

Damage Control: Noam Chomsky and the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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Noam Chomsky has been the foremost critic of America's imperial adventures for more than three decades. That is probably the only point of agreement shared by his legions of loyal supporters and his equally committed although far less numerous detractors. His domination of the field is so extraordinary and unprecedented that one would be hard-put to find a runner-up. It is a considerable achievement for someone who has been described, at times, as a "reluctant icon." [1]

Despite his low-key demeanor and monotone delivery, Chomsky has been anything but reluctant. On closer examination, however, it appears that he has gained his elevated position less from scholarship than from the sheer body of his work that includes books by the dozens--30 in the last 30 years--and speeches and interviews in the hundreds.

In the field of US-Israel-Palestine relations he has been a virtual human tsunami, washing like a huge wave over genuine scholarly works in the field that contradict his critical positions on the Middle East, namely that Israel serves a strategic asset for the US and that the Israeli lobby, primarily AIPAC, is little more than a pressure group like any other trying to affect US policy in the Middle East. For both of these positions, as I will show, he offers only the sketchiest of evidence and what undercuts his theory he eliminates altogether.

Nevertheless, he has ignited the thinking and gained himself the passionate, almost cult-like attachment of thousands of followers across the globe. At the same time it has made him the favorite hate object of those who support and justify the US global agenda and the domination of its junior partner, Israel, over the Palestinians. Who else has whole internet blogs dedicated to nothing else but attacking him?

What is less generally known is that he admits to having been a Zionist from childhood, by one of the earlier definitions of the term--in favor of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and a bi-national, not a Jewish state--and, as he wrote 30 years ago, "perhaps this personal history distorts my perspective." [2] Measuring the degree to which it has done so is critical to understanding puzzling positions he has taken in response to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Given the viciousness and the consistency with which Chomsky has been attacked by his critics on the "right," one ventures cautiously when challenging him from the "left." To expose serious errors in Chomsky's analysis and recording of history is to court almost certain opprobrium from those who might even agree with the nature of the criticism but who have become so protective of his reputation over the years, often through personal friendships, that have they not only failed to publicly challenge substantial errors of both

fact and interpretation on his part, they have dismissed attempts by others to do so as "personal" vendettas.

Chomsky himself is no more inclined to accept criticism than his supporters. As one critic put it, "His attitude to who those who disagree with him, is, by and large, one of contempt. The only reason they can't see the simple truth of what he's saying is that they are, in one way or another, morally deficient." [3]

Although I had previously criticized Chomsky for downplaying the influence of the pro-Israel lobby on Washington's Middle East policies ,[4] I had hesitated to write a critique of his overall approach for the reasons noted. Nevertheless, I was convinced that while, ironically, having provided perhaps the most extensive documentation of Israeli crimes, he had, at the same time immobilized, if not sabotaged, the development of any serious effort to halt those crimes and to build an effective movement in behalf of the Palestinian cause.

An exaggeration? Hardly. A number of statements made by Chomsky have demonstrated his determination to keep Israel and Israelis from being punished or inconvenienced for the very monumental transgressions of decent human behavior that he himself has passionately documented over the years. This is one of the glaring contradictions in Chomsky's work. He would have us believe that Israel's occupation and harsh actions against the Palestinians, its invasions and undeclared 40 years war on Lebanon, and its arming of murderous regimes in Central America and Africa during the Cold War, has been done as a client state in the service of US interests. In Chomsky's world view, that absolves Israel of responsibility and has become standard Chomsky doctrine.

Following through with a critique of his work seemed essential after reading an interview he had given last May to Christopher J. Lee of *Safundi: the Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* and circulated on Znet. [5] [See below]

Quite naturally, the discussion turned to apartheid and whether Chomsky considered the term applied to Palestinians under Israeli rule. He responded:

I don't use it myself, to tell you the truth. Just like I don't [often] use the term "empire," because these are just inflammatory terms... I think it's sufficient to just describe the situation, without comparing it to other situations.

Anyone familiar with Chomsky's work will recognize that he is no stranger to inflammatory terms and that comparing one historical situation with another has long been part of his modus operandi. His response in this instance was troubling. Many Israeli academics and journalists, such as Ilan Pappé, Tanya Reinhart and Amira Hass, have described the situation of the Palestinians as one of **apartheid**. Bishop Tutu has done the same and last year *Ha'aretz* reported that South African law professor John Dugard, the special rapporteur for the United Nations on the situation of human rights in Occupied Palestine and a former member of his country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, had written in a report to the UN General Assembly that there is "**an apartheid regime**" in the territories "**worse than the one that existed in South Africa.**" [6]

Chomsky explained his disagreement:

Apartheid was one particular system and a particularly ugly situation... It's just to wave a red flag, when it's perfectly well to simply describe the situation...

His reluctance to label Israel's control of the Palestinians as "apartheid" out of concern that it be seen as a "red flag," like describing it as "inflammatory," was a red flag itself and raised questions that should have been asked by the interviewer, such as who would be inflamed by the reference to 'apartheid' as a "red flag" in Israel's case and what objections would Chomsky have to that?

A more disturbing exchange occurred later in the interview when Chomsky was asked if sanctions should be applied against Israel as they were against South Africa. He responded:

In fact, I've been strongly against it in the case of Israel. For a number of reasons. For one thing, even in the case of South Africa, I think sanctions are a very questionable tactic. In the case of South Africa, I think they were [ultimately] legitimate because it was clear that the large majority of the population of South Africa was in favor of it.

Sanctions hurt the population. You don't impose them unless the population is asking for them. That's the moral issue. So, the first point in the case of Israel is that: Is the population asking for it? Well, obviously not.

Obviously not. But is it acceptable to make such a decision on the basis of what the majority of Israelis want? Israel, after all, is not a dictatorship in which the people are held in check by fear and, therefore, cannot be held responsible for their government's actions. Israel has a largely unregulated, lively press and a "people's army" in which all Israeli Jews, other than the ultra-orthodox, are expected to serve and that is viewed by the Israeli public with almost religious reverence. Over the years, in their own democratic fashion, the overwhelming majority of Israelis have consistently supported and participated in actions of their government against the Palestinians and Lebanese that are not only racist, but in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Chomsky made his position clear:

So calling for sanctions here, when the majority of the population doesn't understand what you are doing, is tactically absurd-even if it were morally correct, which I don't think it is. The country against which the sanctions are being imposed is not calling for it.

The interviewer, Lee, understandably puzzled by that answer, then asked him, "Palestinians aren't calling for sanctions?"

Chomsky: "Well, the sanctions wouldn't be imposed against the Palestinians, they would be imposed against Israel."

Lee: "Right... [And] Israelis aren't calling for sanctions."

That response also disturbed Palestinian political analyst, Omar Barghouti, who, while tactfully acknowledging Chomsky as "a distinguished supporter of the Palestinian cause," addressed the issue squarely:

Of all the anti-boycott arguments, this one reflects either surprising naiveté or deliberate intellectual dishonesty. Are we to judge whether to apply sanctions on a colonial power based on the opinion of the majority in the oppressors community? Does the oppressed community count at all? [7]

For Chomsky, apparently not. But there were more absurdities to come:

Furthermore, there is no need for it. We ought to call for sanctions against the United States! If the US were to stop its massive support for this, it's over. So, you don't have to have sanctions on Israel. It's like putting sanctions on Poland under the Russians because of what the Poles are doing. It doesn't make sense. Here, we're the Russians.

First, what does Chomsky mean by saying "there is no need of it?" He was certainly aware, at the time of the interview that Israel, with its construction of a 25-foot high wall and fence, appropriately described by its critics as the "Apartheid Wall" was accelerating the confiscation of yet more Palestinian land and continuing the ethnic cleansing that began well before 1947 and there was nothing other than the weight of public opinion that might stop it.

Second, while there would be considerable support of sanctions against the US, if such were possible, would this not violate Chomsky's own standard for applying them? Had he not moments before, said that the majority of the people must support them? He apparently has a different standard for Israelis than he does for Americans. And what the Palestinians may wish doesn't count.

Then, having just told the interviewer that he did not like making comparisons, what can one make of his placing the relationship that existed between Poland and the former Soviet Union (Russia, in his lexicon) in the same category as that existing between Israel and the United States? He was referring to the implementation of sanctions by the Reagan administration against Poland in 1981 after the East Bloc nation had instituted martial law in response to the rise of the Solidarnosc movement. What role the Soviet Union had in that has been debated, but it should be obvious that there is no serious basis for such a comparison.

In retrospect, however, it was no surprise. In the Eighties, Chomsky placed Israel's relationship to the US in the same category as that of El Salvador when the Reagan administration was backing its puppet government against the FMLN. Not embarrassed at having spouted such nonsense, he still repeats it. [8] Even then, he exhibited a gritty determination to deflect responsibility for Israel's actions on to the United States. To point this out is not to defend the US or its egregious history of global criminality –which is not defensible– but to expose the deep fault lines that inhabit Chomsky's world view.

In case I had missed something, however, I wrote him, asking if he wished to clarify what the Polish-Soviet relationship had in common with that of Israel and the US?

He declined to answer that question but with reference to my asking him about his avoidance of placing blame on Israel, he responded:

I also don't acknowledge other efforts to blame others [presumably Israel] for what we do. Cheap, cowardly, and convenient, but I won't take part in it. That's precisely what's at stake. Nothing else. [9]

"Cheap, cowardly and convenient" to blame Israel? If his primary desire is to protect Israel and Israelis from any form of inconvenience is not obvious from that private response, his public effort to sabotage the budding campus divestment program should leave no doubt where and with whom his sympathies lie:

In an exchange with *Washington Post* readers, Chomsky was asked by a caller:

Why did you sign an MIT petition calling for MIT to boycott Israeli investments, and then give an interview in which you state that you opposed such investment boycotts? What was or is your position on the proposal by some MIT faculty that MIT should boycott Israeli investments?

Chomsky replied:

As is well known in Cambridge, of anyone involved, **I was the most outspoken opponent of the petition calling for divestment, and in fact refused to sign until it was substantially changed**, along lines that you can read if you are interested. The "divestment" part was reduced to three entirely meaningless words, which had nothing to do with the main thrust of the petition. I thought that the three meaningless words should also be deleted... On your last question, as noted, I was and remain strongly opposed, without exception -- at least if I understand what the question means. How does one "boycott Israeli investments"? [10] (Emphasis added)

I will assume that Chomsky understood very well what the caller meant: investing in Israeli companies and in State of Israel Bonds of which US labor union pension funds, and many states and universities have purchased hundreds of millions of dollars worth. These purchases clearly obligate those institutions to lobby Congress to insure that the Israeli economy stays afloat. This isn't something that Chomsky talks or writes about.

The caller was referring to a speech that Chomsky had made to the Harvard Anthropology Dept. shortly after the MIT and Harvard faculties issued a joint statement on divestment. It was gleefully reported in the *Harvard Crimson* by pro-Israel activist, David Weinfeld, under the headline "Chomsky's Gift":

MIT Institute Professor of Linguistics Noam Chomsky recently gave the greatest Hanukkah gift of all to opponents of the divestment campaign against Israel. By signing the Harvard-MIT divestment petition several months ago--and then denouncing divestment on Nov. 25 at Harvard--Chomsky has completely undercut the petition.

At his recent talk for the Harvard anthropology department, Chomsky stated: "I am opposed and have been opposed for many years, in fact, **I've probably been the leading opponent for years of the campaign for divestment from Israel** and of the campaign about academic boycotts."

He argued that a call for divestment is "a very welcome gift to the most extreme supporters of US-Israeli violence... It removes from the agenda the primary issues and it allows them to turn the discussion to

irrelevant issues, which are here irrelevant, anti-Semitism and academic freedom and so on and so forth." [11] [Emphasis added.]

Here you see one of the tactics that Chomsky uses to silence his few left critics; he accuses them of aiding "the most extreme supporters of US-Israeli violence."

When contacted by the *Cornell Daily Sun* which was preparing an article on the MIT-Harvard divestment movement, Chomsky repeated his objections, and "despite acknowledging the existence of this petition," the reporter wrote, Chomsky said, 'I'm aware of no divestment movement. I had almost nothing to do with the 'movement' except to **insist that it not be a divestment movement.**' [12] [Emphasis added.]

A least, he cannot be accused of inconsistency. After speaking at the First Annual Maryse Mikhail Lecture at the University of Toledo, on March 4, 2001, Chomsky was asked:

Do you think it's is a good idea to push the idea of divestment from Israel the same way that we used to push for it in white South Africa?

Chomsky replied:

I regard the United States as the primary guilty party here, for the past 30 years. And for us to push for divestment from the United States doesn't really mean anything. What we ought to do is push for changes in US policy. Now it makes good sense to press for not sending attack helicopters to Israel, for example. In fact it makes very good sense to try to get some newspaper in the United States to report the fact that it's happening. That would be a start. And then to stop sending military weapons that are being used for repression. And you can take steps like that. But **I don't think divestment from Israel would make much sense, even if such a policy were imaginable (and it's not).**

Our primary concern, I think, should be change in fundamental US policy, which has been driving this thing for decades. And that should be within our range. That's what we're supposed to be able to do: change US policy. (Emphasis added .)

Let us examine the response he gave at this event. Having stated forthrightly his opposition to pressuring Israel through divestment, he made no suggestion that his audience contact their Congressional representatives or senators regarding their support for aid to Israel. Mass appeals to Congress to stop funding, whether it was in opposition to the war in Vietnam or the Contras in Nicaragua, have been a basic element in **every** other nation-wide struggle against US global policy. Why not in this case? If Chomsky has ever called for **any** actions involving Congress, I could find no record of it.

Middle East activists, consequently, following Chomsky's lead, have continued to allow members of Congress and liberal Democrats, in particular, avoid paying any political price for supporting legislation that has provided Israel with the billions of dollars and the weaponry it has used to suppress the Palestinians, confiscate their land and expand its illegal settlements. This is what has devastated the Palestinians, not the meaningless three score plus Security Council resolutions reprimanding Israel that the US has vetoed but which, for Chomsky, validate his position that the US is the main culprit.

What he suggested to this audience—getting a newspaper to report the helicopter "sales" to Israel should have had those not entranced by his presence shaking their heads. As for changing US policy being "within our range," if Israel is a US "strategic asset," as he maintains, how does Chomsky suggest this be done? Beyond contacting your local newspaper editor, he doesn't.

Last year, Noah Cohen had the temerity to challenge Chomsky's opposition to both a "single state" solution and implementing the Palestinian "right of return." Chomsky defended his "realism" and accused Cohen of being engaged in "an academic seminar among disengaged intellectuals on Mars... [and] those who take these stands" [are] "serving the cause of the extreme hawks in Israel and the US, and bringing even more harm to the suffering Palestinians." [13]

Note, again, how Chomsky accuses those who disagree with him of harming the Palestinians. This evidently includes the Palestinians themselves who refuse to surrender their "right of return." Their crime, in Chomsky's opinion, is to oppose what he praises as the "international consensus," the support of which, for him, is "true advocacy." [14]

"The main task," he says, "is to bring the opinions and attitudes of the large majority of the US population into the arena of policy. As compared with other tasks facing activists, this is, and has long been a relatively simple one." [15] Simple? Who, we must ask, is on Mars? Of course, as noted previously, he offers no suggestions as how to accomplish this.

Although he doesn't advertise it publicly, Chomsky did sign a petition calling for the suspension of US military aid to Israel, but it has received little publicity and Sustain, the organization initiating the campaign has done little to promote it. It is not a demand that Chomsky raises in his books or interviews. When I pointed this out, he responded:

That is totally false. I've always supported the call of Human Rights Watch and others to stop 'aid' to Israel until it meets minimal human rights conditions. I've also gone out of way to publicize the fact that the majority of the population is in favor of cutting all aid to Israel until it agrees to serious negotiations (with my approval)... [16]

Given the probable nature and outcome of previous "serious negotiations" and the relative strength in the power relationship, this would present no problem for Israel as was demonstrated at Oslo and since. Chomsky's claim to have supported Human Rights Watch's call for stopping aid to Israel, however, was a figment of his imagination. This was confirmed by an HRW official who explained that HRW had only asked that the amount of money spent on the occupied territories be deducted from the last round of loan guarantees. [17] That is hardly the same thing. When I pointed this out to Chomsky, he replied:

To take only one example, consider 'HRW, Israel's Interrogation of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories,' p. xv, which states that US law prohibits sending any military or economic aid to Israel because of its practice of systematic torture. [18]

To my objection that this did not exactly constitute what would be described as a "campaign," he testily responded:

Calling actions illegal is sufficient basis for a reference to a call that the actions should be terminated. If you prefer not to join HRW

and me in calling the aid illegal, **implying directly** that it should be terminated, that's up to you. Not very impressive... [19] (Emphasis added.)

I will leave it to the reader to decide whether describing US aid to Israel as illegal in a single document is the same as conducting a campaign to stop it.

Two and a half years earlier, Chomsky had made his position quite clear:

It is convenient in the US, and the West, to blame Israel and particularly Sharon, but that is unfair and hardly honest. Many of Sharon's worst atrocities were carried out under Labor governments. Peres comes close to Sharon as a war criminal. Furthermore, the prime responsibility lies in Washington, and has for 30 years. That is true of the general diplomatic framework, and also of **particular actions**. Israel can act within the limits established by the master in Washington, rarely beyond. [20] (Emphasis added.)

While no doubt a statement of this sort is comforting to the eyes and ears of Israel's supporters in "the left," it should be obvious that his waiving of the Jewish State's responsibility to adhere to the Nuremberg principles, as well as the Geneva Conventions, clearly serves Israel's interests. (While a strong case can certainly be made against Peres, as well, he is not in Sharon's class in the "war criminal" competition.)

Chomsky's rationalization of Israel's criminal misdeeds in *The Fateful Triangle* should have rung alarm bells when it appeared in 1983. Written a year after Israel's invasion of Lebanon, in what would become a sacred text for Middle East activists, he actually **began** the book not by taking Israel to task so much as its critics:

In the war of words that has been waged since Israel invaded Lebanon on June 6, 1982, critics of Israeli actions have frequently been accused of hypocrisy. While the reasons advanced are spurious, the charge itself has some merit. It is surely hypocritical to condemn Israel for establishing settlements in the occupied territories while we pay for establishing and expanding them. Or to condemn Israel for attacking civilian targets with cluster and phosphorous bombs "to get the maximum kill per hit." When we provide them gratis or at bargain rates, knowing that they will be used for just this purpose. Or to criticize Israel's 'indiscriminate' bombardment of heavily-settled civilian areas or its other military adventures, while we not only provide the means in abundance but welcome Israel's assistance in testing the latest weaponry under live battlefield conditions... In general, it is pure hypocrisy to criticize the exercise of Israeli power while welcoming Israel's contributions towards realizing the US aim of eliminating possible threats, largely indigenous, to American domination of the Middle East region. [21]

First, the PLO was seen as a threat by Israel, not by the United States in 1982, particularly since it had strictly abided by a US-brokered cease-fire with Israel for 11 months, giving it a dangerous degree of credibility in Israeli eyes. Second, whom did Chomsky mean by "we?" Perhaps, President Reagan and some members of Congress who gently expressed their concern when the number of Palestinians and Lebanese killed in the invasion and the wholesale

destruction of the country could not be suppressed in the media. But he doesn't say. It certainly wasn't those who took to the streets across the country to protest Israel's invasion. Both political parties had competed in their applause when Israel launched its attack, as did the AFL-CIO which took out a full page ad in the *NY Times*, declaring "We Are Not Neutral. We Support Israel!" paid for by an Israeli lobbyist with a Park Avenue address. The media, in the beginning, was also supportive, but it is rare to find an editorial supporting US aid to Israel. It is rarely ever mentioned and that's the way the lobby likes it. So is Chomsky creating a straw figure? It appears so.

If we follow Chomsky's "logic," it would be an injustice to bring charges of war crimes against Indonesian, El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Haitian, or Filipino officers, soldiers, or public officials for the atrocities committed against their own countrymen and women since they were funded, armed and politically supported by the US. Perhaps, General Pinochet will claim the Chomsky Defense if he goes to trial.

He pressed the point of US responsibility for Israel's sins again in his introduction to *The New Intifada*, noting that as one of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions, "It is therefore Washington's responsibility to prevent settlement and expropriation, along with collective punishment and all other measures of violence... .It follows that the United States is in express and extreme violation of its obligations as a High Contracting Party." [22]

I would agree with Chomsky, but is the US refusal to act a more "extreme violation" than the actual crimes being committed by another signatory to the Conventions, namely Israel? Chomsky would have us believe that it is.

It is a point he made clear at a talk in Oxford in May, 2004, when he brought up the killing a week earlier of the Hamas spiritual leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin by the Israeli military as he left a Mosque in Gaza. "That was reported as an Israeli assassination, but inaccurately" said Chomsky. "Sheikh Yassin was killed by a US helicopter, flown by an Israeli pilot. Israel does not produce helicopters. The US sends them with the understanding that they will be used for such purposes, not defense, as they have been, regularly."

Chomsky is correct to a point. What is missing from his analysis is any reference to the demands from Congress, orchestrated by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Israel's officially registered lobby, to make sure that the US provides those helicopters to Israel to use as its generals see fit. (In fact, there is not a single mention of AIPAC in any one of Chomsky's many books on the Israel-Palestine conflict). What Chomsky's British audience was left with was the conclusion that the assassination of Sheik Yassin was done with Washington's approval.

While its repeated use of helicopters against the Palestinian resistance and civilian population has been one of the more criminal aspects of Israel's response to the Intifada, absolving the Israelis of blame for their use has become something of a fetish for Chomsky as his introduction to *The New Intifada* [23] and again, in more detail in *Middle East Illusions*, illustrates:

On October 1, [at the beginning of the Al-Aksa Intifada] Israeli military helicopters, or, to be more precise, US military helicopters with Israeli pilots, sharply escalated the violence, killing two Palestinians in Gaza... The continuing provision of attack helicopters by the United States to Israel, with the knowledge that these weapons are being used against the civilian Palestinian population, and the silence of the mainstream media is just one illustration of many of how we live up to the principle that we do not believe in violence. Again, it leaves honest citizens with two tasks: the important one, **do**

something about it; and the second one, try to find out why the policies are being pursued. (Emphasis added) [24]

What to do Chomsky again doesn't say, but he does try to tell us why: "On that matter, the fundamental reasons are not really controversial... It has long been understood that the gulf region has the major energy sources in the world..." [25]

Chomsky then goes on for two pages explaining the importance of Middle East oil and the efforts by the US to control it. It is the basic explanation that he has repeated and republished, almost verbatim, over the years. What it has to do with the Palestinians who have no oil or how a truncated Palestinian state would present a threat to US regional interests is not provided, but after two pages the reader has forgotten that the question was even posed. In his explanation there is no mention of the lobby or domestic influences.

Chomsky does acknowledge that "major sectors of American corporate capitalism, including powerful elements with interests in the Middle East [the major oil companies!]" have endorsed a "two-state solution" on the basis that

the radical nationalist tendencies that are enflamed by the unsettled Palestinian problem would be reduced by the establishment of a Palestinian mini-state that would be contained within a Jordanian-Israeli military alliance (perhaps tacit), surviving at the pleasure of its far more powerful neighbors and subsidized by the most conservative and pro-American forces in the Arab world... This would, in fact, be the likely outcome of a two-state settlement." [26]

Such an outcome would have little direct influence on regional Arab politics, except to demoralize supporters of the Palestinian struggle in the neighboring countries and around the world, a development that would clearly serve US interests. It would, however, curb Israel's expansion, which is critical to Israel's agenda, not Washington's. Chomsky also fails to recognize a fundamental contradiction in his argument. If the support of Israel has been based on its role as protector of US strategic resources, namely oil, why does not that position enjoy the support of the major oil companies with interests in the region?

It is useful to go look at Chomsky's earlier writings to see how his position has developed. This paragraph from *Peace in the Middle East*, published in 1974 and repackaged with additional material in 2003, is not dissimilar from the liberal mush he often criticizes:

I do not see any way in which Americans can contribute to the active pursuit of peace. That is a matter for the people of the former Palestine themselves. But it is conceivable that Americans might make some contribution to the passive search for peace, by providing channels of communication, by broadening the scope of the discussion and exploring basic issues in ways that are not easily open to those who see their lives as immediately threatened. [27]

Readers should note amidst the vagueness of this paragraph, how Chomsky's suggestion that "the active pursuit of peace" should be left to "people of the former Palestine" mirrors a phrase that we have heard frequently from Clinton and since from George the Second and Colin Powell, namely, "leaving the negotiations to the concerned parties".

This was published a year after the October 1973 war when the US was massively increasing both military and economic aid to Israel, a fact Chomsky emphasizes in his other writings. Raising it in this context, however, was not on his agenda at that time.

It is reasonable to conclude by now that Chomsky's dancing around the question of US aid, his opposition to divestment and sanctions, and to holding Israel to account, can be traced more to his Zionist perspective, irrespective of how he defines it, than to his general approach to historical events. It doesn't stop there, however. An examination of a sampling of his prodigious output on the Israel-Palestine conflict reveals critical historical omissions and blind spots, badly misinterpreted events, and a tendency to repeat his errors to the point where they have become accepted as "non-controversial facts" by successive generations of activists who repeat them like trained seals. In sum, what they have been given by Chomsky is a deeply flawed scenario that he has successfully sold and resold to them as reality.

The consequences are self-evident.

Those who have relied on Chomsky's interpretation of the US-Israel relationship for their work in behalf of the Palestinian cause, have been functionally impotent. There is simply no evidence that **any** activity they have undertaken has applied any brake on the Palestinians' ever-deteriorating situation. I include here, specifically, the anti-war and solidarity movements and their leading spokespersons who have adopted Chomsky's formulations en toto. How much responsibility for their failure can be laid at Chomsky's feet may be debatable, but that he has been a major factor can not be. On the other hand, for those in the movement whose primary interest has been to protect Israel from blame and sanctions, and their numbers are not small, Chomsky has been extremely helpful.

Up to this point, I have dealt largely with Chomsky's opinions. His scholarship, unfortunately, exhibits the same failings. They were succinctly described by Bruce Sharp on an internet site that examines his early writings on the Cambodian genocide. Chomsky, wrote Sharp

does not evaluate all sources and then determine which stand up to logical inquiry. Rather he examines a handful of accounts until he finds one which matches his predetermined idea of what the truth must be; he does not derive his theories from the evidence. Instead, he selectively gathers 'evidence' which supports his theories and ignores the rest. [28]

His failures, wrote Sharp, are:

rooted in precisely the same sort of unthinking bias that he derides in the mainstream press. Stories which support his theory are held to a different (far lower) standard of accountability than stories which do not. [29]

These criticisms, to be sure, are not exclusive to Chomsky, but given his elevated status and credibility as a scholar, they are particularly relevant. What has been described by Sharp is closer to the function of a courtroom prosecutor than a historian.

Granted, the issues concerning the effort to secure a just resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict are complex and controversial, but they need to be honestly examined and debated. Everyone, however, is not an equal participant

in that debate. The question of the Palestinian "right of return" is for Palestinians themselves to determine, not Israelis, Washington or Chomsky's "international consensus." Another issue, closely connected, "one-state vs. two states," is more complicated and upon which Palestinians are themselves divided. Although I support a single state, I do not intend to argue for it here, only to present and lay out for the reader Chomsky's perspective. Given the dominance of the Zionist narrative, however, neither issue has the potential of energizing significant numbers of Americans in their behalf beyond those with a personal or vested interest in their outcome.

Two issues that do have that possibility and which are intimately linked are

1. Stopping the flow of tax dollars to Israel. In view of the sharp cuts being made across the nation in spending on health, education and pensions, there is a ready audience for stopping that aid which has now surpassed the \$100 billion mark. It would include ending public and private investment in Israel, in Israeli companies, and in American companies doing business in Israel, which has already begun in a limited way; in other words, imposing the sanctions that Chomsky deplures, and

2. Exposing and challenging the pro-Israel lobby's stranglehold on Congress and its control over US Middle East policies which is accepted as a fact of life by political observers in Washington and elsewhere, but not by Chomsky.

Chomsky does mention from time to time that the majority of the American people is less than enthusiastic about military aid to Israel but fails to take the issue further than that. His fixation on Israeli pilots flying US helicopters, notwithstanding, relegating the potential power of the aid issue and the lobby to the margins of political discourse has been essential for Chomsky since they undermine the basis of his analysis that

1. Israel is essentially a US client state that is supported by Washington based on its "services" as a "strategic asset" [30] and "cop on the beat" [31] for US interests in the Middle East and elsewhere and

2. The "rejectionist" position of the United States, espoused by successive administrations that oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state is the primary obstacle blocking the implementation of a "two-state solution." Moreover, he would have us believe that US policy, despite occasional appearances to the contrary, has supported "the gradual integration of the occupied territories within Israel." [32]

3. The influence of the pro-Israel lobby has been exaggerated by its critics and " is more of a swing factor than an independently decisive one... [and] that opens the way for the ideological influence to exert itself - lined up with real power." [33]

On these three points there is an extraordinary amount of contradictory evidence provided by reputable scholars in the field of which Chomsky is clearly aware (since he quotes them when useful) but chooses to ignore. Within the limits of this article, I will only be able to touch on a few.

The "Strategic Asset" Theory

Chomsky's argument that US support for Israel has been based on its value as a "strategic asset," was most clearly articulated [in] *The Fateful Triangle* in 1983 and was repeated in interviews and speeches until the Soviet Union was no longer a threat and new justifications were required:

From the late 1950s... the US government came increasingly to accept the Israeli thesis that a powerful Israel is a "strategic asset" for the United States, serving as a barrier against indigenous radical nationalist threats to American interests, which might gain support from the USSR. [34]

The paucity of evidence he supplies to back it up should long ago have raised eyebrows. One item he inevitably brings up is a National Security Council Memorandum from January, 1958, that, according to Chomsky "concluded that a 'logical corollary' of opposition to growing Arab nationalism would be to support Israel as the only strong pro-Western power left in the Middle East" [35] On such an important point, one would expect he could produce something more recent. In that same year, in response to the successful anti-colonial uprising against the British in Iraq and nationalist moves in Lebanon, Eisenhower sent the marines to that country to protect perceived threats to US interests. Use of Israeli troops was apparently not considered.

The only regional "services" provided by Israel referred to by Chomsky were the defeat of Egypt in 1967 (when France was Israel's major arms supplier) that was clearly done for Israel's own interests and its role in dissuading the Syrian government from coming to the aid of the Palestinians when they were under attack by Jordan's King Hussein in September, 1970. That's it. And in the latter instance, Israel did not need the US to activate its forces to prevent what has been incorrectly recorded (not by Chomsky) as an attempted PLO takeover of Jordan. [36]

What Chomsky and those who parrot his analysis ignore (since he fails to mention them) are other factors that played a role in the routing of the PLO, such as internal Palestinian dissent, the refusal of the Syrian air force under Hafez Al-Assad –no friend of the PLO-- to provide air cover, and the strategic advantages of Jordan's largely Bedouin forces. It was Henry Kissinger who exaggerated Israel's role in the outcome of that situation and its potential as a Cold War asset [37], and, ironically, it is Kissinger's position that Chomsky has enshrined as "fact."

There is another factor in the "strategic asset" argument that is usually overlooked. As Camille Mansour points out:

[T]hese struggles for influence, occurring in a region so close to Israel, are often linked (and in the case of the Jordanian crisis, were definitely linked) to the Arab-Israeli conflict itself: for the Americans, Israel was in the paradoxical position of being an asset by alleviating threats to its own and American interests—threats, however, that it may have itself originally provoked through its situation of conflict with the Arabs. [38]

This opinion was confirmed earlier by Stephen Hillman, former staff member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, who wrote:

The strategic service that Israel is said to perform for the United States—acting as a barrier to Soviet penetration of the Middle East—is one that **is needed primarily because of the existence of Israel**, but for which the Arabs would be much less amenable to Soviet influence... It is true that Israel provides the United States with valuable military information and intelligence, and it is conceivable... that the United States might have need of naval or air bases on Israeli territory. These assets in themselves... do not seem sufficient to explain the expenditure by the United States between the founding of Israel and 1980 of almost \$13 billion in military assistance and over \$5.5 billion in economic support, making Israel by far the largest recipient of United States foreign aid." [39] (Emphasis added)

Chomsky was quite aware of Tillman's work, using it frequently as a reference in *The Fateful Triangle*. The above citation was not included. More to his liking was a comment by the late Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, a Democrat from Washington, that Chomsky included in *The Fateful Triangle* and has been repeating in virtually every book, interview and speech he makes about the Israel-Palestine conflict. According to Jackson Israel's job was to

"inhibit and contain those irresponsible and radical elements in certain Arab states... who were they free to do so, would pose a grave threat indeed to our principal sources of petroleum in the Persian Gulf. [40]

He was referring to "the tacit alliance between Israel, Iran (under the Shah) and Saudi Arabia" yet there is no evidence that any of the three countries ever performed that role. When the first Bush administration considered the region's oil sources threatened by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, it acted on its own, and went out of its way to keep Israel from participating. This has not dissuaded Chomsky from continuing to tell us the same tale.

Why Chomsky believes we should give credibility to Jackson's opinion is that he was "the Senate's leading expert on the topic [of oil]" in *Fateful Triangle* (p. 535); "the Senate's expert on the Middle East and Oil" in *Toward a New Cold War*. (p. 315) ; "the Senate's leading specialist on the Middle East and Oil" in *The New Intifada*, (p.9) and *Middle East Illusions* (p. 179); "the ranking oil expert," on P. 55 in *Deterring Democracy*, "the Senate's leading specialist on the Middle East and oil," in *Pirates and Emperors*, (p. 165), and "an influential figure concerned with the Middle East," *Hegemony or Survival* (p.165).

I dwell on Chomsky's descriptions of Jackson because they are characteristically misleading. The closest thing that Jackson came to being an oil expert was having once chaired an investigation on domestic oil practices while head of the Senate Interior Committee.

Aside from being known as "the senator from Boeing," in recognition of the many lucrative contracts he funneled Boeing's way while chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Jackson's main legacy is as co-author of the Jackson-Vanik amendment which made the success of US-USSR Cold War negotiations dependent on the Soviet Union opening its doors to Jewish emigration. Understandably, that made him the darling of the pro-Israel lobby and American Jews, in general, who provided \$523,778 or 24.9% of his campaign contributions over a five-year period. [41] An opponent of détente and a Cold War hawk, he was "virtually the last Democrat in the Senate to support... [the Vietnam] war." [42] Most recently, he has been remembered as

the Congressional patron saint of the neo-cons, having given Richard Perle his start on the path to evil.

Thanks to his support of both Israel and the US military-industrial complex, Jackson's labors did not go unnoticed by the influential Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), a major promoter of the integration of the US and Israeli arms industries since 1976. It is another key component of the pro-Israel lobby that Chomsky has never mentioned. In 1982, it established the Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson Distinguished Service Award and Jackson became its first honoree. The most recent was his protégé, Perle.

Had Chomsky mentioned Jackson's hawkish pro-Israel background it would surely have raised questions about the senator's credibility if not stripped it away altogether.

Apart from a handful of loyalists who seem echo his every word, Chomsky's view of US-Israel relations does not fair as well with his fellow academics, including those who generally share his world view. While careful not to mention Chomsky by name, for example, Professor Ian Lustick was clearly referring to his theory when interviewed by Shibley Telhami in 2001:

The US is strong enough and rich enough that, even when there are crises like the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which was clearly a major crisis, it could address it. But... the biggest question in terms of what motivates the US domestically has been on what is the source of the commitment to Israel. That really has been the core question. And here you have different competing views. For a long time, there was a view which said that the commitment to Israel is a corollary to the US strategic interest, that, essentially, the US sees Israel as an instrument in its broader strategic interest, containing the Soviet Union during the Cold War and then later, maintaining the flow of oil, reducing terrorism, etc.

The truth of the matter is that theory just doesn't work, because Israel was, at various stages, very useful strategically, and other stages it was not viewed to be strategically very important. Even more important, probably, during much of the Cold War, the bureaucracies — the Executive bureaucracy, the Defense Department, and the State Department -- did not view Israel to be a strategic asset, and some of them viewed it to be a detriment. So that just doesn't do it. [43]

Whether valid or not, if during the Cold War the US regarded Israel as a reliable ally against Soviet-backed regimes in some Arab states, this argument vanished as quickly as did the USSR. When Afif Safieh, Palestinian Delegate to the UK and the Holy See visited the United States just before the collapse of the Soviet Union he was surprised to see :

Within pro-Israeli circles ... their worry was about the loss of "an enemy," what it might signify for the *raison-d'etre* and the strategic function and utility of Israel in American foreign policy as a bastion and strategic asset to contain Soviet expansionism. It was precisely during this period that the ideological construction of an alternative global threat, the peril of Islam, took shape. [44]

The Soviet collapse forced not only the pro-Israel lobby, but Chomsky, as well, to scramble for a new reason justifying continued US support; the lobby to maintain, Chomsky to explain the US-Israel relationship.

He found it in a statement by former Israeli intelligence chief, Shlomo Gazit. The Cold War argument that Chomsky had earlier relied upon he now found to have been "highly misleading," preferring "the analysis... of Gazit" who wrote after the collapse of the USSR that:

Israel's main task has not changed at all, and it remains of crucial importance. Its location at the center of the Arab Muslim Middle East predestines Israel to be a devoted guardian of stability in all the countries surrounding it. Its [role] is to protect the existing regimes: to prevent or halt the processes of radicalization and to block expansion of fundamentalist religious zealotry.[45]

"To which we may add," Chomsky wrote in the preface to the new edition of *Fateful Triangle*, "performing dirty work that the US is unable to undertake itself because of popular opposition or other costs." [46] Chomsky is still writing as if it were the Seventies or Eighties; there apparently is no limits to the "dirty work" the US will do for itself these days. Gazit would, of course, be expected to come up with an excuse for maintaining US support. But stability? If anything, Israel's presence in the region has been the key destabilizing factor in the region and on two occasions, in 1967, and again in 1973, it almost led to nuclear war (and did lead then to a costly Arab oil embargo.) In the early days of the October War, when it appeared that Israeli troops might be overrun, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan reportedly panicked and threatened to use Israel's atomic weapons on Egypt if the US did not rush Israel an airlift of conventional weapons. The Nixon administration promptly responded. [47]

As Mansour points out, "By so urgently asking Washington for arms, the Israeli government did not behave as a strategic asset, but as a protégé that feared—exaggeratedly perhaps—for its life." [48]

It should be noted that not until 1978, when Menachem Begin was elected prime minister, did Israel officially promote itself as a US asset. In an interview in the January 1991 *Journal of Palestine Studies*, the late retired Israel General Matti Peled said, "The argument that Israel is a strategic asset of the US serving as a static aircraft carrier, has never been more than a figment of the Israeli imagination. It was first proposed by Prime Minister Begin as a way of justifying the considerable grants given to Israel to purchase American weapon systems.... The Kuwaiti crisis has proved that the argument was false..." The arms deals were useful to the U.S, he said, because they triggered even bigger arms sales to America's Arab allies.

In 1986, and reprinted in four editions through 2002, Chomsky's popular *Pirates and Emperors* contained a "strategic asset" theory that appeared to be pumped up on steroids. In one of **five** references to Israel performing that service, he wrote:

The US has consistently sought to maintain the military confrontation and to ensure that Israel remains a "strategic asset." In this conception, Israel is to be highly militarized, technologically advanced, a pariah state with little in the way of an independent economy apart from high tech production (often in coordination with the US), utterly dependent on the United States and hence dependable, serving US needs as a local "cop on the beat" and as a mercenary state employed for US purposes elsewhere... [49]

Chomsky couldn't have been more mistaken. Thanks to the political support of the United States, Israel is anything but a "pariah state." It enjoys favored nation status with the European Union, its largest trading partner, and its arms industry, despite increasing integration with its US counterpart, is one of the world's largest and competes with that of the US on the world market. Israel is also one of the major centers of the domestic high tech industry. It is hardly hostage to US demands although that characterization is what Chomsky is clearly trying to suggest. Furthermore, while the Israeli military and its arms manufacturers did serve US interests in Latin America and Africa, from the Sixties to the early Eighties, they did so for their own interests which happened to be mutually profitable.

Israel's alleged usefulness to the US has been negated from other angles. Harold Brown was Jimmy Carter's Secretary of Defense. When his Israeli counterpart suggested that the two countries make plans for joint nuclear targeting of the Soviet Union in case of a war, Brown told Seymour Hersh that the Carter administration

would not have wanted to get involved in an Israeli-Soviet conflict. The whole idea of Israel as a strategic asset seems crazy to me. The Israelis would say, 'Let us help you,' and then you end up being their tool. The Israelis have their own security interests and we have our interests. They are not identical. [50]

Professor Cheryl Rubenberg challenged the Chomsky mindset from another perspective:

[T]he constraints imposed on American diplomacy in the Middle East by virtue of the US-Israeli relationship have impeded Washington's ability to achieve stable and constructive working relationships with the Arab states, a necessary prerequisite for the realization of all American regional interests... Even those regimes that pursued close associations with Washington in spite of the American-Israeli union were constrained from publicly normalizing the ties for fear of the domestic opposition an overt affiliation with the United States would bring... .

American corporate and commercial interests in the Middle East have been constrained in other ways... To cite but one example: as a result of pressure that pro-Israeli groups were able to exert on Congress, a set of antiboycott laws was passed that severely limit [US] business in the Arab world. As a result, American companies and the United States economy suffer an estimated \$ 1 billion loss per year. [51]

That antiboycott legislation has been successfully used to prosecute American companies over the years and is now being employed by pro-Israel members of Congress to stifle efforts of US activists to instigate a boycott of Israeli products in the United States. There is no need to ask where Chomsky stands on that.

Furthermore, Rubenberg, emphasizing the point made by others, asks, "How can Israel, committed to policies that a priori assure the perpetuation of regional instability, be considered a strategic asset to American interests?" [52]

For the post-Soviet era, Chomsky might have sought support for his case from neocon stalwart Douglas Feith. With only slight modifications, these lines

from an article by the Deputy Defense Secretary in the *Harvard Law Review*, Spring 2004, could have been written by Chomsky himself:

For a variety of reasons, Israel has remained strategically relevant since the Soviet Union's demise... Israel's geography ensures its continued importance to the US. Even without a Soviet presence, the Middle East remains important to the US as the primary source of American oil imports... .

Israel has been a loyal ally to the US and, through its strength, a **stabilizing** Force in an otherwise volatile region. **Although Israel's very existence has fueled numerous conflicts in the Middle East**, from the perspective of the US government, the destruction of Israel, the region's sole liberal democracy, is strategically not an option. Operating on the principle that Israel is here to stay and should stay, US aid to Israel has yielded enormous strategic dividends for the US. By creating a regional imbalance of power favoring Israel, aid has curbed Arab military aggression and prevented situations, namely full-blown war between Israel and its neighbors, in which the US might need to deploy troops to the Middle East. (Emphasis added)

This last paragraph is quite interesting. Not only does Feith reinforce earlier citations from Hillman, Mansour and Rubenberg regarding Israel's existence being the source of regional instability, he suggests that Israel has been justly rewarded for preventing another war that its presence would otherwise have caused. That's *chutzpah*.

The "Rejectionist" Theory

"In the real world," Chomsky writes, "the primary barrier to the 'emerging vision' [the Arab League's offer of full peace and recognition in exchange for Israeli withdrawal] has been and remains, **unilateral** US rejectionism." (Emphasis added) [53] Chomsky would have us believe that it is primarily the US and not Israel that stands in the way of a peaceful (if not a just) settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict. He fails, however, in all his prolific writings, to explain why this solution would interfere and not enhance US power in the Middle East since the Palestinian state suggested, as he frequently acknowledges, would be weak and dependent largely on Israel, the US and other Arab countries for its economic survival.

By repeating it over and over, often several times on the same page, Chomsky has made the "rejectionist" label stick to the US like tar paper. What he has really achieved, however, is establishing his **own** definition of the term, yet another "straw man" that he can then pummel the stuffing out of as if it were real. This has required some nimble shifting and inexcusable ignoring of the available record that every US president beginning with Richard Nixon has tried to get Israel to withdraw from the land it captured in 1967, albeit now, after successive failures, White House efforts have been reduced to a dribble.

These "peace plans" as they were called were not initiated for the benefit of the Palestinians but to pacify the area in the pursuit of America's regional and global interests that have been negatively affected by Israel's continuing occupation as described earlier. Under those plans, Palestinians in the West Bank would likely have once again come under Jordanian sovereignty and the Gazans under that of Egypt. Other than Camp David, in which Israel ended up the big winner, all the plans have been doomed:

"What happened to all those nice plans?" asked Israeli journalist and peace activist Uri Avnery. "Israel's governments have mobilized the collective power of US Jewry - which dominates Congress and the media to a large degree - against them. Faced by this vigorous opposition, all the presidents, great and small, football players and movie stars - folded one after another." [54]

The origin of the term "rejectionist" is important. Chomsky lifted it from what was referred to in the Seventies by Israel's supporters, Chomsky among them, as the Palestinian "rejection front." It was the term they used to describe those Palestinian resistance organizations, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DPFLP), and some smaller groups, that rejected the existence of Israel as a Jewish state and called for the establishment of a democratic, secular state in all of historic Palestine, a position to which Chomsky was and remains unalterably opposed.

In 1975, Chomsky considered the possibility of

a unitary democratic secular state in Mandatory Palestine... an exercise in futility. It is curious that this goal is advocated in some form by the most extreme antagonists: the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and expansionist elements within Israel. But the documents of the former indicate that what they have in mind is an Arab state that will grant civil rights to Jews, and the pronouncements of the advocates of a Greater Israel leave little doubt that their thoughts run along parallel lines, interchanging "Jew" and "Arab." [55]

The Palestinian struggle did not, in fact, become acceptable in Chomsky's eyes until it accepted the US-Israel demand that the PLO recognize Israel's legitimacy within its 1967 borders. That he equates the desires of Palestinians to regain their lost homeland to the program of the most extremist Israeli colonizers is also telling. Another piece of the puzzle fits. Writing in 1974, he was more explicit:

The Palestinian groups that have consolidated in the past few years argue that this injustice could be rectified by the establishment of a democratic secular state in all of Palestine. However, they frankly acknowledge—in fact, insist—that this would require the elimination of the "political, military, social, syndical and cultural institutions" of Israel" which will necessitate armed struggle, which "guarantees that... all elements of Israeli society will be unified in opposing the armed struggle against its institutions.

Even if, contrary to fact, the means proposed could succeed—I repeat and emphasize, even if, **contrary to fact**, these means could succeed—they would involve the destruction by force of a unified society, its people, and its institutions—a consequence intolerable to civilized opinion on the left or elsewhere." (emphasis in original) [56]

Apparently, for Chomsky, "civilized opinion" excluded the entire Arab world and much of the Third World—at least in sufficient numbers for the UN General Assembly to overwhelmingly brand Zionism as a form of racism in 1975. His "civilized opinion" as well, did not consider the expulsion of the Palestinians to be an "intolerable consequence" of the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state.

Now, in an effort to appear fair-minded, he equates the rejection of a Palestinian state with the rejection of an Israeli Jewish state and declares the US to be "rejectionist" on the basis that it has not called for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. This enables him to ignore the US goal: getting Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 borders as a way of improving regional US relations and the stability of its sources of oil.

Not only does this make the US "rejectionist" by Chomsky's definition, but also, so he places Resolution 242 in the same category. While admitting that the resolution, passed five months after the 1967 war was intended to restore the pre-existing status quo, "It is important to bear in mind that 242 was strictly rejectionist –using the term here in a neutral sense to refer to rejection of national rights of **one or the other** of the contending national groups in the former Palestine, not just rejection of the right of Jews, as in the conventional racist usage." [57]

Chomsky's use of the inflammatory term, "racist," here, however, disguises the fact that from the perspective of the Palestinians, it was Chomsky who was the **rejectionist**. In the early 70s, the Palestinian national movement was **not** calling for a separate state in the West Bank and Gaza but for returning to the land from which 750,000 of them had been expelled or fled, not 2000 years, but twenty years before. **It was not until the PLO dropped its demand for its national rights in all of what had been Palestine in exchange for a truncated entity on the other side of the Green Line (1967 border) that Palestinian national rights, or what was left of them, became acceptable to Chomsky.**

The Israel Lobby: A Chomsky Blind Spot

If there are any constants in Washington, they are the power of AIPAC over Congress and the combined power of both over the White House when it comes to issues in the Middle East. While the lobby and its legislative lackeys may not win every battle, they ultimately win every war as the three living ex-presidents, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush the First, who ended up losers at the polls can attest.

Founded in 1959, with each passing year, the organization gets bigger and stronger. With a base in Washington, offices across the country, 85,000 energized members, a staff of 165, and a \$33.4 million annual budget, [58] AIPAC is at the pinnacle of a massive complex of Jewish organizations and Political Action Committees (PACS) across the country, from the national to the local, that are devoted to maintaining Israel's privileged status in the nation's capitol.

It no longer has serious concerns about the White House, but in the past, Ford, Carter and Bush Sr. publicly challenged Israel's territorial aspirations and crossed the lobby on numerous occasions. There is little evidence of this in Chomsky's writings. Instead, he would like us to believe that they, as well as their predecessors, supported Israel's settlement building and its efforts to integrate the territories into Israel proper. The historical record proves otherwise. And yet he writes:

Through the most significant facts are missing from mainstream, commentary, and often ignored or misrepresented even in scholarly work, they are not controversial. They provide the indispensable background for any serious understanding of what is happening now. [59]

Much of what Chomsky tells us is "not controversial," invariably proves to be very much so and particularly when it comes to the relations between Israel and the White House. The late revered Israeli scholar and human rights activist, Professor Israel Shahak pointed out that Chomsky's analysis suffers from his

undoubted tendency of demonizing the American presidency and the Executive in general, while ignoring the Legislature, but also from his very mistaken, in my opinion, tendency of assuming that not only the principles but literally everything concerning the American imperialism was laid in detail long ago, in 1944 or about that time, and from then on the policy is, so to say, a follow-up of instructions from a computer.

This ignores not only the human factor in the US itself but also the completely different nature of the foes and the victims of the US during the last decades. There can be no doubt, in my own opinion, that the actual policies of the US are complex even when they are evil, influenced, as in the case of all other states, by many factors of which AIPAC is one and human stupidity (for which he never allows) is another.

And finally, this very insightful paragraph:

But such simplistic theories, backed by his memory and ability to pick isolated examples (sometimes from a long time ago like his stock example of Eisenhower in the case of Israel while ignoring everything else from 1967 on) can appeal to [the] young who look for certainty and also for those who don't want to [be] engaged in actual work and so find substitute for it in crude and useless display of emotion. " [60]

I had written to Shahak after hearing Chomsky's reply to a question following a speech he made in Berkeley at the outset of the first Gulf War. A member of the audience wanted to know his thoughts about AIPAC's role in that war and his opinion of the lobby, in general. Chomsky was predictably dismissive:

Personally I don't think AIPAC played much of a role in this, in fact, my own feeling is that the role of the Israeli lobby, in general, is pretty much exaggerated. That's a matter of judgment. It's not a simple factual question. In my opinion the Israeli lobby gets its input in large part because it happens to line up with powerful sectors of domestic US power. [61]

Chomsky's comment, notwithstanding, AIPAC, "was widely credited with having played a key role" in rounding up the necessary votes in the Senate to give Pres. Bush his majority. "[B]ecause of the extreme sensitivity to the issue, AIPAC was anxious to camouflage its role to avoid providing evidence for the accusation... that the Persian Gulf War was fought at the behest of the Jews to protect Israel." [62] To disguise their role, the *Washington Jewish Week's* Larry Cohler reported that AIPAC had prominent Jewish senators vote against the war while lobbying non-Jewish senators in states with small Jewish populations to support it. That Saddam Hussein was not removed at the time brought strong criticism from the primarily Jewish neocons and on a lower register from AIPAC. During the Clinton presidency they would press their demand for

regime change in Iraq and under Bush Jr., they made sure that task would be carried out. [63]

The most troubling part of his answer, however, was his downplaying of the lobby. Since most political observers view elected officials at virtually every level as representing to varying degrees their major campaign contributors, much like lawyers representing corporate clients –and AIPAC has been acknowledged as a leader in the field– his response answer was at best disingenuous.

Predictably, it drew applause from the supporters of Israel who were happy to have the distinguished scholar absolve organized American Jewry of any responsibility for what their co-religionists were doing to the Palestinians or for the lobby's activities in support of the first war on Iraq. I decided to express my feelings to Professor Shahak. Here was his frank reply:

I had the same, only greater, differences of opinion with Noam Chomsky, who is my personal friend for quite a time, on the subject of AIPAC and the influence of the Jewish lobby in general as you have. What is more, a number of mutual friends of Chomsky and me have also tried to influence him, in vain, on that point.

I am afraid that he is, with all his wonderful qualities and the work he does, quite dogmatic on many things. I have no doubt that his grievous mistake about the lack of importance of AIPAC, which he repeats quite often, **helps the Zionists very much** as you so graphically described. (Emphasis added) [64]

At least, I realized I was not alone in my assessment of Chomsky. His position has been a boon for AIPAC and therefore has benefited Israel's position in the United States. In fact, as noted earlier, **he has never even mentioned the organization by name in any of the books he has written on the Middle East.** By steering activists away from confronting the liberal politicians that the lobby holds in thrall and placing the blame for Israel's actions on the resident of the White House, Chomsky has, without question, been doing "damage control" for AIPAC.

Another good friend and admirer of Chomsky, the late Professor Edward Said, did not mince words on the issue. In his contribution to , entitled, appropriately,

"America's Last Taboo," he wrote:

What explains this [present] state of affairs? The answer lies in the power of Zionist organizations in American politics, whose role throughout the "peace process" has never been sufficiently addressed –**a neglect that is absolutely astonishing**, given the policy of the PLO has been in essence to throw our fate as a people into the lap of the United States, without any strategic awareness of how American policy is dominated by a small minority whose views about the Middle East are in some ways more extreme than those of Likud itself. (Emphasis added) [65]

And on the subject AIPAC, Said wrote:

[T]he American Israel Public Affairs Committee–AIPAC–has for years been the most powerful single lobby in Washington. Drawing on a well-organized, well-connected, highly visible and wealthy Jewish

population, AIPAC inspires an awed fear and respect across the political spectrum. Who is going to stand up to this Moloch in behalf of the Palestinians, when they can offer nothing, and AIPAC can destroy a professional career at the drop of a checkbook? In the past, one or two members of Congress did resist AIPAC openly, but the many political action committees controlled by AIPAC made sure they were never re-elected... If such is the material of the legislature, what can be expected of the executive? [66]

With the lobby, the checkbook is always open. In 2002, for example, Israeli-American Chaim Saban donated \$12.3 million to the Democrats with little public notice. Compare that with the media hoopla over Exxon having donated \$10 million to the Republicans over a six-year period. Moreover, according to the *Mother Jones* web site, approximately 120 of the top 250 donors to the 2000 elections were Jewish which is interpreted in Washington as Israel lobby money.

University of Michigan Professor Juan Cole sounded the alarm on AIPAC with equal vigor, noting a CNN report that AIPAC, "holds 2000 meetings a year with US Senators and Congressmen, leading to the passage of an average of 100 pro-Israel pieces of legislation every year!" He further writes:

Some readers have suggested that I have exaggerated AIPAC's hold on the US Congress. But I have direct knowledge of senators and congressmen being afraid to speak out on Israeli issues because of AIPAC's reputation for targeting representatives for un-election if they dare do so. And, it is easy to check. Look in the Congressional record. Is there ever /any/ speech given on the floor critical of Israeli policy, given by a senator or representative who goes on to win the next election? And look at the debates in every other parliament in the world; there are such criticisms elsewhere. The US Congress is being held hostage by a single-issue lobbying organization that often puts Israeli interests above US interests... [67]

Two decades earlier, well before the emergence of the Christian Zionist factor, Seth Tillman had pointed out that

American presidents have sought to avoid a direct confrontation with Israel and its strong supporters in the United States because of the terrific domestic controversy sure to be engendered by such a face-off; because of the powerful and undiminished hold Israel and its supporters have upon Congress; because of the exorbitant amount of political capital that would have to be expended in such a battle, placing at risk an administration's other objectives, foreign and domestic; and because of the uncertainty that even with the use of the full political and educational powers of his office, a president would prevail in a domestic showdown... [68]

Unlike other domestic lobbies, AIPAC has no serious challengers, the Arab-American organizations in Washington, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Arab-American Institute (AAI), being both too small and too timid to challenge even their shadow. What gives the lobby its strength, besides its significant organizational skills, is that its members are intimately tied to Jewish organizations, federations, and

community relations councils across the country, as well as to labor union officials, and in recent years, to the growing Christian evangelical movement, which provides Israel with unprecedented support in what is generally right-wing Republican territory. It is noteworthy that it was only when the Christian Zionists joined the fray did Chomsky and his acolytes, most notably Professors Stephen Zunes and Joel Beinin, and the Institute for Public Studies' Phyllis Bennis began to speak about "the lobby," suggesting that the evangelicals were now its most powerful component. The subtext was that they were welcome because they took the attention away from AIPAC.

Fighting a lonely fight against AIPAC has been the Council for the National Interest (CNI), a group made up of former State Department and Foreign Service diplomats with experience in the Middle East, and ex-members of Congress such as Paul Findley and Pete McCloskey whose criticism of Israel and support of Palestinian rights led to their being targeted for defeat by AIPAC. The former government officials are disdainfully referred to by Israel's supporters and its friends in the media as "Arabists," as if to imply that their experience in the Middle East has compromised their patriotism. In practice, the term has become a euphemism for "anti-semitic," and occasionally their Jewish critics do not bother with the euphemism. The position of CNI is, simply, that the support by Washington of Israel's policy of occupation and expansion is not in the US national interest.

The effects of an accusation of "anti-Semitism" are like none other. Being so branded as has brought such powerful and diverse public figures as Rev. Billy Graham and Actor Marlon Brando to their knees and to tears with their apologies. The fear of being called "anti-semitic" or of provoking anti-semitism, ironically, inhibits the actions of US-based Palestinian organizations despite the fact that they are Semites themselves. As if losing their land was not enough, in America they have also been robbed of their ethnic identity.

The result is that they have found it easier to go along with Chomsky's positions. Unfortunately, they do so to the point where the issue of AIPAC and the pro-Israel lobby is never discussed at their conferences. This is also at least partly due to their affiliation with various political organizations that are led by self-proclaimed Jewish anti-Zionists who, fearful themselves of provoking anti-Semitism, prefer to blame everything on US imperialism, a much safer, if more remote target.

No series of events provide a deeper understanding of AIPAC's power than President Gerald Ford's losing battle with Israel and the lobby in 1975 – one of the most significant encounters in the history of US-Israel relations. It rated less than three lines from Chomsky in 1982, **and not one word since.** [69]

The confrontation involved Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on one side and Israel and AIPAC on the other. This is how Seth Tillman described it:

Among the lobby's many victory trophies from the legislative arena, one of the most conspicuous and consequential was "the letter of seventy-six" addressed to President Ford by that number of Senators on May 21, 1975. Following the collapse in March of Secretary of State Kissinger's first round of shuttle diplomacy toward a second Sinai disengagement agreement [as a result of the 1973 war], the angry and frustrated secretary of state announced a "reassessment" of American Middle East policy, during which the Ford administration conspicuously delayed the delivery of certain weapons to Israel and

suspended negotiations for pending financial and military aid, including the new F-15 fighter plane.

In the course of the policy reassessment, **experts from within the government and others called in from the outside reached a near consensus in favor of the United States calling for a Middle East settlement based on Israeli withdrawal to the borders of 1967** (with minor modifications), coupled with strong guarantees for Israel's security... Kissinger's advisers envisioned a national television appeal by President Ford to the American people spelling out the basic issues of American national interest in the Middle East, and on the basis of these, making the case for Israeli withdrawal in return for guarantees." [70] (Emphasis added)

With the administration's gauntlet down, AIPAC went into action. Three weeks later, after intensive lobbying, 76 senators signed a letter to Ford that reaffirmed Israel's role as a barrier to Soviet influence in the Middle East and warned that

withholding military equipment from Israel would be dangerous, discouraging accommodation by Israel's neighbors and encouraging a resort to force. Within the next several weeks, the Congress expects to receive your foreign aid requests for fiscal year 1976. We trust that your recommendations will be responsive to Israel's urgent military and economic needs. We urge you to make it clear, as we do, that the United States acting in its own national interests stands firmly with Israel in the search for peace in future negotiations, and that this premise is the basis of the current reassessment of US policy in the Middle East." [71]

That effectively ended the administration's "reassessment" plan and coupled with his pardon of Nixon, Ford's election hopes for 1976.

"Any document," observed UCLA's Stephen Spiegel, "that brought together such disparate Senatorial voices as [Teddy] Kennedy and Barry Goldwater, Frank Church and Paul Laxalt, Walter Mondale and Strom Thurmond, was bound to challenge the administration's Mideast diplomacy." [72] The realization that AIPAC was able to get such a diverse group of senators to sign a letter at any time was not lost on future presidents, but as we shall see, underestimating the lobby would trip up Bush and James Baker 15 years later. (It is still the case today. Only the names have changed. There is no other critical issue that finds liberal Democrats eagerly locking arms with the most right wing Republicans and thanks no little to Chomsky's efforts, paying no political price for doing so).

In evaluating the "Congressional Impact on United States Policy Toward Israel" a comprehensive study of that period, Marvin Feuerwerker concluded that

Congress played a key role in shaping the course of American-Israeli relations during the 1969-1976 period... Congress was willing at times to exert its authority by blocking measures that the administration contemplated but Congress believed would threaten Israel's security. This willingness helped keep United States policy within certain pro-Israel boundaries... [referring to the letter from the senators to Ford, and] virtually forced the executive branch to abandon the option of imposing a Mideast settlement which Israel considered to

be potentially detrimental to its security. Similarly. Congressional and interest group [AIPAC] activity in response to the 1969 Rogers Plan 'virtually insured that no further pro-Arab initiatives would be undertaken' by the Nixon administration." [73]

If Chomsky's ignoring of the Ford administration's losing battle with AIPAC was inexcusable, the same must be said for his revisionist history of George Bush Senior's relations with Israel. While an overall evaluation of Bush's career would have him standing in the dock as a war criminal, his confrontation with the lobby was one of the bright spots for opponents of the US-Israel alliance. It also probably cost him re-election.

While it is generally acknowledged both in Israel and within the American Jewish community that the first Bush administration was the most unfriendly to Israel since the establishment of the state, Chomsky, incredibly, maintains otherwise. "There is an illusion," he wrote, "that the (first) Bush Administration took a harsh line toward Israel. The truth is closer to the opposite." Chomsky bases that on "the official administration position of December 1989 (the Baker Plan), which endorsed **without reservations** the May 1989 plan of Israel's Peres-Shamir coalition government... [that] declared that there can be no "... Palestinian state" and no change in the status of the occupied territories and no negotiations with the PLO. [74]

Chomsky complained that the story was unreported in the press, while "What one does read is that Baker strongly reiterated US support for 'total withdrawal from territory in exchange for peaceful relations'—while he was quietly lending decisive support to programs to ensure that nothing of the sort would happen." Not only does the historical record not back Chomsky up, this is another typical example in which Chomsky "examines a handful of accounts until he finds one which matches his predetermined idea of what the truth must be... [he] selectively gathers 'evidence' which supports his theories and ignores the rest." In this case, "the rest" is massive, much of it provided by former Israeli foreign minister Moshe Arens whose book, *Broken Covenant*, was an angry rebuke of the Bush administration's treatment of Israel.

As Ronald Reagan's vice-president, Bush had already shown his animosity toward Israel when he urged the president, unsuccessfully, to implement sanctions against Israel when it destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor 1981. He fared no better the following June when he once again urged sanctions when Israel invaded Lebanon but was outvoted by Reagan and Secretary of State Al Haig. [75]

Of his first meeting with the newly elected President Bush in Washington, Arens writes, "The President raised the question of Israeli settlements in the territories, leaving no doubt of his objection to further settlement activity." [76] Later conversations with Baker led Arens to conclude that

The 'new world' the State Department was talking about was a world in which the Bush administration had decided to assume a confrontational posture toward Israel, its longtime ally and friend... that the 'final status' it was promoting was a return of Israel to the lines that existed prior to June 1967." [77]

It was time to call in "the lobby."

[T]he Bush administration would have to learn that Israel would not be bullied or pushed around. It was clear to me that the only

possible constraint on the Bush administration's tactics toward Israel was domestic politics... .If Bush and Baker were to realize that there was public opposition to their bullying tactics, then they would be likely to relent, certainly as election time approached...

I realized that we would have to fortify support for Israel in Congress and among US public opinion... I spent the next day on the Hill meeting with congressional committees and with individual members of the Senate and the House... [78]

Arens's visit and the work of AIPAC were to pay off when Baker launched a shot across its bows. Speaking at its annual convention in Washington in May of 1990, in the second year of the Bush administration, he told the assembled lobbyists and their Congressional guests that

For Israel, now is the time to lay aside once and for all the unrealistic vision of Greater Israel. Israeli interests in the West Bank and Gaza, security and otherwise, can be accommodated in a settlement based on Resolution 242. Forswear annexation; stop settlement activity; allow schools to reopen, reach out to the Palestinians as neighbors who deserve political rights. [79]

Baker, a longtime player on Capitol Hill should have known what was coming next. Here is how Arens described it:

Early in June, in an extraordinary display of support and collective acknowledgement that there had been a turnaround in official US sympathy for Israel, ninety-four of the one hundred US senators signed a letter to the secretary of state asking that the administration 'strongly and publicly' endorse the Israeli [Peres-Shamir] peace initiative.

Israel's proposals," said the letter, "have not always received the consideration they deserve by other parties to the conflict or by the international community at large. To prevent that from happening now, the United States must be fully supportive, both in fact and appearance."

A triumphant Arens concluded:

There could be no misreading the message to the administration, or the implied rebuke. It was reported to me that Baker was genuinely taken aback by the letter and the fact that ninety-four senators had signed it... [80]

Over the years Congress has been at the ready to give Israel additional funding, even when money has been unavailable for essential domestic programs, as happened in 2002 when the Senate, after defeating a bill that would have provided \$150 million for inner-city schools that had been impacted by 9-11, turned around and tucked an additional \$200 million for Israel into the Homeland Security Bill as if Israel had been targeted that day and not New York and Washington.

Things were no different in 1991 when six out of ten US cities were unable to meet their budgets and several states their payrolls. In March of that year, over the objections of the Bush administration, the House voted by a 397-24

margin to give Israel \$650 million in cash as part of the Gulf War emergency spending bill. Bush had publicly threatened to veto the bill but backed down when he realized it would be overridden.

In September 1991, with the war over, the Bush administration presented AIPAC with its greatest crisis since the battle with Ford. In the midst of the administration's efforts to assemble the cast for what became the Madrid "peace conference," much to the consternation of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Israel sprang a surprise on the President –a demand for \$10 billion dollars in US guaranteed loans over a five year period.

Congress, of course, was ready to jump through Israel's hoops again over the opposition of President Bush. Angered at Israel's demand and fearing, perhaps, that approval of the loan guarantees would allow Israel to withdraw from the conference while antagonizing the Arab invitees, Bush asked Shamir to postpone the loan application for 120 days, and made its approval conditional on Israel freezing Jewish settlements.

When Bush indicated that he was going to ask for the delay, Arens recalled, "[Sen. Daniel] Inouye [D-HA] was not equivocal at all. He said, 'I am putting on my yarmulke; we're going to war.'" (It was no coincidence that his first paying job after getting out of the Army after WW 2 had been as a salesman for State of Israel Bonds.)

Shamir refused, confident that he would prevail over Bush should it come to a showdown with Congress. On September 12, aware that AIPAC had secured sufficient votes in both Houses to approve the guarantees and override his veto, and taking note that "more than a thousand American Jews, representing various organizations and mobilized by AIPAC, went to Capitol Hill to express their support for [their] speedy enactment" [81] Bush took an unusual step. He called a press conference. What happened was graphically described in the *Washington Jewish Week*. [82]

Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski, a long time darling of the liberal Democrats, had just promised a group of the Jewish lobbyists her vote for the guarantees when she was interrupted by an aide who handed her a note. Mikulski's face "went ashen," wrote the WJW reporter, "I've just learned the president said he's taking his case for a 120-day loan guarantee to the American people," said Mikulski. The American people! Imagine that, the very last folks AIPAC and Congress wanted included in their deliberations.

As Arens describes it

Bush hastily called a press conference and made an extraordinary televised appeal to the American people. Visibly angry, pounding his fist on the lectern, he made it appear that Israel's insistence on the guarantees was a threat not only to the forthcoming conference but to peace itself. "A debate now could well destroy our ability to bring one or more of the parties to the peace table... If necessary I will use my veto power to keep that from happening."

Then the president took direct aim at the pro-Israel lobby. 'We are up against some powerful political forces... very strong and effective groups that go up to the Hill' he said, 'We've only got one lonely little guy down here doing it... [but] I am going to fight for what I believe. It may be popular politically but probably not... the question isn't whether it's good for 1992 politics. What's important here is that we give the process a chance. And I don't care if I only get one vote... I believe the American people will be with me.' Then, his voice rising, the president said: "Just months ago, American men and women in

uniform, risked their lives to defend Israelis in the face of Iraqi Scud missiles, and indeed Desert Storm, while winning a war against aggression, also achieved the defeat of Israel's most dangerous adversary." He also added that, during the current fiscal year, "despite our own economic worries," the United States had provided Israel with more than \$4 billion worth of aid, "nearly one thousand dollars for each Israeli man, woman, and child." [83]

Never had a president addressed the American people with such frankness and none has since. Polls taken afterward indicated that Americans supported Bush by a 3-1 margin and half of those responding opposed providing any economic aid to Israel. Two weeks later, a *NBC News/Wall Street Journal* survey showed that while by 58 to 32% voters favored aid to the Soviet Union and by a margin of 55% to 29% supported aid to Poland, voters opposed economic support to Israel by 46% to 44%. Moreover, 34% saw Israel as the greatest impediment to peace in the region while only 33% saw the Arab nations in that role. [84] (Emphasis in original)

If there had ever been a "window of opportunity" for Middle East activists, this was it. Chomsky was to effectively close it. Writing of Bush's appeal several months later, he was smug and, at best, naïve, and the polls were not mentioned:

At the time of the US-Israel confrontation, it took scarcely more than a raised eyebrow from the President for the Israeli lobby to collapse, while major journals that rarely veer from the Israeli Party line took the cue and began to run articles critical of Israeli practices and hinting that US support for them was not inevitable. That should also occasion little surprise. Domestic pressure groups tend to be ineffectual unless they line up with significant elements of state-corporate power, or have reached a scale and intensity that compels moves to accommodate them. When AIPAC lobbies for policies that the state executive and major sectors of corporate America intend to pursue, it is influential; when it confronts authentic power, largely unified, it fades very quickly. [85]

Chomsky's dismissal of Bush's stance as "a raised eyebrow" was accepted with approving nods by the movement's trained seals. AIPAC had become a "paper tiger" in Chomsky's words, a sentiment that quickly moved across the country to be repeated by Prof. Joel Beinin of Stanford. What Bush's press conference made clear, however, was the immense power that AIPAC wields over the US Congress to the extent that it stands ready to place the demands of Israel, a foreign country, above the wishes of an American president. It forced Bush, in this instance, to take what was clearly a desperate and unprecedented action. While succeeding for the moment, within a week and under pressure, Bush had written a letter to the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations, a large umbrella group that lobbies the White House (and includes AIPAC), expressing his dismay that some of his remarks had "caused apprehension within the Jewish community... My references to lobbyists and powerful political forces were never meant to be pejorative in any sense." [86]

Chomsky's response to that series of events and his decision to erase them from his version of history reveals what side of the Israel-Palestine conflict he is on when forced to choose. Rather than urge activists to take advantage of the

huge fissure that Bush's dramatic appeal had opened between Israel and the American people and to suggest, if not call, for a campaign to stop aid, he provided "damage control" for AIPAC. While one must also fault the Palestine solidarity movement for not seizing the situation and acting upon those poll figures themselves, the influence of Chomsky on its actions was at the time, and unfortunately, still remains overwhelming.

AIPAC, of course, was not about to fold its tent and depart the field. On the day after the press conference, Tom Dine, AIPAC's executive director, declared "September 12 a day that will live in infamy," and declared war on the president. Both Israel and AIPAC had agreed, given the poll numbers that it would be unwise to challenge the president in Congress, but to wait for the 120 days. In the interim one could detect a considerable increase in the media of articles critical of Bush's handling of the presidency and, particularly, the economy. With the November election in view, and after Yitzhak Rabin had replaced Shamir as prime minister, Bush agreed to the loan guarantees with the proviso that the amount of money that Israel was spending in the Occupied Territories be deducted from the total. It didn't help him. Arens summed it up:

George Bush was defeated in his attempt to get a second term. His administration's repeated attempts to interfere in Israel's internal politics had been without precedent in the history of relations between the United States and Israel... Although in the months after the Likud defeat Bush gave Rabin everything he had withheld from Shamir, including the loan guarantees, he could not dispel the impression that his administration had been hostile to Israel. Bill Clinton had narrowly defeated Bush for the presidency of the United States. The vast majority of the Jewish community of America, as well as many non-Jews who were dedicated to the US-Israel alliance, could not bring themselves to vote for George Bush. The Bush administration's confrontational style with Israel, especially the withholding of the loan guarantees, had contributed to the Likud's defeat and, considering Rabin's slim margin of victory, might well have been decisive. Now, it seemed as if the same policy had also contributed to the Bush defeat." [87]

Readers should ask themselves how this first-hand report squares with what Chomsky referred to as "the extreme pro-Israeli bias of the Bush-Baker administration" in an interview with his devoted Boswell, David Barsamian. [88]

Given the experiences of their predecessors, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush apparently decided that "if you can't beat them, join them." Clinton turned his Middle East diplomacy over to pro-Israel Jewish lobbyists with ties to Israel's Labor party while Bush Jr., after a bruising and losing encounter with the lobby and Ariel Sharon following his criticisms of Israel's actions in Jenin in 2002, allowed a gaggle of right-wing pro-Israel Jewish neocons, to write his Middle East script which gave us the war on Iraq. He has even gone beyond that, to Sharon himself, as such diverse sources as Robert Fisk and Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor under George Sr., have pointed out, Fisk suggesting that Sharon was running Bush's "press bureau," and [89] and Scowcroft, that the Israeli prime minister has George Jr., "mesmerized." [90] The control over US Middle East policy by Israel and its American supporters now seems to be total.

Cheryl Rubenberg, after a detailed study of the lobby in her "Israel and the American National Interest," concluded

that the power of the Israeli lobby over the formation and execution of US Middle East policy has become a virtual stranglehold. **It no longer matters whether elected officials subscribe to the perception of Israel as a strategic asset to American interests or not. What matters is that the Israeli lobby is able to maintain the dominance of that perception as virtually unquestionable political truth** and to assure that regardless of how severely American interests in the Middle East are compromised by Israel's policies, the US government will continue to provide Israel with complete support. The lobby's effectiveness in impacting on the electoral process and its ability to shape public opinion and affect political culture are major factors in fostering this perception. (Emphasis added). [91]

It has arguably had no more effective ally in this cause than Noam Chomsky.

One foot still in Zion:

While I knew, in a casual way, that Chomsky had been a Zionist in his youth, it had not seemed that important since his detailed descriptions of the injustices that had been heaped upon the Palestinians by the Israelis, described in detail in *The Fateful Triangle* and elsewhere, were exposing thousands of new readers and potential activists to the evils of Zionism. What was puzzling was why, at the same time, he was providing cover for the pro-Israel lobby.

While doing research for this article, I believe I found the answer. In 1974, Chomsky had written a little book, *Peace in the Middle East*, which contained many clues to the puzzle but this paragraph was the one that tied them all together. He wrote:

that a few years later [after the establishment of the state] I spent several very happy months working in a Kibbutz and for several years thought seriously about returning permanently. Some of my closest friends, including several who have had a significant influence on my own thinking over the years, now live in Kibbutzim or elsewhere in Israel and I retain close connections that are quite separate from any political judgments and attitudes. I mention all of this to make clear that I inevitably view the continuing conflict **from a very specific point of view, colored by these personal relationships. Perhaps this personal history distorts my perspective.** In any event, it should be understood by the reader. [92] (Emphasis added).

Although *Peace in the Middle East* was reprinted in 2003 as the first part of yet another Chomsky book, *Middle East Illusions*, it is questionable how many of Chomsky's many fans and admirers know this about his past. A reference to his Zionist youth was in the Safundi interview cited earlier and seemed to account for his determination to protect Israel, for which he obviously maintains an affection, from being punished in any way for its misdeeds. Here is what he said in that later interview:

I've been involved in this since childhood in the 1930s. I was part of the Zionist movement, in fact, a Zionist youth leader, but I was opposed to a Jewish state, and that was part of the Zionist movement at

the time. It was not the main part, but it was considered within the umbrella, so I could be an activist Zionist youth leader -the main thing in my life as a teenager- but opposed to a Jewish state, up until 1948. [93]

What becomes apparent in reading *Peace in the Middle East* and his later writings is Chomsky's naïve, romantic vision of the early Zionists and his sincere belief that leaders of the Jewish Yishuv (settlement) in Palestine –despite mountains of evidence to the contrary-- were genuinely interested in peacefully sharing the land with the Palestinian Arabs **whom they were already dispossessing** and only opted for a state in 1942 in the wake of the Nazi holocaust. Here is how he frames the argument in *Towards a New Cold War*:

It is useful to recall that in the period before the Second World War, Zionist leaders, particularly those associated with the labor movement that dominated the Palestinian Yishuv, forcefully opposed the idea of a Jewish state "which would eventually mean Jewish domination of Arabs in Palestine," on grounds that "the rule of one national group over the other" is illegitimate and that the Arabs of Palestine "have the right not to be at the mercy of the Jews" [94]

One needs to go to the footnotes to find that the speaker quoted was David Ben-Gurion who remains an admirable figure in Chomsky's pantheon. What Chomsky did not mention was that in 1931, when Ben-Gurion made those comments, Jews in Palestine numbered 172,300, or 18% of the total population, as opposed to 784,891 Arabs and owned but 1,201,529 dunams or 4.6% of the land. [95]

It should not be surprising, under the circumstances, that Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders said what they did at the time, preferring, as they have done since, to "create facts on the ground." In the above quote from Chomsky, the word "publicly" would have been more appropriate than "forcefully." This was also the opinion of the late Zionist leader, Nahum Goldmann, who Chomsky cites, but then doubts "the accuracy of Goldmann's interpretation, many years after the event and after a Jewish state had in fact been established." Goldmann, who would go on to form the World Jewish Congress, was actually in Palestine in the Thirties, participating in the discussions and debates. He pointed out in his autobiography that the silence on the part of Zionists regarding their intent, from the Twenties, to establish a Jewish state was purely tactical, but Chomsky believes what he wants to believe and he wants us to believe it, too. [96]

To those supporting Chomsky's position as opposed to that of Goldmann, (and the majority of observers at the time) the question must be asked as to whether the Zionists, mainstream and revisionists, exerted all that energy, money, and political pressure over the years, **before** WW II, for anything less than the establishment of a Jewish state?

I noted, earlier, Chomsky's criticism of the UN Security Council's approval of Resolution 242 in 1967 which he dismissed as "rejectionist." His own thinking at the time, however, clearly revealed his affinity and concerns for Israel that informed his thinking then as it does now. In *Peace in the Middle East*, he reveals that:

At the time of the Six Day War in June 1967, I personally believed that the threat of genocide was real and reacted with virtually uncritical

support for Israel at what appeared to be a desperate moment. In retrospect it seems that this assessment of the facts was dubious at best. [97]

It was an honest expressions of his affection for Israel and a rare admission by Chomsky that he had erred. It was apparently his last. Given this background, some other questionable statements of Chomsky in that South African interview become comprehensible. When asked to explain the differences between Israel before and after statehood, he responded:

The post-1967 period is different. The concept of settler-colonialism would apply to the pre-1948 period. It is plainly an outside population coming in and basically dispossessing an indigenous population.: ... **Without going into it, by 1948, that argument is over. There was a state there, right or wrong. And that state should have the rights of any state in the international system, no more, no less.** After 1967, there is a quite different situation. That's military conquest. (Emphasis added) [98]

What Chomsky seems to be saying here to the Palestinians after 1948, is "Get over it." Is that a misinterpretation? Could not the apartheid state of South Africa been defended on the same basis? And what was Israel's war in 1948, if not military conquest? Israel took not only the area accorded it by the United Nations, but much of what would have been the Palestinians' had they accepted partition. Finally, how could Chomsky's ideal of a Jewish homeland in Palestine have been realized by any means other than by settler-colonialism? Those are a few of many questions that require answers from Chomsky.

In these pages I have begun what, ideally, will lead to a further critical assessment of Chomsky's work, not as academic exercise, but as an instrument to energize what has been a largely ineffectual movement with regard to the struggle for justice in Israel/Palestine that has relied on him for guidance. I am aware that what I have written will upset those who have accorded him god-like status as it will others who have allowed their friendship with Chomsky to keep them silent concerning his failings, even when aware of them. That has been my intention. Rather than being responded to with personal attacks, I would hope that the issues raised here will be examined on their merits. Let the debate begin.

Notes:

- 1) Noam Chomsky interviewed by Tim Halle circa 1999 <http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/1999----.htm>
- 2) *Peace in the Middle East*, Vintage, 1974 p. 49-51
- 3) Mick Hartley, <http://mickhartley.typepad.com/blog>, January 10, 2004
- 4) *Occupied Territory: Congress, the Lobby and Jewish Responsibility*, City Lights Review, San Francisco, 1992, *The Israel Lobby and the Left: Uneasy Questions*, Left Curve, Oakland, 2003.
- 5) *Safundi*, *Znet*, May 10, 2004.
- 6) *Ha'aretz*, August 24, 2004.
- 7) <http://www.jihadunspun.org>, Dec. 25, 2004.
- 8) *Pirates and Emperors*, South End Press. Cambridge, 2002.
- 9) email Nov. 26, 2004.
- 10) *Washington Post*, Nov. 26, 2003.
- 11) *Harvard Crimson*, Dec. 2, 2003.
- 12) *Cornell Daily Sun*, April 12, 2004.

- 13) *Znet*, July 26, 2004.
- 14) *Znet*, August 26, 2004.
- 15) *ibid.*
- 16) email, Nov. 26, 2004.
- 17) Leila Hull, HRW, email, Nov. 27, 2004.
- 18) email, Nov. 25, 2004.
- 19) email, Nov. 26, 2004.
- 20) *Znet*, April 2, 2002.
- 21) *The Fateful Triangle*, South End, Boston, 1983, pp. 1-2.
- 22) *The New Intifada*, Verso, London-New York, 2001 p. 18-19.
- 23) *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 24) *Middle East Illusions*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2003, p.207.
- 25) *Middle East Illusions*, p. 209 *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 17 ff.
- 26) *The Fateful Triangle*, pp 43-44.
- 27) *Peace in the Middle East*, p. 56.
- 28) <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/archive/chomsky.htm> . May 25, 1995.
- 29) *ibid.*, May 27, 1995.
- 30) *Fateful Triangle*, p. 17 ff.
- 31) *Pirates and Emperors*, p. 117.
- 32) *Fateful Triangle*, p. xii.
- 33) *Left Hook*, Feb, 4, 2004.
- 34) *The Fateful Triangle*, p.20.
- 35) *ibid.*, p. 21; *MEI*, p. 176.
- 36) *ibid.*, p.21 , *Hegemony or Survival*, Henry Holt, New York, p. 264.
- 37) Camille Mansour, *Beyond Alliance: Israel and US Foreign Policy*, Columbia University, New York, 1994, p. 103-104.
- 38) *ibid.*, p. 103-104.
- 39) Seth Tillman, *The United States and the Middle East*, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, 1982, pp. 52-53.
- 40) *Fateful Triangle*, p. 535.
- 41) A.F.K. Organski, *The \$36 Billion Bargain*, Columbia Univ., New York, 1990, p. 228.
- 42) Jim Lobe, *Chicken Hawks as Cheer Leaders*, Foreign Policy In Focus Advisory Committee, <http://www.fpif.org> , 2002.
- 43) Harry Kreisler, *US Foreign Policy and the Search for Peace in the Middle East: Ian Lustick in Conversation with Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development*, University of Maryland, College Park; Nov. 8, 2001.
- 44) Rome and its Belligerent Sparta, <http://www.bethlehemmedia.net/features.htm>
- 45) *Fateful Triangle*, p. xii; *Middle East Illusions*, p. 177.
- 46) *ibid.*, p. xiii.
- 47) Stephen Green, *Living by the Sword: Israel and the US in the Middle East*, Amana, Brattleboro, VT, 1988, p. 91. Seymour Hersh, *The Sampson Option*, pp. 225ff, Avner Cohen, *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 2003.
- 48) Mansour, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
- 49) *Pirates and Emperors*, *op. cit.*
- 50) Hersh, *op.cit.*, p. 270.
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South Africa, Israel-Palestine, and the Contours of the Contemporary World Order

An Interview With Noam Chomsky

by Noam Chomsky and Christopher J. Lee; [Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies](#)
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On behalf of **Safundi**, Christopher J. Lee interviewed Professor Noam Chomsky on March 9, 2004, in his office at the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They spoke on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the end of apartheid, the building of the so-called "separation wall" in Israel-Palestine and its comparison to apartheid measures, and his general resurgence as a critical voice against U.S. foreign policy since September 11, 2001.

I. SOUTH AFRICA, ISRAEL, AND PALESTINE: CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS AND COMPARATIVE DIFFERENCES

Christopher J. Lee (Safundi): Given the audience of this journal and its interest in issues of apartheid and race relations, I want to start with a specific event: the hearings that were held before the International Court of Justice at the Hague at the end of February, from the 23rd to the 25th, on Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

There was a delegation of South African officials participating, and in particular, Aziz Pahad, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and leader of the South African delegation, argued before the Court that "the separation wall is not a security wall, it is a wall to enforce occupation, a wall that has separated hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their families, homes, lands, and religious sites." He also spoke of the contemporary South African situation. He said that "South Africa is in the midst of celebrating 10 years of democracy. After centuries of division and conflict, South Africans found the political will to build a new democratic society based on reconciliation and peaceful coexistence." So, he's drawing a comparison between both places.

At the same time, Minister Pahad said that "South Africa is committed to a two state solution: the state of Israel within secure borders, and a viable Palestinian state within equally secure borders. The 'separation wall' is anathema to the peace process as envisioned in the road map, as it eliminates the prospect of a two state-solution."

Since the early 1990s, with the coincidence of the Oslo meetings and the end of apartheid, you've drawn comparisons between both places...

Noam Chomsky (Chomsky): As many people have.

Safundi: As many people have, and you've suggested that the two-state political solution as proposed is akin to the apartheid system that existed in South Africa.

Chomsky: It depends on which two-state solution.

Safundi: What is your perspective on this kind of comparison? How do the two situations generally compare? How do you respond to the support of a two-state solution by South Africa? Do you see it as perhaps counter-intuitive on their part?

Chomsky: No. First of all, on the separation wall, the first statement that you made is quite correct. It is obviously not a security wall. That is inarguable. If Israel wanted a security wall, no one would object, there would be no international objection, and we would know exactly where they would build it: a couple of kilometers inside the Green Line. That's the way you can build a perfect security wall: you make it a mile high, you can have the IDF patrolling on both sides, totally impenetrable. So if you want security, that's the way to do it.

Except that's not even considered. And the reason is that security is simply not the issue. The issue is expanding the move into the Occupied Territories, which has been going on for thirty-five years. And this is another step in that. The only security this is giving is to those [Israeli settlers] who are illegally there, on the other side of the Green Line. They shouldn't be there anyway. If you trace the course of the wall, it's taking, it's moving in such a way as to integrate within Israel sectors of the Occupied Territories, which is what they've always wanted.

Safundi: So it's moving east of the pre-1967 border.

Chomsky: Yes. There isn't one inch of the wall that's [to the west]. Some of it's on the Green Line, but nothing is on the Israeli side...it's all on the Palestinian side, and in crucial areas.

A large part of it is taking control of the water supplies. The main aquifer is mostly under the West Bank... A lot of the settlement programs since 1967 have been designed with long-term hydrological concerns in mind, to make sure that Israel controls the aquifer. Actually, Israel uses almost eighty percent of it or so anyway. Even the settlers have green lawns and swimming pools, while the Palestinian villages next door may not have water at all. They may have to go miles to get a bucket of water. The separation wall will help cement control over the water sources and take some of the most arable Palestinian land, and it will ultimately dispossess a couple hundred thousand Palestinians, who are probably not going to be able to survive there.

In fact, even the legal conditions would be very familiar in apartheid South Africa: the section between the separation wall and international border-the Green Line-is called "the Seam," and there are new laws for the Seam. If you live in the Seam you are allowed to apply for the right to live there. So if you are Palestinian whose family has lived there for generations, you are allowed to apply for the right to your home. There are two categories of people who don't have to apply for that right: one category is Israelis, [they] don't have to apply for that right. And the other is a formula that is constantly used in Israel. The other category is: people who are not Israelis, but who would be allowed to immigrate into Israel if they chose to. Jews, in other words. You can't come straight out and say "Jews are allowed" in there, but what you say is "people who would be allowed to immigrate to Israel," mainly Jews if you look at the legal system. And that's a formula that's used all the time, to avoid saying straight out it's racist. But the fact of the matter is, what it is saying is that Israelis and other Jews can live there, or maybe others if they grant them permission.

So it's essentially extending the state to the east and in not insignificant ways. There are questions. The long-term plan that's proposed literally cages the remaining Palestinian sectors in. There is an eastern wall also planned.

Safundi: Between Jordan and...

Chomsky: Yes. They haven't made a big thing about it yet, but it's in the plan. And it's essentially implementing a plan which Sharon had pretty well announced at least ten, fifteen years ago, which is a plan to grant a Palestinian state in probably less than half the territory of the West Bank, and it will probably include Gaza. I think he's serious about leaving Gaza, which is a hell-hole. They don't want it.

So you'll get two cages-a Gaza cage and a West Bank cage-and probably some small sector of East Jerusalem, which will be connected in some fashion. But Sharon's plans are not that different from the Labor Party's plans. In fact, the Labor Party-Rabin, Peres, and so on-had never even gone as far as conceding a Palestinian state.

Safundi: So this is part of a long-term process.

Chomsky: So this is part of a long-term program. Now, as far as South Africa supporting a two-state settlement, it's almost meaningless. The whole world has been supporting a two-state solution since the mid-1970s.

Since the mid-1970s there has been an extremely broad international consensus, which includes just about everyone, including the major Arab states, the PLO, Europe, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Bloc, Latin America, in fact virtually everyone. There was kind of a fringe, so-called "rejection front" in the Arab world that didn't accept it. But among anyone that mattered, they'd accepted it. It's been blocked by the United States since the mid-1970s. The U.S. vetoed a [U.N.] Security Council resolution to that effect in January 1976, and since then it's been year after year blocking one move after another. The Oslo agreements actually undermined this. The modalities are not too well understood generally. But the facts are there.

After the Gulf War, the Bush I administration realized that it was now in a position to implement unilaterally its own solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because the rest of the world had backed off. And they did. They opened negotiations in Madrid, right after the Gulf War under U.S. auspices. They brought in the Russians as a token because the Russians barely existed at the time, but that was to make it look international. But it was in fact run by the United States. There was a Palestinian negotiation team, led by probably the most respected person in the Palestinian community: Haidar Abdel Shafi, a conservative nationalist, a person of high integrity. He's not corrupt...serious, highly respected. He in fact got the highest vote in the parliamentary elections [in 1996]. He was the head of the Palestinian negotiating team, meeting in Washington, mainly to negotiate a settlement, and it came to an impasse.

The impasse was that the Palestinian team insisted that the agreement terminate settlement in the Occupied Territories. Israel and the United States rejected this, and that was the impasse. At that point, Yasser Arafat came along. The Palestinians were divided into two groups: the insiders and the outsiders, the people in the territories and then the "Tunis" group of big shots, the outsiders. Arafat was losing his support in the Occupied Territories and in the refugee camps. In fact there were several calls for his removal. And he apparently realized that the only way he could get back in the game was by undercutting the Palestinian negotiation. So they set up a side channel in Oslo-I don't know if the Norwegians understood what they were doing, but it was pretty clear-they set up a side channel in which negotiations could proceed between the Tunis Palestinians-Arafat and the PLO-and the Israeli leadership, and under Clinton's watchful eye. And they reached a settlement which is the Oslo agreement, and the famous handshake on the lawn, to which Abdel Shafi

refused to attend because they did not insist on termination of the settlements. That's the end.

Safundi: Arafat has since taken that position.

Chomsky: No, he hasn't. Arafat's position is like that of the black leadership of the Transkei [during the apartheid period]. His responsibility under Oslo was to control the Palestinian population and make sure that they did not oppose in any meaningful way the Oslo agreement. And he was quite violent. One of the first acts after the Oslo agreements was to start arresting people for criticizing the agreements, and the U.S. thought that was fine, Israel thought that was fine.

He was corrupt, you know. His friends were buying villas in Gaza. He has money stashed away. Nobody cared. It's just like South Africa.

Safundi: He compares then to Mangosuthu Buthelezi, head of Inkatha Freedom Party, walking a tight rope between the apartheid government and his local base of support.

Chomsky: Maybe. The heads of the Bantustans are a closer parallel. Their job was to keep the population quiet...They can be as corrupt as they want, as violent as they want, as rich as they want, and in fact the whole history of imperialism works like that. Who ran India under the British? Indians. Who ran Europe under the Nazis? The French, the Norwegians, and so on. Who ran Eastern Europe under the Kremlin? The Poles, the Czechs. That's the way it works.

Meanwhile the settlement continued, continued to encroach into the Occupied Territories, and it was very clear...I have to say that right after Oslo, I immediately wrote an article that came out a month after Oslo, saying this is the end of the two-state settlement, because it's going to undermine any possibility of ever realizing it, and that's precisely what happened. Settlement programs continued steadily. In fact the peak year of settlement was the last Clinton year: 2000, the Clinton-Barak year; 2000, the year of Camp David, settlement reached its highest peak since before Oslo. And it was going to continue.

Safundi: So you had a two-state solution that was being discussed?

Chomsky: The notion of a two-state solution did not arise. That is a myth. In the international community it had been virtually uniform since the mid-1970s. So South Africa's being part of it didn't mean very much: everybody was a part of it.

The U.S. was against it, Israel was against it, and they remained against it through the Oslo period. In fact the first Israeli official to mention a Palestinian state was Benjamin Netanyahu's government, the extreme right-wing government. And they mentioned it, but just to ridicule it. They said, "Well, they want to call it a state? Fine, they can call it fried chicken if they want to." That was the comment. And around the year 1999-2000, the U.S. and Israel started talking about a Palestinian state, then comes the Camp David proposals, which were a Bantustan system.

Safundi: So it's basically been a cover then.

Chomsky: A cover. And it was clear from 1993. Now actually, if you really look at the intricate details, it changes around after the Intifada.

Safundi: The second Intifada.

Chomsky: The second Intifada. The first Intifada set the whole thing off. Before that, nobody was going to pay any attention at all. But the first Intifada made it clear that you got to do something, so they went into Oslo. Then, after the second Intifada broke out and it became serious...

For the first time [the Israelis were] really meeting organized resistance in the Territories. They went on for thirty-five years of harsh military occupation

with very little happening. I mean, the Palestinians were "enduring." Resistance meant enduring. Don't raise your head, but stay there. Don't let them kick you out. That was resistance. There were some exceptions, but that's basically what it was.

After the second Intifada broke out, it gave a shock of recognition. And in December 2000, at the end of his term, after the election, Clinton proposed what he called "informal parameters" which were never formally published, but it was clear what they were. Right after that, negotiations went on, in Taba, Egypt, in January 2001, between high level Israeli and Palestinian negotiators-it was not formal, but it was high level-and they actually came along with a proposal which was a big improvement over Camp David. It still wasn't acceptable-it still left Israeli settlements dividing up the West Bank-but it was a big improvement. Then, Israel called them off, the negotiations, before the elections, then Sharon came along and they never went back formally. But meanwhile it turns out, it was not known, informal negotiations continued, and they led to what is now called the Geneva Accords.

The Geneva Accords of last December were made formal, between relatively high level officials of the former Israeli government and high levels of the Palestinian Authority. Neither has formally accepted them. The Palestinian Authority has more or less ambiguously accepted them, the way they usually do. Israel rejects them flat out. The U.S. disregards them. But that's the basis for a two-state settlement, of a kind not too different from the one that's been the international consensus for almost 30 years.

The crucial question is: Will the U.S. accept it? The separation wall is just another step towards making it impossible to accept. And that's where it stands. And the U.S. government, including Colin Powell and the rest of them, simply refuse to move from the rejection of political settlement. They will allow something, but it will be Bantustans.

Safundi: Do you think, then, that the term "apartheid" is an accurate term for this situation?

Chomsky: Apartheid in South Africa meant something different. Apartheid wasn't [only] Bantustans, apartheid was the arrangement inside South Africa. Bantustans were bad enough, but that was something else, that was caging the population into unviable territories. Like putting Indians in reservations. We don't call that apartheid. We call it something else.

Safundi: But the term has been invoked by people within Israel, as well as among scholars.

Chomsky: It has been invoked, but for different reasons.

Safundi: What are those reasons?

Chomsky: Those reasons have to do with Israel itself. Uri Davis-[who] has been involved in civil disobedience since the 1960s, he was the first serious activist in civil disobedience in Israel-in the 1960s, he protested real apartheid, inside Israel. This had been going on for the whole history of the state, but it was particularly dramatic around 1967 or 1968.

Israel has a technique for dispossessing Israeli citizens-non-Jewish citizens-that's apartheid. One of the ways of doing it is to declare an area a military zone, so therefore for security reasons people have to get out, and it always turns out that it's never a Jewish area, it's Palestinian, and then after it's declared a security zone, you build settlements afterwards. And that's what's been going on. Palestinian villages had their lands taken away.

Safundi: So it's similar to the forced removals that were happening in South Africa.

Chomsky: Kind of, yes. And then, after people have forgotten about it, you go in and you build an all-Jewish city. And that's what was happening. Palestinian villages were restricted and they started building an all-Jewish city, Karmiel. This was a closed area, and Uri Davis went in, breaking the law, to protest what was happening. And that was the first serious act of civil disobedience.

Safundi: This was when?

Chomsky: Some time in the Sixties, I forget exactly when. We've been friends for years. Then later, he started doing scholarly work on what he calls "Apartheid Israel." And that's the internal structure of the society—in fact, I've written about it, too—and Ian Lustick, whom you may know, a professor at Penn, has written about it. But internally within Israel itself, forgetting the Occupied Territories, there is an extremely discriminatory system. It's subtle, you know. They don't have a law saying "Only Jews," but it's there.

Safundi: So it's similar then to Jim Crow South.

Chomsky: Even more than that. Jim Crow South was kind of informal apartheid, but here it's formalized. So, for example, if you look at the land laws, and decode it all, what it amounts to is that about ninety percent of the land inside Israel is reserved to what's called "people of Jewish race, religion and origin."

Safundi: They use the term "race."

Chomsky: "Race, religion, and origin." That's in the contract between the state of Israel and the Jewish National Fund, which is a non-Israeli organization, which, however, by various bureaucratic arrangements, administers the land. So it turns out to have a major role in the land administration authority.

All of this is covered up enough so that nobody can say, "Look, here's an apartheid law." You have to pull it out of the various regulations and practices, but it's there. Effectively, it means that about ninety percent of the land, in one fashion or another, is reserved for the Jewish citizens of Israel. There is the occasional case of a short-term contract given to a Bedouin, but it's close to... In fact it's presented as a very progressive, socialist legislation. Because the land is nationalized, it's not under private ownership, and this is regarded as very progressive, Western, leftist, you know, "this is terrific," but it's just a technique for ensuring that the land would be reserved for Jewish citizens, not Arab citizens.

And then that shows up in every other way you can imagine, whether you have village development or schools, sewage—the usual things that just sharply discriminate. So, in that sense, there is kind of an apartheid structure, and it's built into the system. It's also built into the immigration laws and all sorts of other things.

Safundi: Do you think this term, the invocation of this term, as having meaning at the ground level?

Chomsky: I don't use it myself, to tell you the truth. Just like I don't [often] use the term "empire," because these are just inflammatory terms... I think it's sufficient to just describe the situation, without comparing it to other situations. Every country is going to have its own way: Jim Crow is different from South African apartheid.

I grew up here in the U.S. during a period of extreme anti-Semitism. When I was a child in the 1930s, when my father managed to put enough money together to buy a second-hand car and we would drive together on the weekend into the nearby hills near the city where we lived, you had to check the motels. If a motel said "restricted" on it, that meant we couldn't go there,

because that meant Jews weren't allowed-this is not blacks, this is Jews. And by the time I got to Harvard in the early 1950s, there were virtually no Jewish faculty because it was so anti-Semitic. One of the reasons that MIT became a great university is that other Jewish faculty couldn't get jobs at Harvard, so they went to the engineering school down the street. That's not the same as South African apartheid, I don't know what name you can give it, but it's something. You have to describe it for what it is.

Anti-Arab racism in the U.S. is endemic. It is extreme. In fact, in a sense it is the only legitimate kind of racism. Harvard professors can write articles with openly racist condemnations of Arabs which are not noticed. I've sometimes given talks there in which I take those statements and put in "Jew" instead of "Arab," and people say, "My God, this is horrible. How can anyone say this?" You tell them it's just Arab, not Jew, and they relax.

Racism is endemic. I don't know what you call it exactly. There's no legal basis for it, but it's certainly there. Israel has its own form. Many other countries do, too.

Safundi: Clearly, we don't want to hinge things on universals, but what you are suggesting is that many places experience these forms of racial or cultural difference which are linked to certain situations of power.

Chomsky: You find it all over the place.

Safundi: So "apartheid" is just one word for it.

Chomsky: Apartheid was one particular system and a particularly ugly situation. Davis is a good friend, and I don't mind if he uses it, but personally I wouldn't have used it. It's just to wave a red flag, when it's perfectly well to simply describe the situation. But I should say is that this is all entirely different from the Occupied Territories

Safundi: You are making a distinction then between apartheid as it is understood internal to Israel, as opposed to the broader situation between Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Chomsky: Yes.

Safundi: So you would apply "apartheid" to that broader situation?

Chomsky: I would call it a Bantustan settlement. It's very close to that. The actions are taken with U.S. funding, crucially. U.S. diplomatic, military, and economic support are crucial. It cannot be done without that.

Safundi: And that is similar to U.S. support for South Africa during the apartheid period through the 1980s.

Chomsky: Yes. As I'm sure you know, the Reagan Administration-which is basically the current people in power, including people like Colin Powell-found ways to evade Congressional restrictions so that they continued to support the apartheid administration, almost until the end.

Safundi: Connected to that...

Chomsky: In the case of Israel, they don't have to hide it because there are no sanctions.

Safundi: That's my question. One of the important tactics against the apartheid government was the eventual use of sanctions. Do you see that as a possibility?

Chomsky: No. In fact I've been strongly against it in the case of Israel. For a number of reasons. For one thing, even in the case of South Africa, I think sanctions are a very questionable tactic. In the case of South Africa, I think they were [ultimately] legitimate because it was clear that the large majority of the population of South Africa was in favor of it.

Sanctions hurt the population. You don't impose them unless the population is asking for them. That's the moral issue. So, the first point in the case of Israel is that: Is the population asking for it? Well, obviously not.

But there is another point. The sanctions against South Africa were finally imposed after years, decades of organization and activism until it got to the point where people could understand why you would want to do it. So by the time sanctions were imposed, you had international corporations supporting them. You had mayors of cities getting arrested in support of them.

So calling for sanctions here, when the majority of the population doesn't understand what you are doing, is tactically absurd-even if it were morally correct, which I don't think it is.

The country against which the sanctions are being imposed is not calling for it.

Safundi: Palestinians aren't calling for sanctions?

Chomsky: Well, the sanctions wouldn't be imposed against the Palestinians, they would be imposed against Israel.

Safundi: Right...[And] Israelis aren't calling for sanctions.

Chomsky: Furthermore, there is no need for it. We ought to call for sanctions against the United States! If the U.S. were to stop its massive support for this, it's over. So, you don't have to have sanctions on Israel. It's like putting sanctions on Poland under the Russians because of what the Poles are doing. It doesn't make sense. Here, we're the Russians.

Israel will of course do whatever it can as long as the U.S. authorizes it. As soon as the U.S. tells it no, that's the end. The power relations are very straight forward. It's not pretty, but that's the way the world works.

II. ISRAEL-PALESTINE, SOUTH AFRICA, AND THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL CONFLICT: ON THE QUESTION OF SETTLER COLONIALISM

Safundi: I want to shift this discussion to thinking about another category instead of "apartheid," to think about "settler colonialism" as a category. Clearly settler colonialism is a phenomenon experienced in a number of places throughout the world: North America, South Africa, Algeria, Australia, a number of places.

Chomsky: Almost all over the world. It depends on how far back you go.

Safundi: Right! [laughter] Some scholars are applying it to the post-1967 period. How do you feel about applying this category to this period?

Chomsky: The post-1967 period is different. The concept of settler-colonialism would apply to the pre-1948 period. It is plainly an outside population coming in and basically dispossessing an indigenous population.

Safundi: There was a Jewish community, though...

Chomsky: Well, there was a small Jewish community that was mostly anti-Zionist. There was a traditional Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem and a few other places, but before the European settlers started coming in it was strongly anti-Zionist, and their descendants are still anti-Zionist. This is by now a marginal, small group. They were Orthodox Jews who wanted to pray in Jerusalem, and they even called on Jordan to take over Jerusalem again so they could have religious freedom, which they feel they don't have under Israel. But they are a separate story, you know. That's also not one-hundred percent of them. There was a pro-Zionist element among them, too, but the majority of them-before what's called the Aliyah, meaning "rising to the land," the arrival of Europeans-were anti-Zionist. Without going into it, by 1948, that argument is over. There was a state there, right or wrong. And that state should have the rights of any state in the international system, no more, no less. After 1967, there is a quite different situation. That's military conquest.

Safundi: Settlers have occupied some of the territory.

Chomsky: Not before '67. They couldn't. They would have been killed.

Safundi: But since 1967...

Chomsky: Since 1967, after the Territories were conquered-and that includes the Sinai-after that, slowly settlement programs began in the Territories that were under military occupation.

Actually, the major one was in the Sinai. In 1971 Israel was offered a full peace treaty by Egypt. They said they'd accept U.N. Resolution 242, a retreat to the international borders, a full peace treaty, navigation rights, anything, but they wanted Israel to stop settling in the Sinai, in the northeast. This was a Labor government then. It was not Sharon. Israel was driving out thousands of farmers, Bedouins, they were called, but they were settled farmers, in northeast Sinai, driving them into the desert to build an all-Jewish city. Egypt was infuriated. Sadat called for a full political settlement, which would have ended settlement in the Sinai. His main concern was Egyptian territory. Israel and the United States rejected it. That's why there was still a military conflict going on. Finally, in 1978 at Camp David, Israel and the U.S. accepted the proposal that Sadat had made in 1971, and that they had then rejected, and the reason for that was the 1973 War.

Meanwhile, Israel had started settling in the West Bank and Gaza, and that increased. It's a very systematic program.

Safundi: So it's part of a long-standing trend.

Chomsky: It's a long-standing trend, but it's illegal settlement in territories under military occupation. That's quite different from whatever you describe happening before 1948. It's quite different.

Now, if you want my own opinion, I've been involved in this since childhood in the 1930s. I was part of the Zionist movement, in fact, a Zionist youth leader, but I was opposed to a Jewish state, and that was part of the Zionist movement at the time. It was not the main part, but it was considered within the umbrella, so I could be an activist Zionist youth leader-the main thing in my life as a teenager-but opposed to a Jewish state, up until 1948.

Safundi: Because you thought a Jewish state would conflict with certain secular, socialist principles.

Chomsky: Look, I'm against a Muslim state, I'm against a white state, a Christian state, why should I be in favor of a Jewish state? Almost by definition it's a discriminatory state. If it's just symbolism like "You don't go to school on Sunday," it doesn't matter much, but it was clearly going to be a lot more than symbolism, like the land laws for instance.

So yes, I thought it was a terrible idea. But once it was established in 1948, it was there...actually, I lived there on a kibbutz for a while. If you continued to regard yourself as part of this general movement, what you are in favor of was eliminating the highly discriminatory elements internal to Israel, and of course opposing foreign conquest.

Safundi: So it becomes in a sense a civil rights movement.

Chomsky: Yes, internal to Israel. However, in 1967 my feeling was that after the '67 war that Israel had a fantastic opportunity: it could have moved towards peace with the major Arab states like Egypt and Jordan, which basically agreed to peace within a couple years. And internally to Cis-Jordan-the area from the Jordan to the Mediterranean-what it should have done in my opinion was move towards a kind of federalist bi-nationalism, so two federalist units, kind of like Belgium in a way. One of them basically Jewish, the other basically Arab. Each would internally be discriminatory, there is no way of avoiding that, but that would be compensated by the fact that there is a paired

society, and then they could become integrated...the more associations that develop along non-national lines, the greater the integration can move until ultimately at some point, by some agreement, the people themselves, they can form some sort of secular state.

Now, that's not something you can legislate. That's something that has to grow. And I think the possibility of growing it would have come out of a federal arrangement.

Safundi: But that...

Chomsky: The Palestinians would certainly have accepted it, the Arab states would have accepted it, the world would not have objected. Israel would not accept it.

Safundi: Do you see that kind of option re-emerging?

Chomsky: Well, I think they lost their chance. It's interesting what happened: from 1967 to 1973, this was a very live option. There were very few people talking about it. I was one of the few, and we were just hated on all sides. Nobody would talk to us. In 1973, it was over. In 1973 came the war, it was a very serious war. For Israel, it was extremely dangerous. After the war, they recognized that they can't just dismiss Egypt. And the U.S. and Israel then began to move towards an accommodation with Egypt. But by then the Palestinian issue had come into the international agenda, and even the Palestinian community, and from '73 on, the only real option was two states.

Now, can you go back to the chances that were lost? I doubt it. In fact, it's kind of interesting to watch in the United States and Israel: it's kind of becoming legitimate to talk about bi-nationalism, whereas in the period from '67-'73 it was considered anathema. What has changed? I think what's changed is that it's now recognized to be impossible. So therefore if somebody wants to write an article about it in the New York Review of Books, it's not a problem anymore. At the time when it was feasible, it couldn't be allowed. In fact, it was despised. One of the reasons for my interesting position relative to American intellectuals is that I was talking about it then. Now you can talk about it, because it's unfeasible. There is no possible way for Israel to agree to any form of bi-nationalism now. So fine, if intellectuals want to talk about it, not a problem.

Safundi: Edward Said spoke about it.

Chomsky: Edward Said is an old friend, but it was thirty years too late, in the late 1990s, and he was even allowed to write about it in the New York Times. If he had tried to hint at it at the time when it was feasible, he would have been practically hanged. But by the late 1990s it was okay, because it was out of the range of possibility. Edward was a supporter of the two-state solution.

Safundi: But he ended up being a single-state supporter.

Chomsky: In the late 1990s. After Oslo. But right through the period of-in fact, he was one of the people who initiated it, the PLO formal acceptance of the two-state settlement, we're old friends-but he had no [other position]. Maybe in the back of his mind, but he was part of the general international consensus and the leading Palestinian figure in favor of a two-state settlement. In the late 1990s, by then it was [perhaps possible], after you could see where Oslo was heading.

He was opposed to Oslo right away. He saw exactly what was going to happen. He was one of the very few people who saw right away that Oslo was just a sell-out. And he was opposed to it from the beginning. And then moved towards calling for abandoning the two-state settlement as the Oslo process proceeded.

But the feasible period was from 1967-73. And that's when you simply could not talk about it. And if you look at the current discussion, it never refers to that. They had a chance to do it, and that chance is gone. Maybe it will come back someday, but not now. The only feasible settlement now is through the international consensus: a two-state settlement or something like that, on or near the international border.

Safundi: Do you think it's moved-if we're to talk about settler colonialism-from an Algerian paradigm to a South African paradigm?

Chomsky: Again, I think you have to distinguish between inside Israel and the Occupied Territories. In the Occupied Territories, it's just straight, illegal, territorial conquest.

Safundi: Like South Africa.

Chomsky: No, because South Africa was working within the international legal system. South Africa was regarded as a state that had control of its own territory. Israel does not have any claim on the Occupied Territories, anymore than Saddam Hussein had a claim on Kuwait. That's a very different matter. What happens inside Saddam Hussein's Iraq is one thing, but what he did inside Kuwait is something different. Not that either of them is acceptable, but they are very different. And the Occupied Territories are like the conquest of Kuwait.

When Israel conquered half of Lebanon, now that was aggression, and if it had started to carry out settlements inside Lebanon, that would have been quite different from anything it's doing inside Israel. That distinction is very crucial.

III. SOUTH AFRICA: ITS EXAMPLE, ITS CHALLENGES

Safundi: I want to shift to South Africa itself. I know you've been there and given talks at UCT and other places. I'm curious what your current perspective is on South Africa as a state that has undergone a dramatic transition. I've read parts of the new edition of *Fateful Triangle* where you describe it as a success, and it is a success story on a certain level.

Chomsky: At a certain level.

Safundi: I'm curious what your impressions on the ANC are as this longstanding opposition party-somewhat similar to the PLO as being an organization that was seen as very fringe for a long time, particularly by the U.S.-and then coming to power and being embraced by the U.S. What are your thoughts?

Chomsky: Well, the ANC is a different story. I've obviously read a lot about it, and I was there, but when I was there, it just gave me a sort of personal richness of experience to what I assumed anyway from reading.

So take, say, Cape Town, where I was: if you are inside the walls, inside Cape Town, it looks like a progressive city. Blacks and whites mix together, blacks are riding around in limousines, just as the whites are riding around in limousines, and it has its poor areas, but it looks like there are plenty of black faces, so it looks like an integrated city.

On the other hand, if you walk one inch outside the walls, it's a horror story. There are some of the most hideous slums I've ever seen in my life. I could barely get into them because the activists who took me there [in 1997] were afraid to go in. And it's just teeming masses of deeply impoverished people, all black of course. When I was there, no electricity, I don't know if there is now. That's the other part of South Africa.

So what has basically happened-I don't think it's a big secret-is that the racial system technically has been eliminated, but the class system has remained. It's just that now you have some black faces among the wealthy. And the class system is very close to a race system. It's not exact and it's not formally

racist. In fact, it may be worse than it was under apartheid for much of the population. And the ANC has taken up a standard, neo-liberal program which is devastating for the mass of the population. As in everywhere it has been imposed. And you know exactly why: it's built into the system. Even in the United States. Nevertheless, if you look at what has happened since the more-or-less neo-liberal policies have been imposed, they aren't as stringent in the U.S. as they are in a third-world country because the population would never permit it-these measures are primarily for the weak; the rich would never accept them-but even in a rich country like the U.S. there's been some move towards-like the Reagan administration, like the Clinton administration which was not that different, this current version more extreme-[some] are trying very hard to dismantle the legislation and programs of the past century which have somewhat protected the general population from the ravages of an unconstrained corporate-capitalist system. And it's very harsh.

Safundi: So you see South Africa following this same path.

Chomsky: Well it's much more extreme because it's the third world...South Africa is a much more extreme case. These neo-liberal programs can be applied with far greater harshness in countries where the population has not won a lot of freedom for itself. In the United States, there's two-hundred years of struggle in which people won a lot of freedom. Just to impose on them the measures that you impose on the third world is extremely difficult.

There is nothing novel about this. The modern distinction between the first and the third world has developed primarily since the eighteenth century. There wasn't that much difference in the eighteenth century between what is now called the third world and what is now called the first world. Britain, for example was essentially a backwater as compared to India and China, which were the main commercial and manufacturing centers of the world. Britain had to impose high protectionist barriers to begin to develop its own industry in competition with superior Indian textile manufacturers. In fact, England even had to destroy the Irish woolen manufacturing industry by force. Since then, there have been some very regular developments. The countries that had market discipline forced on them have become the third world. The countries that protected themselves from market discipline became the first world. There is not one significant exception.

The conclusion to this interview will be published in the next issue of Safundi.

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