

Israel's liberal press demands military suppression of the Palestinians.

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Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper has published a series of articles criticising the country's "policy of restraint" and demanding an intensification of the repression of the Palestinians by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). The call, from a paper with a similar orientation and standing within Israel to the *New York Times* in the US and the *Guardian* in Britain, shows the liberals' increasing bellicosity and headlong rush to the right in defence of the ruling Zionist elite.

Ze'ev Schiff, long time defence editor of *Ha'aretz*, wrote an op-ed article entitled "A Shortage of Non-lethal Weapons" on October 24. In it, he made a convoluted attempt to excuse the IDF's shooting of unarmed Palestinians, including a large number of children, which has shocked and outraged people all over the world.

The problem, according to Schiff, was the IDF's and the police's lack of non-lethal weapons that had led to the unavoidable use of live ammunition. Israel is developing various types of non-lethal weapons, such as spraying crowds with an adhesive or oily substance, or employing acoustic roadblocks that use high frequency sound and cause victims to stumble and/or lose consciousness. But as yet, the IDF and police did not have anything other than tear gas and rubber-coated bullets, "which can sometimes kill", he wrote.

After trying to argue that the development and use of such weaponry was vital where riots involving Israeli Palestinians and Jews was creating the "more delicate issue" of using "excessive force against citizens of the state"—i.e. Israeli Arabs—he then gave the game away in his conclusion:

"Non-lethal weapons cannot solve every problem. A water cannon, for example, is effective only against small groups... However these weapons are incapable of providing comprehensive solutions. One also needs to consider whether non-lethal weapons should be used against crowds that include both individuals who are hurling rocks and individuals who are using firearms or Molotov cocktails. Another significant consideration is whether non-lethal weapons should be used against crowds that include both adults and children. *Generally speaking, the response in such situations is directed against the greatest danger that exists in the groups of civilians storming a given target.*" [Emphasis added]

In other words, non-lethal weapons are not much use in the situation that Israel confronts, and thus it is entirely legitimate to use the Israeli army against defenceless men, women and children. The Israeli liberal establishment is making mealy-mouthed concessions to liberal qualms and sensitivities, while all the same time it stands four square behind the IDF.

The tortuous logic and evasive formulations of Schiff's article were trumped by an extraordinary op-ed piece on November 9 by Israel Harel, entitled, "There must be a military solution". Harel went so far

as to attack the IDF Chief of Staff, Shaul Mofaz, for his equivocation in recognising the necessity of using the full force of the military.

Harel insists that without a "military solution" to the present crisis, the Jewish state has no future. Israel must use its overwhelming military might to stop the uprising and force Arafat and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. "Without the option of a military solution—and this is a truism that certain generals are trying to run away from—a political solution did not exist either", he wrote.

He was reacting to a press conference where Mofaz had said, "the situation is likely to deteriorate within a year's time, into a regional, all-encompassing war.... The IDF was making preparations for a possible war". Harel was furious that no one had asked why, given the balance of power between the Israelis and Palestinians, the Israelis were unable to stop the violence that could erupt into an all out war. "Why is the IDF acting so fatalistically and why is it allowing the initiative to be taken by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat?", he asked. As far as he was concerned, the IDF should pull out all the stops and put an end to "the war of attrition".

"Mofaz is just a few centimetres away from declaring, as the then Chief of Staff Dan Shomron declared during the first *intifada*, that 'there is no military solution' to this war of attrition", he complains.

Mofaz had already been stung by the perception that the IDF was taking a reactive rather than a proactive role. Mohammed Dahlan, the Palestinian head of preventative security in Gaza, earlier claimed in an interview with the mass daily *Yediot Aharonot* that Israel had learnt to live with a war where it was constantly on the defensive, as it had in Lebanon. In response Mofaz announced that, "The IDF will now take the initiative". But Harel argued that the IDF had not put its money where its mouth was. It was allowing the Palestinians' action to intensify.

There are clearly divisions within the Israeli ruling elite about how far to go with pressing a military solution to the conflict. Mofaz appears to have made a sober military and political appraisal of the situation prevailing throughout the region. He has evidently calculated that the "Tiananmen Square" option would ignite the social tensions that are reaching boiling point in Israel's neighbouring Arab countries. This would destabilise the very regimes, like Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, upon whom Israel and the US rely to protect their interests and may precipitate an all out regional and civil war that the Zionist state could not survive.

Harel is outraged that the Palestinians realised that the IDF is apprehensive about the long-term prospects for Israel. Now well to the right of the military, he and other liberals are demanding the IDF make short shrift of the uprising. The Palestinians must be forced to make peace or face annihilation.

Danny Rubinstein, in another op-ed on November 13, demanded the Palestinians call a spade a spade. The *intifada*, the uprising on the West Bank and Gaza, was a war. They were, he said, conducting a war of attrition against Israel, but hiding behind the term *Al-Aqsa intifada* (Jerusalem uprising) to gain the support of Muslims around the world, in an attempt to wring concessions from Israel.

War therefore justifies the "liquidation" (a term reserved until recently for Hezbollah and Hamas) of Fatah activist Hussein Abayat in Beit Sahur. Abayat was a member of the Palestinian ruling party and Arafat's colleague in the Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership. War explains and justifies Israel's decision not to co-operate or consult with the PA.

Writing in *Ha'aretz* on November 15, Ze'ev Schiff claimed—in a statement, which flew in the face of all the evidence—that the mounting violence had not entered a new phase and that "Israel had largely confined itself to defensive measures, initiating few operations. Even IDF initiatives have been mainly responses to Palestinian actions, not the consistent offensive one would take in a real war where the goal would be to win."

With the cabinet split on whether to use the full military option, Schiff is clearly trying to raise the stakes. He says that the question facing Barak's government is how to act in this war of attrition: shouldn't Israel permit the IDF to make "major incursions into Palestinian-controlled territory?" and "stem the flow of some of life's essentials to the PA, such as electricity and gas?"

It is of some significance that such suggestions are coming from *Ha'aretz* and Ze'ev Schiff. Schiff, co-author with Ehud Ya'ari of *Year of the Dove, Israel's Lebanon War*, and *Intifada* was one of the architects of the rapprochement with Palestinians that became known as the "peace process", and he has the ear of the top echelons of the Zionist power elites.

It was in *Intifada* *, written in 1989 while the Palestinian uprising that had started in 1987 and was to last for several more years was still raging, that Schiff set out the basic framework for a settlement of the Palestinian question. Schiff had become convinced that "the 'war within' had reached a crossroads that leads towards negotiations in one direction and away from them in the other". Israel had to make room for the Palestinians and the PLO and do what other nations had done before in similar circumstances: "invest all its efforts in working towards a compromise".

Israel, he wrote, would, in the end, have to seek an accommodation with the Palestinians to avoid the situation getting totally out of control. New Palestinian leaders were emerging in opposition to the veteran leadership of Yassir Arafat: "Men who are being cast into prison today will be the preferred negotiating partners in the future (as were Archbishop Makarios, Habib Bourguiba, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kwame Nkrumah in their day). The important thing is that Israel not exhaust its energies in a fruitless bid to avoid the inevitable and thus arrive at the negotiating table in a considerably weakened state". Essentially he argued that Arafat, as a future President of a Palestinian state, would be an even more compliant tool than these conservative bourgeois nationalist leaders were in their day.

He then went on to sketch out the basis of a military and political deal with the Palestinians and the PLO that looks like the blueprint for the 1993 Oslo Accords and the subsequent "land for peace" agreements.

In return for a Palestinian "entity" and a guarantee that they would abandon their "plan [to dismantle Israel] in stages", the Palestinians would have to renounce all further claims against Israel.

There would be no "right of return" for those Palestinians who had lost their homes as a result of the establishment of the Zionist state, since this amounted to a "means of destroying Israel from within".

There would be a prohibition on military forces, tanks, combat planes and field guns. No foreign forces would be allowed and the Palestinians would not be allowed to manufacture weapons, although they would have their own police force.

"If Israelis reconcile themselves to this grim prospect, the younger generation of Palestinians will surely deduce that a civil uprising is not an effective vehicle of political expression and they must return to the path of armed struggle", Schiff and Ya'ari wrote.

Schiff's blueprint made the Palestinians' fate, their national and democratic rights, entirely subordinate to Israel's strategic interests. Should the arrangements be violated, the Palestinians stood to lose their sovereign status. In other words, it would be a peace of the mighty.

This clearly demonstrates that so-called peace deal was never animated by pacifist sentiments but a political appraisal of how the interests of the Zionist state could best be defended when the *intifada*, an embryonic revolutionary movement of the Palestinians masses, threatened to break out of the PLO's control and galvanise popular opposition to Israel throughout the Middle East.

Schiff proposed, and the dominant sections of the Israeli bourgeoisie agreed with him, that the time had come for a deal with Arafat. Taking his cue from the former colonial powers in their attitude to the nationalist leaders, he concluded that, in Arafat, Israel had a man they too could do business with.

That these liberals now advance a stauncher militarist stance than the head of the IDF not only says much about the political character of the negotiated settlement arrived at with the 1993 Oslo Accords, it also speaks volumes about the political physiognomy of the Israeli pacifist and liberal movement. From its inception the needs and interests of the Israeli state, not liberal or democratic principles, dominated it. The social, economic and political issues confronting both the Palestinian people and the Israeli working class were never a cause for concern. The right wing has been able to dominate Israeli politics for so long precisely because the liberals agree with them in essence. Now, not only have they abandoned any pretence of liberal sentiments and opposition to the right wing, they are outstripping them in their war rhetoric and patriotic jingoism.

* Z Schiff and E Ya'ari, "Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising- Israel's Third Front", Simon and Schuster, New York, 1989.

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