and announced that she had enjoyed a good life and was ready to be dispatched to heaven.

Horrified, I scolded her for being so morbid and set up an exhilarating, life-enhancing experience for her, i.e., a thrilling game of Scrabble with me. (This is more exciting than it sounds, because I cheat a lot, making up words like Xqmjzx to raise my score, and throw massive tantrums if I don't win every single round.)

But afterwards she repeated her request. Consulting an expert, I learned that this was extremely common, and not at all a sign of unhappiness. "You'll make the same request when you are 88," a wise man from the academic world told me.

Granny kept repeating the request. What to answer? And how would one "arrange" such a thing anyway?

I raised the issue at a famed forum at which intellectuals gather (the back table of the Quite Good Noodle Shop). "You just go to the shady part of town and hire a contract killer," said a man eating laksa. "They're not even that expensive these days with the recession."

Other diners fiercely opposed this option. "It's messy and you'll traumatise the dog," one said.

My fellow diners clearly "did not get it." The only wise comment came from an udon-eater who said nature would take its course. God/ destiny would handle it. Granny's vital systems, such as digestion or breathing, would consciously or unconsciously be shut down, and her wish would be painlessly fulfilled.

I'm being typically flippant, of course, but this is actually a serious topic. A quick Google of the newspapers revealed that a debate about how best to achieve a



respectful, humane life-ending is going on all over the world, as mothers of the baby-boomer generation become elderly. It's been huge in Europe, with a place in Switzerland specifically offering ideal send-offs. A couple from UK who used the facility made front-page news in their home country.

This is a real issue that we all have to face eventually. If you want to go to London, you go to London. If you want to go to Heaven/ Nirvana/ oblivion, what do you do?

It's a far more important step, but there's nothing you can do about it. You can't even talk about it without stupid people like me scolding you for being morbid.

The dilemma reminded me of Old Mrs Adamson, who lived opposite me when I was a child. She had a "farewell to life" party when she was 66, another at 67, a third at 68 and so on. By her 10th deathbed party, at the age of 76, she was hopping mad. "I've been ready to die for ages but I am still waiting," she thundered at God. She eventually died, furious, at 96. (I would not have liked to have been St Peter at the gates of heaven that day.)

Then last week, at our home, Granny suddenly fell ill. Terrified, we raced her to hospital, Doctors rushed her into surgery for an operation.

Biting our nails, we soon got to know the hushed corridors of the intensive care unit.

Days later, doctors emerged and explained: Granny's digestive and breathing systems had failed, but a risky operation to fix them had proved successful.

We celebrated, of course: what else can one do? We didn't want her to go. But who was she saved for? Herself or for us?

These are questions with no easy answers.

When I got home, my heart still beating at double-speed, I told my kids that when I got old, they should get a contract killer to polish me off and divide up their inheritance among themselves.

One of them reached for her mobile phone. "not now," I said. "When I get old."

Honestly, you have to be so careful with what you say to kids these days.

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Metternich's World

The murder of a Pakistani liberal



Salman Taseer

LONG years ago, in the days of General Ziaul Haq, Salman Taseer wrote a poignant biography of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It was, of course, adulatory in tone and some copies were available in bookstores in Dhaka. Taseer was a bright young man at the time and showed promise of a scholarly career in writing. Those who observed Pakistan at that point imagined that Taseer and others like him, all of whom were engaged in their many ways in the struggle against the Zia brutality, would someday transform Pakistan into a liberal state, well away from the sordid military-civilian bureaucratic complex it had become trapped in despite the loss of East Pakistan in 1971.

Taseer did not, of course, make a

career in writing, though he did come up at times with his thoughts through writing for newspapers and periodicals. But he did go into active politics. He joined the Pakistan People's Party and swiftly went into the business of linking up with the movement for a restoration of democracy in his country. For him as for other Pakistanis, the PPP was a symbol of liberalism and only Benazir Bhutto was capable of leading the party back to power.

The real story of the PPP was, and has been, different, to be sure. Formed in 1967 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto with the rather queer combination of Islam, democracy and socialism as its guiding principles, the party was essentially a coming together of feudals, rightists and elements willing to ditch Ayub Khan and go looking for greener pastures in a changing era. Z.A. Bhutto was emblematic of hope for people in Sind and Punjab, fundamentally because his was the first voice of protest against an entrenched system in West Pakistan. East Pakistan was a different matter altogether.

For those who idolised Bhutto and saw hope reflected in his party, it mattered little that the man and the organisation had been part of the process that led Pakistan down the road to disaster in 1971. Many were the ailments Bhutto

suffered from and much was the arrogance which brought about his doom. But men like Salman Taseer went on believing that despite Bhutto's sordid end, there was the liberalism that remained.

At a point, Taseer himself came to believe that what other men could not say, out of political expediency or from a need for caution, he could pronounce with all the clarity and force at his command. It was thus that he adopted a strong position on the blasphemy law, one of the more disturbing of constitutional regulations in Pakistan. It simply muffled the voice of dissent, especially in the case of Pakistan's non-Muslim communities and its liberal classes.

Anyone taking a stand against the blasphemy law was quickly looked upon as an enemy of Islam. And many have been the crude ramifications of the law, with innocent men and women paying a price for crimes and sins they did not commit only because a section of fundamentalists, believing they have the authority to pronounce judgement on Islam and on Sharia law, have tried to exert their 'authority' against those they think are guilty of acting against God's will.

It is these men who have caused the murder of Salman Taseer. That it was his own bodyguard who shot him down,

with no regret and in the apparent belief that he was pleasing Allah by his act, only demonstrates the vulnerabilities to which good, thinking men are subject in Pakistan these days. The good ones have mourned Taseer's end, in pretty muted form, for there are the many more who have warned against any mourning, indeed who have unabashedly celebrated the murder of the governor of Punjab.

Salman Taseer's assassination can only make things worse for Pakistan. The country has moved a step ahead toward being a failed state. Its northwest region is troubled, with the Taliban running the show. Its federal government is in a tottering stage, despite the return of the Muttahida Qaumi Mahaz to the coalition it had walked out of a few days ago. Its military is always breathing down the neck of its government. It has yet to convince the world that it can prevent global terrorism from taking roots in its soil or among its citizens who live abroad. And, yes, it has a president who has made a laughing stock of himself through his clear inability to do justice to his job.

The murder of the man who could have been a scholar but chose to be a politician only thickens the darkness of the clouds in Pakistan's skies.

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