

The Road Map era	2
The Aqaba Summit	6
There is never a partner for peace	9
And in 2005	14

FROM AQABA TO SHARM - FAKE PEACE FESTIVALS.

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(An excerpt from an update chapter to Israel/Palestine - How to end the war of 1948.)

The Sharm-el - Sheikh summit of Sharon and Abbas is hailed in the Western media as the opening of a new era. This is the climax of a wave of optimism that has been generated since the death of Arafat. In the last four years, the Israeli leadership singled Arafat out as the main obstacle for peace. Adopting the Israeli perspective, the media world believes that his departure would enable a renewal of the peace process. This, in the media world, is coupled with the faith that Israel is finally led by a man of peace. Sharon, who might have had some problems in the past, so the story goes, has changed his skin, and now he is leading Israel to painful concessions.

The same euphoria has been of course dominant also in the Israeli media, as Aluf Benn noted in *Ha'aretz* in December 7,: "The media atmosphere over the last few days has been reminiscent of the Oslo-era euphoria, or the early days of Ehud Barak's government... There is once again talk of cooperation, public embraces and peace conferences. International diplomats are once again viewing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an arena for diplomatic successes instead of a guaranteed recipe for frustration and failure".¹

Judging from the optimistic language of the media, the new era exists not just at the level of declared plans. The praises for Sharon, the feeling of huge progress, would let one almost believe that things have actually changed on the ground - some settlements evacuated, the occupation almost over, cessation of Israeli violence. The Palestinian elections, together with the Iraqi elections that also took place in January, were hailed as a big victory for democracy, with hardly any mention of the fact that in both places, these were elections under occupation. In the CNN report of the Palestinian election day, the enthusiastic reporter spoke about the future relations between the two "countries" (Israel and Palestine), as if the Palestinian state is already founded on its liberated land.

But the bitter reality is that nothing has changed. The new "peace plans" are no more real than the previous ones, and on the ground, the Palestinians are losing more of their land and are being pushed into smaller and smaller prison enclaves, surrounded by the new wall that Sharon's government keeps constructing. On the day of the Sharm-el- Sheikh summit Israeli sources announced that even the illegal outposts that Israel has committed to evacuate long ago will not be evacuated until "after implementation of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip"

2

Mahmoud Abbas, who was elected as prime minister of the Palestinian authority on January 9, has served in this role already once before, since April 29, 2003. These were the days of another promising "peace plan" - the road map. Just as now, the new era was celebrated, in June 2003, in a summit in Aqaba Jordan, with Bush, Sharon and Abbas. If we want to know what awaits Abbas on this round, it would be useful to examine in detail what happened in that previous round. The road map story contains all the elements of Israel's policy in the last four years, and of what Israel will continue to do, if undisturbed by the international community.

The Road Map era

On April 29, 2003, The Palestinian Legislative Council approved a new Palestinian Authority cabinet under Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). That followed a long period of pressure by the U.S. and Israel for Palestinian reforms, and Abbas, who is considered a moderate, appeared to receive their support. In his address, presenting his ministers and his political vision, Abu Mazen said inter alia: "We reject the terror on either side and in any form, in keeping with our tradition and moral values... We stress that terror and its various forms does not help our just cause, but rather destroys it, and will not bring the peace we want."³

Israel welcomed the occasion with a new assassination on that same day. An Israel Air Force Apache helicopter gunship fired several missiles at a car driving in a residential neighborhood south of Khan Yunis killing local PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) commander Nidal Salameh and another PFLP member, Awani Sarhan. " In response to criticism over the timing of Salameh's killing (on the day that a new, reform-minded Palestinian government was being approved), IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon said that.... "Salameh's assassination will actually strengthen the new Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen)"⁴ From the Palestinian side, the next day, two terrorists, who smuggled their way from

the Gaza strip, blew themselves up in an explosion at Mike's Place, a Tel Aviv beachfront pub, killing three Israelis and wounding about 60.⁵

It was in this setting that the 'road map' document was ceremonially presented to the two sides, on April 30, 2003. "U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer brought the document to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Jerusalem office. European representatives delivered the document to Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) at his Department for Negotiations, a research institute he established in Ramallah."⁶

The road map plan has its roots in a speech of U.S. President George W. Bush, on June 24, in which he outlines a vague two-state solution and calling for the Palestinian leadership to be replaced. On July 15, 2002, the foreign ministers of the Quartet - the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia - met to detail the principles of the road map formulated in the U.S. State Department under the direction of William Burns. In October 2002, the first draft of the document was presented to Sharon, on the eve of his meeting with Bush at the White House. Sharon appointed his Chief of Staff Dov Weisglass to coordinate Israel's comments and corrections to the road map. On December 20, 2002, the final version of the plan was completed, but Weisglass' team has submitted about 100 correction proposals since then.

The Road Map's text announces that this time "the destination is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict by 2005"⁷, a goal expected to be achieved at the third phase of the plan, after two preparatory phases. To check if it offers anything concrete in this direction, it is necessary first to refresh our memory regarding what the conflict is about. From Israeli discourse at the time, one might get the impression that it is about Israel's right to exist. According to this view, the Palestinians are trying to undermine the mere existence of the state of Israel with the demand to allow their refugees to return, and they are trying to achieve this with terror. It seems that it was forgotten that in practice this is a simple and classical conflict over Palestinian land and resources (water) that Israel has been occupying since 1967. The Road Map document as well is completely absent of any territorial dimension.

What is demanded of the Palestinians in the first two phases are clear: to establish a government that will be defined by the U. S. as democratic, to form three security forces which will be defined by Israel as reliable, and to crush terror. Once these demands are fulfilled, the third phase is to begin, at which the occupation will miraculously end. But the document doesn't put any demands on Israel in this third phase. Most Israelis understand that there is no way to end the occupation and the conflict without the

Israeli army leaving the territories and the dismantlement of settlements. But these basic concepts are not even hinted at in the document, which only mentions freezing the settlements and dismantling new outposts, already in the first stage: "GOI [Government of Israel] immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001. Consistent with the Mitchell Report, GOI freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements".

Apart from this reference to the old U.S. demand of freezing settlement expansion, the plan is pretty general as to its outcome in the final phase: "Phase III objectives are consolidation of reform and stabilization of Palestinian institutions, sustained, effective Palestinian security performance, and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at a permanent status agreement in 2005... leading to a final, permanent status resolution in 2005, including on borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements; and.... progress toward a comprehensive Middle East settlement between Israel and Lebanon and Israel and Syria, to be achieved as soon as possible."

The proposed first phase, however, is more substantial, because it repeats the cease-fire plan proposed by then CIA head George Tenet, in June 2001. The essence of the Tenet plan was that to restore calm, a cease-fire should be declared, to which both sides should have to contribute. The Palestinians should cease all terror and armed activity, and Israel should pull its forces back to the positions they held before the Palestinian uprising, in September 2000. This is a substantial demand of Israel, because in September 2000, there were large areas of the West Bank that were under Palestinian control. Implementing the demand to restore the conditions that existed then, should mean lifting the many road blocks and army posts that Israel has placed in these areas since that time. The road map specifies the same for the first phase: Israel shall "withdraw from Palestinian areas occupied from Sept 28 2000... [and restore] the status quo that existed then".

There is no doubt that fulfillment of this demand can contribute greatly to establishing some calm, even if a temporary one. But was there any basis for the hope that on the road-map round, Tenet's plan would be finally implemented? The Tenet cease-fire plan has come into the spotlight many times before. The previous round, examined in chapter VII, was what appeared to be an American cease-fire initiative in March 2002, for which Zinni and Cheney were sent to the region. Already then Sharon clarified that he does not agree to this demand, and he only agrees to good-will gestures, like easing the conditions for the population in areas in which quiet will be preserved (in an unspecified way)⁸. This did not prevent the U.S. from pointing at the Palestinians as the side that refused the cease-fire. With the

end of this initiative, Israel embarked on the "Defensive Shield" spree of destruction, with the blessing of the U.S.

Was there any chance, then, that in this round, things would turn differently? On the face of it, the circumstances seemed potentially different. Since 2001, Israel, followed by the U.S., argued that the real obstacle to restoring calm was the continued leadership of Yasser Arafat, who, they said, orchestrated terror behind the screens. They demanded the appointment of a different Palestinian Prime Minister and favored Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) for the role. Furthermore, at the time, there were many reports of Abbas and others negotiating with the various Palestinian organizations a complete cease-fire (Hudna) during which they will refrain from any attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers. What could be more suitable for a new peace initiative than starting with a period of some calm - quiet for the Israelis without terror, quiet for the Palestinians, without the constant presence of the IDF in their midst?

This, however is not how the Israeli authorities viewed the matter. They changed their tone as soon as Abbas was elected. Already the day Mahmoud Abbas was sworn we heard that, "military Intelligence told the political echelon at the beginning of the week that the new Palestinian government headed by Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has no intention of uprooting the terrorist infrastructure. 'According to what we know now, Abu Mazen plans to speak with the Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders, and not to clash with them.' "⁹

The background for this dissatisfaction with Abbas is a demand that Israel posed as a condition for accepting the road map. Israel clarified that it would not be sufficient to halt terror, but a reliable Palestinian authority should engage in an actual clash with the various armed organizations, with the aim of destroying them. This demand was later reiterated in the resolution the Israeli cabinet passed when it approved the road map on May 26, 2003: "In the first phase of the plan and as a condition for progress to the second phase, the Palestinians will complete the dismantling of terrorist organizations (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front, Al-Aqsa Brigades and other apparatuses) and their infrastructure" ¹⁰ The dismantling should involve "arrests, interrogations, prevention and the enforcement of the legal groundwork for investigations, prosecution and punishment."¹¹

From the Palestinian perspective, carrying out this Israeli demand means, in essence, civil war. The list of organizations Israel demands dismantling comprises most Palestinian organizations. Israel demands that not only their military wings be dismantled, but also their "infrastructure", which

means the political and social organizations that support them. Furthermore, this long process of dismantling should take place as a precondition to any further progress towards the goals of the road map, namely right at the start of the process at which the Palestinians have not yet received anything. There is no reason to assume that the various organizations will just obediently dismantle, or let their members be imprisoned or killed by the new Palestinian security forces that Israel expects the Palestinian Authority to form. Rather, the process must involve armed clashes with these organizations. As mentioned in chapter IX, right from the start of Oslo, some Palestinian organizations (most notably the Hamas) warned that Israel is trying to push the Palestinians into a civil war, in which the society kills and destroys itself. One of the achievements of Arafat's leadership, in collaboration with virtually all fragments of the Palestinian society, has been that they managed to avoid deterioration into civil war. The new Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, was neither able, nor willing, to risk civil war. But he was able to offer cessation of terror and attacks on Israel. As Khalil Shikaki, a Palestinian political analyst, explained to the Guardian, "a ceasefire and the dismantling of groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad were in contradiction... Why would Hamas continue a ceasefire if it was merely cover for its destruction? And if Abbas had the infrastructure to dismantle these groups, he wouldn't need the ceasefire in the first place."¹²

The Israeli leadership viewed the cessation of terror offer as a threat, rather than as progress. As Aluf Benn summarized this in *Ha'aretz*, "as the Abu Mazen confidence vote drew closer, the tone changed in Jerusalem. At first Israel presented his election as a large celebration, as Israel's fruit of victory in the intifada. Now the prime minister, foreign minister and defense establishment are warning of another trick of those cunning Palestinians. The Israelis' position, supported by an intelligence analysis of Abu Mazen's statements in various conferences, is that the new prime minister will try to push Israel to concessions by means of hudna, an agreed cessation of attacks among the Palestinian organizations... Jerusalem sources warn that the international community is deaf to... nuances and, as soon as a false calm prevails, will demand from Israel withdrawals and settlement freezes. Israel is demanding a Palestinian 'Altalena,' no less than a confrontational showdown between Abu Mazen and Mohammed Dahlan on the one hand and Hamas, Jihad and the Al Aqsa Brigades on the other."¹³

The Aqaba Summit

At the beginning of June, 2003, a ceremonial summit took place in Aqaba, Jordan, with Bush, Sharon, and Abbas, to mark the beginning of the road

map era. Towards the occasion, Hamas leaders started to openly declare their willingness to enter a cease-fire (hudna) with Israel, for the first time since the establishment of the movement in 1987. "A senior Hamas spokesman in Gaza, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who usually represents movement hardliners, said on Friday: 'The Hamas movement is prepared to stop terror against Israeli civilians if Israel stops killing Palestinian civilians ... We have told (Palestinian Authority Prime Minister) Abu Mazen in our meetings that there is an opportunity to stop targeting Israeli civilians if the Israelis stop assassinations and raids and stop brutalizing Palestinian civilians".¹⁴

Sharon was just as open in immediately rejecting this proposal. On the eve of the Aqaba summit, the headline in Ha'aretz declared: "The prime minister: A Palestinian ceasefire is not enough"; and the text continued to explain that "in his meeting with U.S. president George Bush at the Aqaba summit, prime-minister Ariel Sharon will seek the U.S. backing of his demand that the Palestinian authority use forceful [military] means against the terror organizations and their infrastructure in the territories, as a precondition for any diplomatic advance. Sharon will tell Bush that it is not acceptable to settle just for agreements between the Palestinian organizations to a cease fire (Hudna)... In return Sharon will promise Bush that Israel will evacuate illegal outposts in the West bank "¹⁵. Two weeks later, on June 10, came the more explicit reply of the Israeli army to Rantisi's cease fire offer. Two helicopter gunships fired seven missiles that set his car ablaze in Gaza City, killing two people and wounding about 20. Rantisi managed to escape this assassination attempt, and survived another year, until he was killed by the Israeli army on April 17, 2004.

Still, none of this seemed to have registered in Western consciousness, and certainly not in Israel. The perception of the events was shaped solely at the level of general and abstract declarations. The road map document requires that "at the outset of Phase I... Israeli leadership issues unequivocal statement affirming its commitment to the two-state vision of an independent, viable, sovereign Palestinian state living in peace and security alongside Israel, as expressed by President Bush"¹⁶. This, in fact, is the only clause of the road map that the Israeli leadership did comply with. Sharon declared on several occasions that he "accepts Bush's vision of two states", and the Israeli cabinet, following a "stormy" six hours debate, approved the road map on May 26 (with fourteen reservations that deprived it of content, but did not attract much media attention). At the level of declaration, Sharon was willing to go even further and utter the taboo word "occupation". In a meeting of the Likud Knesset faction on May 27 he said: "I think the idea that it is possible to continue keeping 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation - yes it is occupation, you might not like the word, but what is happening is occupation - is bad for Israel, and

bad for the Palestinians, and bad for the Israeli economy".¹⁷ That was sufficient to arouse a storm in right wing circles and lend complete credibility to Sharon in the eyes of the Israeli doves. The idea that words can lie, that this is perhaps another Israeli deceit, did not seem to cross anybody's mind.

The Israeli public discourse stormed around "Sharon's revolutionary change of mind". The extensive debate on his psyche focused on the question whether he has changed from the inside, or whether it is all just U.S. pressure. Either way, Sharon turned suddenly into the beloved leader of the Israeli "peace camp". The furious right wing and the celebrating peace camp agreed on the substance of what they perceived had occurred: Sharon's Israel has already taken the fatal historical step, and gave up on the occupation. - "In Aqaba, the State of Palestine was founded"! - declared the headline of *Yediot Aharonot* on June 5. This is because, following in the tradition of Oslo, the mere declaration of a willingness to give away something at some future time, is by itself perceived in Israel as the most painful and crucial of concessions. As stated by Labor MP Abraham Burg in his excited address of appreciation to Sharon, "even if you will regret this later; even if you will not stand the pressure of your own party, you already made your contribution, because you said occupation, you said evacuation, you said peace, you started to believe".¹⁸

In the Israeli consciousness, it is not the test of actions that matters, but the test of words - the complex art of the simulation of peace, which so eased the liberal conscience during Oslo. In this perception, Bush and Sharon are the indubitable proponents of world peace. Who would stop to notice what actually occurs in the real world?

It was possible to learn from the Israeli papers at the time that nothing whatsoever has changed in the daily reality of the occupation. The Israeli army continued to arrest, shoot, and assassinate Palestinians. Even during the week of the Aqaba summits, when in the world of simulation the headlines heralded an easing of the closure, the IDF made sure to clarify that nothing would change. On the contrary, the restrictions over Palestinian movement were increased. Here is how Arnon Regular described this in *Ha'aretz*: "The Palestinians might have heard about Israel's easing conditions for travel, but they haven't seen this on the ground. In fact, there are signs that nothing at all has changed. ...The picture that emerged yesterday after a day of driving up and down and back and forth across the West Bank is of tens of thousands of people who have seemingly been thrown back into the Middle Ages, when the only mode of transport was by foot."¹⁹

The diabolic aspect of Sharon's deception, which the U.S. backed, was that from that point on, only the Palestinians would be accused of whatever happens. Since the Aqaba summit, Palestinian resistance to the army's continued brutality could not be tolerated because in the Israelis' perception, Israel already fulfilled its part of the bargain when Sharon declared that he had had enough of the occupation, and will even evacuate a number of outposts. Now it was the turn of the Palestinian Authority to fulfill its part of the generous agreement and to prove that it is capable of controlling terror, even without any change in the situation on the ground.

There is never a partner for peace

Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority and the various Palestinian organizations did fulfill their part in the road map plan and declared a complete cease-fire for three months, during which they agreed to cease attacks both in Israel and in the territories, as required in phase I of the road map. The first announcement that they reached an agreement on this was made on June 25, 2003. "The Hamas spokesmen said it was noteworthy that they had accepted the three-month lull without receiving any guarantees from Israel that it would cease its military activities against them in exchange for the cease-fire".²⁰

The Israeli immediate reaction was clear and decisive: Within minutes of the Hamas' announcement "Israeli helicopters fired missiles at two cars near the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, killing two people, including a woman. The Israel Defense Forces said the helicopters fired the missiles at a Hamas cell that was about to fire mortar shells at an Israeli settlement".²¹ And in Jerusalem, "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz decided... that Israel will ignore any agreements on a hudna, or cease-fire, reached by the Palestinian organizations, and will instead insist that the Palestinian Authority disarm militias in any area in which it assumes security responsibility... The Foreign Ministry... instructed foreign delegations to prepare for a Palestinian propaganda assault that will blame Israel for violating the "cease-fire" while ignoring the PA's responsibility for continued terrorist activity by "local" cells."²²

In perfect coordination, U.S. reaction was pretty similar: "President George W. Bush reacted skeptically yesterday to the reported agreement on halting attacks against Israelis for three months. 'I'll believe it when I see it,' Bush said. Bush demanded that Hamas and groups like it be taken out of business... 'It's one thing to make a verbal agreement,' he said. 'But in order for there to be peace in the Middle East, we must see organizations such as Hamas dismantled, and then we'll have peace, we'll have a chance for

peace.'... Bush said he did not know details of the reported deal, but was dubious about it, 'knowing the history of the terrorists.' During the meeting with Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, and Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis, the outgoing head of the EU... Bush pressed for the EU to outlaw Hamas in European countries, where a distinction is made between the movement's military and political wings."²³

Although both Israel and the U.S. made their intentions clear, it was not possible to keep pursuing this line at the level of public declaration once the Palestinians stuck to their cease fire. On June 29, the official Palestinian cease-fire was declared²⁴. This time, Israel appeared to cooperate partially. The Israeli army pulled out forces from one town in the northern Gaza Strip and opened the main road in the Strip (- the "Tancher" route) to Palestinian traffic. Sharon promised to consider release of Palestinian prisoners. Later, in July, Israeli forces pulled back in Beit Lehem in the West bank, and three check points were removed in the area of Ramallah, as "goodwill gestures to the Palestinians to coincide with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's trip to Washington, where he is expected to face pressure from the U.S. to ease humanitarian conditions in the territories."²⁵

But this, more or less, exhausts Israel's "goodwill" measures. For about six weeks, as the Palestinians fully kept their part of phase I of the road map, Israel did nothing to implement its part. As mentioned, Sharon clarified in advance that he does not agree to the basic requirement in the Tenet plan, reiterated in phase I of the road map, that the Israeli army pulls back to the positions it held before the Intifada. But one could still expect at least the freezing of military activities in these areas during the cease-fire. Instead, the army maintained and even increased its level of activities in all Palestinian towns and villages. Arrests, shooting, house demolitions, closures and blocking exits continued as usual.

Nevertheless, the Palestinians stuck to the one-sided cease-fire they declared (with one exception, on July 7). The Israeli society was optimistic and relieved, but apparently this was a cause of concern for those "Jerusalem sources" who right from the start, "warned that the international community is deaf to... nuances and, as soon as a false calm prevails, will demand from Israel withdrawals and settlement freezes."²⁶ After six weeks of a complete Palestinian cease fire, Israel resumed its policy of assassinations, targeting mainly leaders of the Hamas.

The day the Palestinian cease-fire was declared, some of the assessments of the security echelons were shared with the public: "The IDF's intelligence units believe that, of the three organizations that declared a

suspension of attacks yesterday, Hamas activists will most closely adhere to the deal. Hamas is considered strictly hierarchical and relatively disciplined, and it seems that the group's leaders will do all they can to enforce the hudna".²⁷ It is hard not to interpret the steps Israel took in August 2003 as an attempt to break this Hamas resolution and provoke it back to arms.

On August 9, 2003 a squad of naval commandos killed two leading Hamas figures, Hamis Abu Salam and Faiz al-Sadar, in the refugee camp Aksar near Nablus.. In the riots that erupted at the Askar camp following the assassination, two more Palestinians were killed. Three days later, two suicide bombers, both from the camp of Askar, blew themselves up in two terror attacks in the Ariel settlement and in Rosh Ha'ain, killing two Israelis. Hamas leadership in Gaza had finally made the mistake the Israeli security echelons were waiting for. It announced that although it was still committed to the ceasefire, the conditions had changed so as to permit retaliations against Israeli attacks²⁸. Israel immediately seized the opportunity to provoke local Hamas cells into action. In this context of frustration on part of the Palestinian organizations that tried to stick to the cease fire, Israel targeted next Mohammed Sidr, the head of Islamic Jihad's military wing in Hebron, on August 14. As always, Israel claimed that the killings were necessary to prevent terror. Amos Harel, a senior security reporter and analyst in *Ha'aretz* raised some doubts. Reporting security sources' claim that "recently, new intelligence has indicated that some of the Islamic organizations' field operatives have tired of the cease-fire and have resumed planning near-term attacks", he states: "If this is indeed what happened, the facts should be presented in full. As long as Israel makes do with generic statements about 'ticking bombs' and 'an attack the wanted man was planning in the near future,' there will always be those who suspect it is Israel that is stirring up trouble in order to free itself of the yoke of the concessions demanded by the road map".²⁹

Already on the day of Sidr's 'liquidation', security echelons informed the Israeli media that the cease-fire was soon to be over. "-We must assume that everything is going to fall apart, and if so, it had better fall apart on the neighbor's side rather than on ours - a Jerusalem source said."³⁰ It was obvious that the failure of the cease-fire would also be a deathblow to Mahmoud Abbas' new government. But by that time, the Israeli leadership was openly no longer interested in maintaining his rule. Abbas, whose appointment was hailed, just less than four months before, as a victory to Israel's tireless pursuit of peace, has lost his favor with the rulers, and apparently, Israel managed to convince also the U.S. administration that it is time to replace him. On that same day, it was reported that "Jerusalem received indications that the White House too is becoming increasingly

disappointed with Abbas. The Americans had pinned many hopes on him, believing that his weight and authority would grow with the job, but they learned that his cabinet is not making the necessary changes and is not fighting against terrorism.... Israeli sources assume that if the Americans despair of Abbas, they will threaten to cut the PA's funds off, thus leading to the collapse of its government and the rise of an alternative leadership."³¹

As we saw in chapter VII, Israel has often applied the assassination policy before, with the full awareness that it is bound to stall any Palestinian attempt at restoring calm. As many times before, the Israeli society paid a horrible price for the killing of Sidr. On August 19, 2003 (optional of course but might help orient at least many u.s. readers?) a suicide bomber belonging to a Hamas cell in Sidr's hometown, Hebron, blew himself up in a Jerusalem bus, killing 20 people, including 6 children, and wounding about 100. The cease fire was on life support. Still, it was possible to save it. Abbas was quick to react. "Overnight he had secured the endorsement of Yasser Arafat to crack down on Hamas and Islamic Jihad for violating the ceasefire with the Jerusalem bombing. The tentative plan called for the arrest of the militants involved in the bombing, shutting Hamas mosques, and disabling its patronage network of schools and hospitals".³² Foreign media reported that the U.S. administration was informed that the crackdown operation on Hamas, including in the Gaza strip, was to begin on August 21.³³ But Israel did not wait, and on that same day, it struck the final blow to the cease fire.

As senior *Ha'aretz'* analyst Ze'ev Schiff reported, it was known that the bombing was decided locally, with no coordination with the Hamas leadership. "The Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip did not have advance knowledge about the Jerusalem bus bombing. Hamas leaders in Gaza, like members of Islamic Jihad, were sure that it was an operation carried out by Islamic Jihad."³⁴ Nevertheless, Israel chose to retaliate against the Hamas leadership in Gaza. Furthermore, the strike was not aimed at the Hamas military wing, but at one of its most moderate political leaders. Here is how *The Guardian* described the event: "Five Israeli missiles incinerated Ismail Abu Shanab in Gaza City yesterday, killing one of the most powerful voices for peace in Hamas and destroying the ceasefire that Palestinian leaders believed would avert civil war... Ariel Sharon could not have been in any doubt that killing Abu Shanab would wreck the ceasefire. He was widely seen as more pragmatic than fellow leaders. He broke a taboo within Hamas by recognising that there would have to be a Palestinian state alongside Israel, not in place of it."³⁵

Abu Shnab's death prompted tens of thousands of Palestinians to take to the streets of the Gaza strip. Hamas activists launched mortars at Israeli settlements within the Gaza strip. Hamas leadership, and other organizations, announced that they were calling off the cease fire. At that time, the Israeli army had already launched a military raid of Palestinian cities of the West Bank and gathered forces around the Gaza strip for a large scale operation. That was the end of the road map plan, which had ignited so much hope for so many Israelis and Palestinians.

Just as in the previous round of an apparent U.S. attempt to broker a cease fire along the lines of the Tenet plan, the U.S. administration fully backed the Israeli side also in this round. After the Aqaba summit in early June, it seemed that Colin Powell attempted a hesitant denunciation of Israel continuing its liquidation operations just as the Palestinians were working to enforce a cease-fire. But he was soon brought into line. Following the Israel's killing of Abdullah Qawasmeh, head of military operations for Hamas in the Hebron region in June 22, we heard that "U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell was critical of the operation and said... that he 'was sorry for the killing of Abdullah Qawasmeh,' which he considers to have been unnecessary and 'a possible impediment to progress [for peace].' The Bush administration clarified to Israel last night that U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell had not condemned the IDF's killing Qawasmeh. U.S. ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer called the Prime Minister's Office and said that Powell had expressed sorrow over the fact that the situation in the Middle East leads to such measures being taken."³⁶

In the subsequent months of the Palestinian cease-fire, there were no more slips of tongue. The U.S. position was one of unequivocal support of Israel's liquidations policy, which the U.S. administration refers to as "Israel's right to defend itself". Even when it was clear that the cease fire was about to collapse, "the administration avoided asking Israel to restrain itself and rein in its forces following the Jerusalem attack, instead placing all the responsibility for the crisis on the Palestinian side. The Israel Defense Forces's operations in Nablus and Hebron in the West Bank [prior to the Jerusalem attack], in which Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants were killed, have been met with American understanding. The U.S. sees these operations as justified in order to stop 'ticking bombs'..."³⁷ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the U.S. was no more interested in actually implementing even the first phase of the road map than Israel was.

As anticipated by the "Israeli sources" above, Mahmoud Abbas' government collapsed following the failure of the cease-fire. He was replaced with Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala), who, just as his predecessor, wasn't given any chance to restore calm. "Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom... rejected Ahmed

Qureia's cease-fire offer, and labeled it a deceitful trick. An Israeli government source said... that Qureia's (Abu Ala) new government, which was sworn in earlier in the day, is 'a long tentacle of Arafat.' According to the source, Israel will not establish official ties with the Qureia government, before it proves in deeds its intention to fight terror and to dismantle the terror infrastructure."³⁸.

And in 2005.

If we examine the press of just the first week of Mahmoud Abbas second cadence as a prime minister, in January 2005, it is easy to notice that the road map pattern repeats itself almost verbatim. Abbas has been working on declaring a cease fire, and on the day of the elections, in January 9, Hamas announced that it is open to the idea of a cease fire³⁹. But already at the eve of the elections, in a meeting with Jimmy Carter, Sharon clarified that "there will be no progress until ... the terror organizations are eliminated".⁴⁰ Israeli official spokesmen in interviews to international media have repeated the message that Abbas must uproot the organizations, and not just reach a cease fire. In fact, the same demand was made explicitly in Sharon's speech in the Sharm-el-Sheikh summit: "We must all make a commitment not to agree for a temporary solution ... [but] to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, to disarm and subdue it once and for all."⁴¹

Already in his first week in power, security sources were "disappointed" with Abbas: " 'We became increasingly concerned by Abbas' apparent decision to use the same counter-terrorism measures he did last time (as PA prime minister), i.e., to persuade the terrorists and reach an agreement with them,' a senior source said".⁴² Amos Har'el, the security analyst of *Ha'aretz*, repeats almost the same text he produced a year before, based on briefings of security sources: "In recent weeks, Jerusalem fostered many expectations of Mahmoud Abbas. Officials were impressed by his explicit statements denouncing terror, the orderly transfer of power after Arafat's death, the former chairman's quiet funeral, and Abbas' sweeping election victory. But the window of opportunity has not opened up by more than a narrow crack. Assuming Abbas plans to achieve a cease-fire with the Palestinian opposition groups, he wants to do it in his own way and time - through persuasive talks and quiet agreements,

without aggressive steps. The trouble is that Israel does not have time to see if he succeeds".⁴³ During the week of the summit, these disappointment voices were suppressed. They will surface again when Israel would have had enough of this enforced cease fire.

The Palestinian organizations demanded that in return for their cease-fire, Israel too should take commitments such as stopping the targeted killings and house demolitions. But on the ground, " the IDF has renewed its incursions into Palestinian Authority territory, following a hiatus it had enforced in view of the elections in the territories. In operations to capture militants since the elections, two armed Hamas men were killed near Ramallah".⁴⁴ In Sharon's speech in the Sharm-el-Sheikh summit, it appeared that Israel was taking a commitment to also stop all its operations in the occupied territories. But the interpretation of this statement was clarified already at the day of the summit: Israel would continue only those operations targeted at "ticking bombs", or necessary to prevent terror attacks. "The Israel Defense Forces are continuing at this stage to operate according to instructions issued by Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon two weeks ago. At that time, Ya'alon gave orders to stop offensive actions in the Gaza Strip and to limit those in the West Bank to actions required by an urgent need to prevent planned terror attacks."⁴⁵ Thus, just as in the previous round, the Israeli army plans to continue to provoke the local cells of the Hamas, until the next terror attack would relieve it from this temporary enforced "restraint".

Nevertheless, just as in the days of the Aqaba summit, the majority of Israeli society is euphoric with expectations for change and calm. As always before, there is an absolute lack of collective memory. It is the media's responsibility to remind the readers of recent history, the background for the events, how it started and ended in the previous round of the road map. But the cooperative Israeli media does not do that. So when the next explosion comes, the Israelis will be convinced that again, they tried everything, but the Palestinians failed it.

¹ Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, Dec 7, 2004.

² Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, February 8, 2005.

³ Arnon Regular, Gideon Alon and Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, April 30, 2003

⁴ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, April 30, 2003

⁵ The two events were not related. A statement issued by the Al Qassam Brigades assumed responsibility for the Tel Aviv explosion saying it was

carried out in revenge for Israel's assassination of Ibrahim Almakadma, a senior member, in the Gaza Strip two months ago. (Roni Singer and Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, May 1).

⁶ Aluf Benn and Arnon Regular, *Ha'aretz*, May 1st, 2003.

⁷ The document was published in *Ha'aretz* May 1, 2003, titled 'Elements of a performance-based road map to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Draft December 2002'. All quotes are from there.

⁸ Aluf Ben, *Ha'aretz*, March 3, 2002. See chapter VII

⁹ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, April 30, 2004

¹⁰ 'Israel's road map reservations', *Ha'aretz*, May 27, 2003.

¹¹ *ibid* ['Israel's road map reservations', *Ha'aretz*, May 27, 2003.]

¹² Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, August 23, 2003.

¹³ Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, May 2, 2003

¹⁴ Arnon Regular, *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 2003.

¹⁵ Aluf Ben, *Ha'aretz* Hebrew edition, June 2, 2003). In the internet English version of *Ha'aretz*, Sharon's rejection of a cease fire was eliminated, and the headline announced only Sharon's willingness to evacuate outposts.

¹⁶ From the road map document as appeared in *Ha'aretz*, May 1, 2003

¹⁷ Gideon Alon, *Ha'aretz*, May 28, 2004.

¹⁸ Avraham Burg, *Yideot Aharonot*, June 5, 2003

¹⁹ Arnon Regular, *Ha'aretz*, June 3, 2003

²⁰ Arnon Regular, Aluf Benn and Nathan Guttman, *Ha'aretz*, June 26, 2003

²¹ Amos Harel and AP, *Ha'aretz*, June 26, 2003

²² *ibid* [Arnon Regular, Aluf Benn and Nathan Guttman, *Ha'aretz*, June 26, 2003]

²³ *ibid* [[Arnon Regular, Aluf Benn and Nathan Guttman, *Ha'aretz*, June 26, 2003]

²⁴ The text of the Palestinian cease fire declaration can be found in *Ha'aretz* June 30, 2003

²⁵ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, July 28, 2004

²⁶ Quoted above: Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, May 2, 2003

²⁷ Daniel Sobelman and Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, June 30, 2003

²⁸ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, August 15, 2003; Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, August 23, 2003

²⁹ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, August 15, 2003.

³⁰ Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, August 15, 2003. See also Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, August 21, 2003.

³¹ Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, August 15, 2003.

³² Suzanne Goldenberg, *The Guardian*, August 22, 2003. See also Ze'ev Schiff, *Ha'aretz*, August 26, 2003.

³³ E.g. Inigo Gilmore, *Telegraph.co.uk*, Aug 24, 2003.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/08/24/wmid24.xml>

³⁴ Ze'ev Schiff, *Ha'aretz*, August 26, 2003. See also, Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, August, 21, 2003.

³⁵ Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, August 22, 2003.

³⁶ Amos Harel and Daniel Sobelman, *Ha'aretz*, June 26, 2003

³⁷ Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz* August 24, 2003

³⁸ Arnon Regular, *Ha'aretz*, October 8, 2003

³⁹ Conal Urquhart, *The Observer*, January 9, 2005. According to this report, the Hamas' announcement "follows a major escalation in the Hamas campaign of firing missiles at Israeli targets in and around the Gaza Strip. According to the Israeli army, Palestinian militants have fired more than 100 mortars and rockets from Gaza in the last two weeks...The escalation can be seen as a bargaining ploy to demonstrate to Israel and the expected winner of today's election, Mahmoud Abbas, better know as Abu Mazen, the importance of a Hamas ceasefire."

⁴⁰ Roni Shaked, Itamar Eichner et al, *Yediot Aharonot*, January 7, 2005.

⁴¹ Sharon's speech, *Ha'aretz*, February 9, 2005.

⁴² Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz*, January 16, 2005

⁴³ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, January 14, 2005.

⁴⁴ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, January 14, 2005.

⁴⁵ Amos Har'el, *Ha'aretz*, February 9, 2005