

**The Myth of Camp David
Or
The Distortion of the Palestinian Narrative**

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Comments by

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The Myth of Camp David
Or
The Distortion of the Palestinian Narrative

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Introduction:

The Palestinian-Israeli-American marathon meetings of July 2000 provided the topic (“Camp David 2000: What Went Wrong? Lessons for the Future”) for a three-day conference at Tel Aviv University, organized jointly by Tel Aviv University and al-Quds University, and funded by the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation. All of the Camp David negotiators were invited to participate. Some excused themselves for not being able to participate, like the former US president Bill Clinton, who did send, however, a small written message to the conference; others had to apologize, like the Palestinian President Yasir Arafat, whose participation via video-conferencing (as suggested by the organizers) was rejected by both Israel and the United States. Nevertheless, many accepted the invitation, from the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and American negotiators Martin Indyk and Robert Malley to Palestinian negotiators Saeb Erekat, Hassan Asfour, and Mohammad Dahlan. In the end, though, there were very few Palestinian participants, among them only one Camp David veteran (Samih al-Abed). Most of the major players were probably busy negotiating the Intifada cease-fire, while others, notably Hassan Asfour, were simply refused passage at Israeli army checkpoints. Sari Nusseibeh, however, president of al-Quds University, could and did attend, and participated in the opening of the conference, side by side with Itamar Rabinovich, president of Tel Aviv University.

This international conference obviously reflects the ongoing intense academic and scholarly interest in the second Camp David Summit of July 2000, as does the astonishing amount of academic writing, already published or about to be published, on myriads of topics associated with it.

Until this very day, both Israelis and Palestinians have to live under the consequences of Camp David, from al-Aqsa Intifada to the re-occupation of all of the West Bank (and large parts of the Gaza Strip), the demise of the Oslo Process and the whole system

built on it. From the de-legitimization of the Palestinian leadership with the focus on President Yasir Arafat and putting him under siege, to the attempt and then the execution of a ‘white’ regime-change in Palestine by means of the creation of the office of Prime Minister and the nomination of Mahmud Abbas to this office. All these events are direct consequences of Camp David. My brief introduction shows that there are two major reasons, two lines of motivation, to deal with Camp David:

- An academic one: studying Camp David as a historian or as a political scientist, focusing on the central historical question of what actually happened in Camp David, or on questions emanating from Political Science like the lessons of Camp David, the interests of the parties in Camp David, or on much narrower issues dealing with methods of negotiation etc.
- A more narrowly political and strategic one: posing questions on the political and strategic results of Camp David, one that works on the hypothetical question of what would or could have happened if Camp David had ended differently, or the simple and yet so difficult question of whether the course of events after Camp David was open or predetermined.

My point has become clear I think. Camp David is an overdue topic for a conference not only in Tel Aviv, but obviously also in Birzeit, where the debate on this crucial summit should be re-opened sooner rather than later. In my paper today, however, I have a much more modest goal. First, I want to try and establish, based on a summary review of the literature (both primary and secondary materials), what actually happened at Camp David, with a clear focus on the Palestinian narrative. Then, I want to follow in some detail Bill Clinton’s and Ehud Barak’s spin on the events and results of Camp David right after the conference, resulting in the creation of the Myth of Camp David, and analyze its formidable consequences, some of which we all are suffering

from today. Last but not least, I want to look at the attempts to counter this story and myth, as undertaken above all by Palestinians, in the first place the Palestinian Authority (the Negotiation Department) and the negotiators in Camp David (first and foremost Akram Haniyeh), in addition to the few Americans' stands (Robert Malley with Hussein Agha and Deborah Sontag), who played a crucial role in this respect. The conclusion will be the main "strategic" part of my paper and present the basis for the discussion by posing one central question:

Was there a chance for the Palestinians, with or without the help of outsiders, to effectively counter the Myth of Camp David, perhaps even to prevent it from exerting such a formidable impact on political developments thereafter? In other words, in fact, I am trying here to provoke a discussion of the role of myth creation, and of the media in major international conflicts.

I. What happened in Camp David?

There are no official Camp David II documents. During the whole conference practically no papers were produced, and there is no written protocol. All the negotiations were done on the basis of positions conveyed orally, with no documentation or protocol of results or diverging positions. What we do have, however, as a source is a whole array of - sometimes more, sometimes less conflicting - personal accounts of most of the participants, both in written (books and articles) and oral (interviews and presentations during conferences) forms.¹ In addition to that, many articles and at least one book were written by political activists, journalists, researchers and academics on Camp David.

¹ I used mainly Malley/Agha 2001 and 2002, Deborah Sontag 2001, Akram Haniyeh 2000, Shlomo Ben Ami 2001 and 2002, Ehud Barak 2002 a and b, and the first book written on Camp David by Charles Enderlin 2002, see bibliography at the end of the paper.

So, the first problem is to try and find out what actually happened in Camp David, i.e. the classic task of the historian as defined by the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), namely “simply to show, what actually has happened”. The fact that three years have passed since Camp David and the availability of both source material and analyses published in the meantime has made this task much easier.

I.1. The Basic and Principled Palestinian Position in Camp David II

The Palestinian leadership, and Palestinian society at large, had a clear vision of the outcome of the Oslo Process, namely the end of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state in this very area from which the Israeli army had to withdraw and from where Israeli settlements had to be removed, with East-Jerusalem as its capital. This vision went back not to the beginning of the Oslo Process, but to the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in 1988, when the Palestinian National Council renounced its demand for the return of all of historical Palestine and agreed on a political solution based on peaceful coexistence with the State of Israel, as it had been created in 1948. The point of reference for this demand in the Oslo documents was UNSCR 242 with the principle it enshrined, namely land for peace, to be interpreted in the Palestinian case to land, on which a Palestinian state was to be established, in return for peace for both sides, Israel, which hoped to achieve security based on peace, and the future Palestinian State and its citizens.

For the Palestinian negotiators, therefore, the question was simply when the Israeli side would be ready to accept these demands which they considered to be based on international legitimacy. To put it differently, the Palestinians came to Camp David on the basis of the perception and assumption that their major compromise had been made in 1988 and in Oslo in 1993, when they recognized the existence of Israel, in the borders of June 1, 1967. Now, or so they

thought, it was the turn of the Israeli side to make the necessary compromises to reach an agreement on the final status issues, starting with the question of the borders, i.e. the borders of June 4, 1967 for the Palestinians, moving to the question of Jerusalem, i.e. East Jerusalem as the capital of the future State of Palestine, and ending with the question of the refugees, i.e. the recognition of the right of return as enshrined in UNR 194.²

I.2. Israeli Positions in Camp David and Palestinian Reactions

The Israeli position could not have differed more from these expectations. It seems that the Palestinians were aware of this; Yasir Arafat was trying by every means to postpone the summit as proposed by Ehud Barak, at least until August, in order to allow for more preparatory rounds of negotiation.³ Ehud Barak, however, needed this summit in order to save his political career, or so he thought. According to his reading of the situation, there was a distinct possibility to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians acceptable to Israel if only it could be imposed on the Palestinians. In Barak's calculation, Arafat simply had to be cornered and driven to the point where he would sign the treaty as proposed to him.⁴

What were Barak's proposals? I want to focus here on the major and decisive proposals, the envisaged borderline between Israel and the future Palestinian state, Jerusalem and the refugees question.

² Summary of Palestinian Positions, available at www.nad-plo.org/permanent/sumpalpo/htm., accessed on July 31, 2003. As background reading see Yezid Sayigh 1997: *Armed Struggle and the Search for State. The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, and Helga Baumgarten 1991: *Palaestina. Befreiung in den Staat*. Frankfurt a.M.: edition suhrkamp.

³ Hanieh 2000, Malley 2001, Kimmerling 2003, Enderlin 2002 and others.

⁴ Malley 2001, Hanieh 2000, very aggressively also Avnery 2001 and Tanya Reinhardt 2001a and 2001b.

1. Borders and Security

Based on the available Israeli, American and Palestinian sources, Barak and his whole delegation adamantly refused the return to the June 4, 1967 borders, as envisioned in UNSCR 242. Instead, Barak proposed at the start of the negotiations to annex part of the West Bank (starting point was approximately 14 %) in order to have about 80% of all settlers within the borders of an enlarged Israel. At the same time, he was not ready to consider any exchange of territory for the land he wanted to annex. For this, Barak received full American backing. In addition to this, Israel demanded from the Palestinians part of the border with Jordan, i.e. part of the Jordan Valley, handed over for a longer period. Taken together, these demands amounted to an annexation of 24 % or more of the West Bank.⁵

The next move by Barak entailed a second Israeli offer, transmitted to the Palestinians via Clinton, which became the standard mechanism in Camp David throughout the summit: annexation of only 10,1% of the West Bank plus Israeli demands on the border with Jordan.⁶

After a brief retreat by the Israelis on July 18, which led them back to demand once again an annexation of at least 12 % of the West Bank, Barak, at the start of the second week, began to move away from these demands which clearly crossed all Palestinian red lines. Now the talks focused on 9 % annexation with 1% exchange of territory given to the Palestinians in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip.⁷

This was as far as Barak moved at any given moment in Camp David: 91% of the West Bank given to the Palestinians, who would receive the amount of 1% of West Bank land in the Gaza area and thus gain an enlarged Gaza Strip, plus the demands in the Jordan

⁵ Enderlin 2002:204, July 15, Israeli map

⁶ Enderlin 2002:214, July 16

⁷ Enderlin 2002, also other references quoted in footnote 1.

Valley, where, at one point, Israel showed readiness to accept an international force instead of an Israeli military presence.

In addition to this, we have to consider the various Israeli demands in the context of preserving their security, i.e. three early warning stations in the West Bank to be manned by Israeli soldiers, Israeli control over Palestinian air space, Palestinian agreement to Israeli army deployment in the West Bank in case of an emergency (without this emergency being clearly defined), Israeli presence at Palestinian border crossings in order to verify Palestinian demilitarization and special security arrangements along the border with Jordan including Israeli de facto annexation of 10 % of the land along this border. This would have left the Palestinians, at the time of the best Israeli offer, with no more than 82% of the West Bank as the basis for their state.

2. Jerusalem

There is agreement among most sources that Jerusalem was the major subject of discussion during the Camp David Summit.⁸

The Palestinian position was clear from the start: East Jerusalem had been occupied in 1967 and Israel was obliged, based on UNSCR 242, to withdraw from there. Palestinians were ready to make far-reaching concessions based on this principled starting point in terms of accepting Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish quarter and over the Wailing Wall, the Kotel, as well as acceptance of Israeli sovereignty over most of the newly created Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem after 1967, with the exception of Jabal Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud.⁹

⁸ For example Moshe Amirav, Haaretz 9.12.2002, p.4: "The Camp David summit became a 'Jerusalem summit', perhaps even a 'Temple Mount summit'." See also Ben Ami 2001 and 2002, Enderlin 2002, Hanieh 2000 etc.

⁹ Explicitly in Amirav 2002 *ibid.*, Enderlin 2002, Hanieh 2000, Ben Ami 2001, Malley/Agha 2001.

The Israeli delegation again adamantly opposed this Palestinian starting position. For them, Jerusalem was the united capital of the State of Israel, and there was no readiness to relinquish sovereignty over it, except for tiny portions, i.e. at most the outlying suburbs of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, there was some movement from this original Israeli position as formulated by Barak. Shlomo Ben Ami presented the most far-reaching Israeli offer on July 24 in the last meeting with the Palestinians, presided over by Bill Clinton.¹⁰

The exterior suburbs, like Beit Hanina for example, would fall under Palestinian sovereignty; in the interior circle, one or at the most two quarters would come under Palestinian sovereignty and the rest would receive only limited sovereignty. For the Old City, a special regime was proposed for the Muslim, Christian and Armenian quarters, together with joint security in the Old City. A previous offer, put on the table by Barak, that the Muslim and Christian quarters would fall under Palestinian sovereignty and the Armenian and the Jewish quarters under Israeli sovereignty, was subsequently withdrawn, even upon intervention by Clinton, who wanted to put it back on the table. There was to be a seat for the Palestinian government under Palestinian sovereignty inside the Old City.

Al-Haram ash-Sharif was to be put under Palestinian custodianship with the presence of Palestinian security, but under Israeli residual sovereignty, in addition to the granting Israel a place in al-Haram terrace where Jews could pray.¹¹

The Palestinian counter-offer, as presented by Saeb Erekat, ceded the Jewish quarter as well as the Wailing Wall, the Kotel, to Israeli

¹⁰ Enderlin 2002, see Ben Ami himself 2001, see Amirav in Haaretz 9.12.2002, p.4. Also forthcoming book by Menahem Klein 2003, as well as Klein 2003 in Haaretz.

¹¹ Details on this in Amirav 2002.

sovereignty. In addition, the Palestinians were ready to concede Israeli sovereignty over the new settlements in East Jerusalem in exchange for land elsewhere.¹²

3. Refugees

On the refugees issue, almost nothing was achieved and no far-reaching concessions by either side were reported, other than the positions already held before the summit.

Israel adamantly opposed to accepting any responsibility for the ‘birth of the Palestinian refugees problem’, to quote the title of Benny Morris’ groundbreaking study of 1987, and was not ready to accept the right of return as enshrined in UNR 194. Barak was adamant on this issue.

The Palestinians, however, insisted on an Israeli declaration assuming responsibility for causing this problem. In addition, they demanded Israel’s acceptance, in principle, of the right of return. In terms of a practical implementation of the right of return, there was a high degree of flexibility on the part of the Palestinians.

Israel, as formulated at one point by Elyakim Rubinstein, declared itself ready to accept a limited number of refugees into Israel, spread over a period of many years.¹³ Palestinians were ready to move in this respect.¹⁴ At least informally, Mohammad Rashid mentioned to Gilad Sher that Palestinians needed a quick solution for the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon by way of compensation and resettlement in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which would be evacuated by Israel. Arafat assured, in addition to that, that no demographic problem would be resulting for Israel from its flexibility in this point, i.e. there would not be huge numbers of

¹² Enderlin 2002, Malley/Agha 2000.

¹³ Malley/Agha 2000, Ben Ami 2001, Enderlin 2002.

¹⁴ Enderlin 2002.

Palestinians returning to Israel. This reassurance was repeated by Arafat in an op-ed in the New York Times in 2002.¹⁵

I.3. Summary of Camp David Negotiations

A short summary seems in place here. Israel under the leadership of Ehud Barak had the following to offer for the Palestinians:

1- **Concerning borders:** 81% of the West Bank plus the whole of the Gaza Strip, to be enlarged by land exchanged for 1% of West Bank territory.

To put it differently, Israel insisted on the annexation of 9% of the West Bank, in addition to a de facto annexation of another 10% of land in the Jordan Valley. It was prepared to exchange 1 % of West Bank land for an equivalent area adjacent to the Gaza Strip, to be added to it.

2- **Concerning Jerusalem:** Palestinian sovereignty over the exterior Palestinian suburbs (like Beit Hanina) and over one or two of the Palestinian quarters in the so-called inner circle (like Wadi Joz or Sheikh Jarrah, for example), as well as a seat for the Palestinian government in the Old City. The Muslim, Christian and Armenian Quarters were to be put under a special regime. Palestinians were to be given custodianship over al Haram ash-Sharif, which would, however, remain under Israeli “residual” sovereignty. Palestinians were asked to give space to Jews for prayer in the al-Haram ash-Sharif area. Jerusalem as a whole was to remain under Israeli sovereignty.

To put it differently, while conceding sovereignty over some Palestinian quarters in East Jerusalem, as well as a seat for the Palestinian government, Israel insisted on

¹⁵ Malley/Agha 2002, Camp David and After: An Exchange (2. A Reply to Ehud Barak), p.2. www.nybooks.com/articles/15502, accessed on August 1, 2003.

keeping sovereignty over Jerusalem as a whole including al-Haram ash-Sharif. In a clear change of the accepted status quo, Israel demanded space for Jews to pray inside al-Haram area.

- 3- **Concerning Refugees:** There was nothing one could call an offer made by the Israeli side, except for the possibility to have a limited number of refugees over a designated period of time allowed into Israel.

Palestinians in turn, insisted on the following positions:

- 1- **Concerning borders:** recognition of the June 4, 1967 borders as the starting point for negotiations. Readiness for territorial exchange on a 1:1 basis for land Israel wanted to annex in order to keep as many settlers as possible in place. Readiness to accept some Israeli settlement blocs, however, only in the actual space they occupy, i.e. without the surrounding Palestinian communities.
- 2- **Concerning Jerusalem:** full Palestinian sovereignty over East-Jerusalem, ceding, however, to Israel the Jewish Quarter and the Wailing Wall. There was readiness to exchange the Israeli settlements built after 1967 in East Jerusalem for land to be given to the new Palestinian State elsewhere. There was no readiness to discuss giving up sovereignty over al-Haram or allowing Jews to pray there, i.e. changing the status quo in this area.
- 3- **Concerning Refugees:** Israeli recognition of its responsibility for the problem, and recognition of the right of return according to UNR 194, coupled with readiness for a pragmatic solution of the application of this right, with a focus on solving the problem of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Pragmatic for the Palestinians meant not to cause demographic problems for the State of Israel.

A sober assessment of the summit would conclude that the

problems were extremely difficult given the demands of both sides. However, there was a readiness on both sides to move. The main achievement of Camp David was therefore without doubt that both sides had started to talk about what had been considered taboos until then, for both Palestinians and Israelis.

This was precisely the assessment of Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, who participated in the last round of talks held in Camp David on July 24 between a Palestinian and an Israeli representative and presided over by Bill Clinton:

“I propose the publication of a trilateral communiqué which recognizes and stresses the progress made in Camp David, underlining that many taboos were broken, but that certain problems need further negotiations, that the two parties have decided to continue their negotiations under the supervision of the United States in order to apply UNSC resolutions 242 and 338 and to reach an agreement in form of a treaty before September 13, 2000”.¹⁶

In his final address to the two delegations, Clinton very much followed this assessment when saying: “... I realize that a lot of progress has been made, that the two sides have advanced. I should like that both sides continue their negotiations in order to achieve a treaty in the middle of September”.¹⁷

While it was certainly bad enough for all participants in Camp David that no final agreement had been reached, there still was enough to build on in the future. The immediate developments after the summit, however, made any further positive developments quite unlikely, and only at the end of December, just before the end of his presidency, Bill Clinton did present his new ideas, which provided the basis for the following negotiations in Taba.

¹⁶ Enderlin 2002:256, translated from French.

¹⁷ *ibid.* 258, translated from French.

II. The creation of the Myth of Camp David

II.1. Clinton and Barak started the spin right after Camp David

It was agreed by all parties in Camp David that Bill Clinton would read the concluding communiqué about the summit conference to the press. It had also been agreed, before the summit even started, that there would be no finger-pointing and no blame put on any party if an agreement was not reached.¹⁸

However, things took a different turn immediately after the summit. In his press conference right at the end of Camp David, after having read the concluding communiqué agreed upon by the parties, Bill Clinton put the blame for the failure of the summit squarely on the Palestinians by accusing them of not having made any concessions while Barak had risked his whole political career when he went as far as accepting the division of Jerusalem.

“Prime Minister Barak has taken some very bold decisions, but we were in the end unable to bridge the gaps. ... We made progress on all of the core issues. We made really significant progress on many of them. The Palestinian teams worked hard on a lot of these areas. But I think it is fair to say that at this moment in time, maybe because

¹⁸ See Hanieh 2000, Enderlin 2002, Malley/Agha 2001.

Source for Clinton’s promise, that no one would be blamed after a failure, no finger-pointing:

Malley/Agha, New York Review of Books article, here quoted from JPS121 (autumn 2001), p.67: “A third Palestinian request - volunteered by Clinton, rather than being demanded by Arafat - was that the U.S. remain neutral in the event the summit failed and not blame the Palestinians”. On page 68, JPS 121: “Clinton assured Arafat on the eve of the summit that he would not be blamed if the summit did not succeed. ‘There will be’, he pledged, ‘no finger-pointing’.” Malley/Agha, JPS 121, p.70. According to Baruch Kimmerling, based on Ran Edelist’s book on Barak, the same thing was agreed with the Israelis. Haaretz, April 4, 2003 www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArtEn.jhtml?itemNo=28045.

*they had been preparing for it longer, maybe because they had thought through it more, that Prime Minister Barak moved forward more from his initial position than Chairman Arafat, on - particularly surrounding the questions of Jerusalem ... My remarks should stand for themselves ... not so much as a criticism of Chairman Arafat ... but in praise of Barak. He came there knowing that he was going to have to take bold steps, and he did it. And I think you should look at it more as positive toward him than as a condemnation of the Palestinian side”.*¹⁹

Ehud Barak also addressed the international press right after the summit, almost simultaneously with the press conference of Clinton, and continued the blame game.²⁰

On July 25, the following Key Points were put on the website of the Israeli Foreign Ministry under the heading ‘Peace Process’:

“Israel came to Camp David ... in order to bring about an end to the conflict and to secure peace for future generations. To reach such an agreement, Israel is prepared to make painful compromises... The positions presented by Israel ...were well received and were accorded legitimacy by the US hosts. President Clinton ... praised the flexibility shown by Prime Minister Barak ... The Palestinian leadership showed that it had not internalized the need to demonstrate flexibility and compromise... In particular, the positions presented by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat with regard to Jerusalem prevented the achievement of an agreement ...Some Palestinian circles have intimated and even declared that they intend to resort to violence

¹⁹ Journal of Palestine Studies (JPS) 117, 2000:156-157.

²⁰ See quotes in Enderlin 2002:263, full speech on www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0hnn0, accessed on August 10, 2003, see also JPS 117, autumn 2000, p.153-154.

*should the Camp David summit fail.... Israel will do everything ... to maintain calm and prevent violence”.*²¹

Upon his return to Jerusalem on July 26, Barak made an official statement on the summit:

*“Fifteen days ago, I set out from Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish people, on a mission of peace in Camp David. ...Today I return from Camp David, and can look into the millions of eyes and say with regret: We have not yet succeeded. We did not succeed because we did not find a partner prepared to make decisions on all issues.... Our Palestinian neighbors have not yet internalized the fact that in order to achieve peace, each side has to give up some of their dreams; to give, not only to demand... We did everything we could. We turned every stone, we exhausted every possibility to bring an end to the conflict and a secure future for Israel. And we continue to hope... To our neighbors, the Palestinians, I say today: We do not seek conflict. But if any of you should dare to put us to the test, we will stand together, strong and determined, convinced in the justness of our cause in the face of any challenge, and we shall triumph”.*²²

It is interesting to note, that in this particular statement Barak chose to address in particular “my brothers, the pioneering settlers in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza... my heart is with you in your pain”. “Also, it should be noted that he made a particular gesture in deciding to end his declaration with a prayer: “The Lord shall give strength to His people, the Lord shall bless his people with peace”.²³ Two days later, on July 27, Clinton gave an interview to the first

²¹ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0hnm0, accessed on August 10, 2003.

²² (www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0hnu0 accessed on August 10, 2003.

²³ *ibid.*

Israeli TV channel²⁴, qualified by most as “a declaration of friendship to Israel and a condemnation of Arafat”.²⁵

He proposed to improve the US-Israeli strategic relationship with increased military and economic aid to Israel, as well as to re-examine the question of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. At the same time, he warned Arafat and the Palestinians not to declare a Palestinian state in September for in this case the US had to re-evaluate its relationship with the Palestinians.²⁶

Already in the first three days after the end of Camp David, the spin was working, and a first version of the myth of Camp David was beginning to become recognizable and to crystallize. During the Camp David Summit, we were made to believe, Barak and Israel moved, proving they were ready for peace with the slogan, which thereafter would be repeated thousands of times by Barak: “We turned every stone, we exhausted every possibility to bring an end to the conflict ..”. Arafat and the Palestinians, however, did not move enough. They were somehow not ready for peace. Put on a next level of argument, Barak already stated on July 26: “We did not find a partner”. On top of it all, Palestinians are now even thinking of unilateral acts, like declaring an independent Palestinian state on September 13. They received a clear warning not to do this, for otherwise the United States would have to reassess its relationship with the Palestinians. On the other hand, Israel under its Prime Minister Ehud Barak, was promised a reward in the form of upgraded strategic relations with the United States, and a possible move of the American embassy to Jerusalem: a clear reference here to the readiness of Barak for compromises in the question of Jerusalem.

²⁴ JPS 117, 2000:158-161

²⁵ Enderlin 2002:266.

²⁶ JPS 117, 2000:159.

Also, one day earlier, on July 25, a first hint was made to possible Palestinian preparations to “resort to violence”, i.e. a first connection between the failure of Camp David and a Palestinian preparation for violence. At this point in time, the Israeli warning is rather couched in general terms focusing on Israel’s intension to prevent violence.

On the Palestinian side, however, we find only one brief statement by Arafat, on his way back from the United States to Gaza, after his meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on July 26: “The Americans have told us they were ready to continue negotiations with us. We have decided in Sharm el-Sheikh to continue negotiations until September 13, the day of independence for our state with Jerusalem as its capital, if they like it or not. And who does not like it might just as well drink the waters of the Dead Sea”.²⁷ Nothing else, no reference to what happened in Camp David, no taking up of the gauntlet thrown by the US, and even more so by Israel under Barak.

Arafat’s response to Camp David was rather to visit each and every foreign political leader, starting in the Arab World and continuing with Europe and Asia to explain the Palestinian position in direct talks, without using the international press, i.e. personal and to a certain degree secret diplomacy instead of a fight for world public opinion, making use of the very same media his counterparts in Camp David had introduced into the conflict.²⁸

However, on this level, too, Barak had been faster and obviously also more effective, as one can judge from the reception Arafat received on July 29 in Paris when meeting French President Jacques Chirac in the Elysee Palace. While the Palestinians took pains to explain their position and the tremendous compromises

²⁷ Quoted from Enderlin 2002:265, translated from French.

²⁸ Palestine Report, 16.8.2000.

they had been and were ready to make, Chirac's answer was unequivocal: "... the American Administration as well as public opinion inside the United States and in Europe got the feeling, that Barak took steps ahead while you (the Palestinians) did not move from your positions".²⁹

The Palestinian response to the spin and the myth-creation will be analyzed later on. Here, I want to follow up the spin as it developed and the further stages in the production of the Camp David's Myth.

On August 30, Barak repeated his criticism of Arafat: "We have yet to hear anything that would indicate openness or flexibility by P.A. Chairman Yasser Arafat".³⁰

After the start of the Intifada in fall 2000, Israeli efforts focused above all on taking up a point already made previously, i.e. the connection between the Palestinian failure to achieve anything at the negotiating table and its alleged resolve to resort to violence. The official Israeli propaganda machine, also followed soon by the Israeli press, which became more and more garnered to it, blamed first and foremost Palestinian president Yasir Arafat for this alleged planning for violence, which, they claimed, had started right after Camp David.

Already on October 2, 2000, a Cabinet Communiqué announced that it "holds the PA responsible for the escalation of violence and the riots". Moreover, it concludes with a very critical note, a rather indirect warning: "Those who believe that violence is an effective tool in the negotiations are mistaken. Violence cannot replace those difficult decisions without which there will be no agreement".³¹

²⁹ Enderlin 2002:271, see also chronology in JPS 117, 2000:174-178, compiled on basis of wide press coverage.

³⁰ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0hso0 accessed on August 10, 2003.

³¹ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i050 accessed on August 10, 2003.

An article by Ronni Shaked in Yediot Ahronot, placed on the official government website on October 3, presents an analysis of the Tanzim, “Fatah’s Fighters on the Ground” and includes this decisive piece of information and interpretation. On the one hand, he maintains that the Tanzim stands under the orders of its commanders, not under the orders of Arafat. At the same time, however, he continues: “Arafat maintains ongoing links with the Tanzim’s commanders, finances the organization and uses its members as a militia in confrontations with Israel, including armed confrontations. This is why Arafat, to Israel’s disdain, does not disarm the Tanzim”.³²

In a communication to Secretary of State Albright, Barak gives a clear warning to the Palestinian Authority and to Arafat: “... a cessation of violence is a precondition to further negotiations and that P.A. Chairman Arafat must choose between proceeding towards an agreement or sliding into a confrontation for which he will bear responsibility for the consequences”. In addition, another slogan was introduced into the debate for the first time: “There can be no reward for violence”.³³ Again, the relation to Camp David is clear though indirect and implicit: If the P.A. has not succeeded in Camp David at the negotiating table, it should not harbor the illusion of achieving any gains by violence, as Israel will never “reward” violence.

Another article, also on the Tanzim, is placed on Israel’s official website on October 6, written by David Schenker from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He argues along the same lines as Ronni Shaked, but with a slightly different interpretation. He starts out for example and puts in unequivocal terms the relationship between Arafat and the Tanzim, which Shaked had presented very carefully in all its complexity: “Tanzim... is the armed wing of Fatah, the largest faction of the

³² www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i0p0, accessed on August 10, 2003

³³ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i0j0, accessed August 10, 2003

PLO, and the one that PA Ra'is Yasir Arafat himself leads... Annual funding for the Tanzim ...stands at \$2.4 million, and is widely believed to come directly from Arafat". While the article goes into some of the complexities of the relationship, the conclusion is again crystal clear: "... Israeli Deputy Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon said, "The moment he (Arafat) orders the Tanzim to stop the riots, they will do just that.""³⁴

The build-up of the argumentation is quite obvious by now. Arafat failed at Camp David, now he is resorting to violence to achieve on the street and with the militias, above all the Tanzim, what he had not been able to achieve on the negotiating table. The culmination in this argument can be found in an Israeli statement criticizing the decision of the UN Security Council of October 7, 2000, which had condemned Israel for "the excessive use of force against Palestinians, resulting in injury and loss of human life".³⁵ "Israel ... utterly rejects the attempt to place responsibility on Israel for the violent riots..."³⁶

Then, the Camp David Myth comes into play: "The government of Israel is acting tirelessly to advance the peace process, while remaining prepared to make painful concessions". (part one: Israel the peace-loving partner, ready for compromises).

"The recent violence is the result of the duplicity and procrastination which the Palestinian leadership, headed by Chairman Arafat, has displayed in the peace process since the Camp David Summit. ... Peace is the courage to make compromises ..."

The attempt to place the blame for the outbreak of the riots on

³⁴ www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2000/284.htm, accessed via link from www.mfa.gov.il on August 10, 2003.

³⁵ UNSCR1322, quoted from JPS118, winter 2001, p.157.

³⁶ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i1a0, accessed August 10, 20003, also for the following.

alleged Israeli provocation is a cynical attempt by the Palestinians to deny their direct responsibility for the current violence”. (part two: Arafat plays a dirty game, is not ready to make compromises and bears responsibility for the violence). The statement concludes in blaming the Security Council, “which rewards violence and undermines the basis of the peace process”.

A decisive turn is taken on October 12, the day two Israeli soldiers were killed by a mob in Ramallah, with Barak subsequently ordering the Israeli army to attack PA targets in Ramallah and Gaza. For the first time, we are confronted here with a contradiction characterizing Israel’s policy throughout the Intifada. On the one hand, the PA and Arafat are blamed for “a loss of control”; on the other hand, instead of having Israel then strengthening the PA in order for it to be able to regain control, the exact opposite was being done, i.e. the PA and its institutions are attacked and the Palestinian infrastructure, above all in its security aspect, was being destroyed.³⁷ The very first hint to the possibility that Israel wanted to interfere and work for a change in the Palestinian leadership can be found on October 15, in a statement by Barak on the upcoming Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, when he summarized the positions of Camp David and accused Arafat of not being able to make the necessary compromises, ‘necessary’ meaning necessary from the perspective of Israel’s “vital interests”.

“In the end, we will make peace with the Palestinians, but the current Palestinian leadership is now showing that it is finding it very difficult to make the decisions related to an agreement”. The statement then goes on:

“...Barak noted that the State of Israel’s diplomatic activity in the last 15 months has ... exposed Arafat’s unacceptable positions - which demand, in effect, a return to the 4 June 1967 lines with an exchange of

³⁷ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i1y0, accessed August 10, 2003.

territories, full control of eastern Jerusalem while providing for Israeli access to the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall, and making no concessions on the right of return - that no Israeli can accept”.

The story takes on new dimensions and presents a new element to the myth, the Myth of Camp David and the myth concerning alleged Palestinian violence in the Intifada, when the Israeli foreign ministry on October 21 rejects the resolution passed by the UN General Assembly’s Emergency Session of October 20:

1- *“ This decision ignores the fact that the PA planned and initiated these acts ... The Palestinians, including the police and Tanzim organization working directly with the PA, are using live ammunition on all fronts against Israeli citizens”.*

In a second step, the communiqué relates this alleged pre-planned violence to the Camp David Summit and the attitudes taken by Israel - in favor of peace - and the PA -unwilling for peace.

2- *“... The Israeli government’s willingness, as displayed during the Camp David summit, to take dramatic and painful decisions in order to advance the peace process, as opposed to the unwillingness of Arafat and the Palestinian leadership to make the necessary decisions”.*³⁸

Then, we encounter for the first time a new element in the myth concerning the Intifada, which surpasses everything presented so far: Palestinians are in fact accused of sending their women and children into the battle: “...They send women and children to confront Israelis”.³⁹

³⁸ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i320, accessed on August 10, 2003.

³⁹ *ibid.*

This issue was taken up in a virtual media blitz and achieved tremendous success worldwide, exemplified by Swedish Queen Sylvia's naïve belief in it.

I want to mention and quote here only one additional article, written by Gerald M. Steinberg, Director of the Program on Conflict Resolution and Negotiation at Bar Ilan University, published on October 25 and put on the official Israeli government website under the title, "Palestinian Child Sacrifice". The picture presented there is chilling on the one hand, and unbelievable on the other for its cynicism, especially confronted with reports from the ground, as for example given by Amira Hass or Gideon Levy on the pages of Haaretz.

I want to quote the first passage of the article which all those who access the website probably focus on:

"According to the Palestinians, over 40 children have been killed in the waves of violence and confrontations. They have been killed in the front lines, providing cover for the armed Palestinian militias with machine guns and other weapons seeking to overwhelm isolated Israeli guard posts. The outnumbered Israeli soldiers, defending the civilians behind these outposts, cannot see the children through the small slits and openings (as was clearly the case at the Netzarim crossing in Gaza). The tragic images of these young victims provide first-rate propaganda to use against Israel".

At the end of the article, Steinberg delivers the unavoidable diatribe against Arafat while trying to put it on a new level of attack:

"When Yassir Arafat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, it was not for sending children to be sacrificed as part of a wider war of terrorism and brutality against Israel. By revoking his award, the Norwegian prize committee would reverse some of the damage it caused in the first place".

Here, Arafat for the first time since the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 was once again called a terrorist, who does not respect “basic human morality”.⁴⁰

A first full presentation of the Myth of Camp David in its basic aspects can be found in a statement made on October 22, 2000, by the Foreign Ministry Spokesman as a reaction to the Arab Summit and its decisions taken in Cairo:

*“At Camp David, Israel made courageous and far-reaching proposals in order to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians and an historic reconciliation with the Arab world. Regrettably, Arafat and the Palestinians did not respond in any way to these proposals. Their response was to launch the region into a whirlpool of violence and bloodshed”.*⁴¹

A first and rather sober balance sheet is presented by Shai Feldman, the head of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University.⁴²

On the one hand, the basic outlines of the Myth of Camp David, as it had been developed until then, are repeated as a matter of fact: According to his assessment, there would have been no additional Palestinian violence after Sharon’s provocative entry into al-Haram, had it not been approved by Arafat.

“The Palestinian leader encouraged the continuation of the violence because he recognized that the clashes provided him with a golden opportunity to extricate himself from the difficult position he found himself confronted with in the immediate aftermath of the Camp David-II summit. At the summit, Prime Minister Barak

⁴⁰ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i440, accessed on August 10, 2003

⁴¹ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i3g0, accessed on August 10, 2003

⁴² www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0igi0, accessed on August 10, 2003

put forward the most conciliatory position ever presented to the Palestinians by an Israeli leader. The proposal manifested Barak's willingness to break long-standing taboos - primarily, the willingness to re-divide Jerusalem and to accept a limited return of Palestinian refugees to Israel proper. In order to do this, Barak sacrificed the coalition upon which his government rested”.

(This has to be corrected factually, as it is wrong about the return of refugees and because Barak's coalition was finished already before he went to Camp David!).

Interestingly enough, Feldman does concede that “Arafat was also willing to make considerable concessions in the framework of a ‘permanent status’ agreement, including acceptance that large settlement blocks would remain under permanent Israeli sovereignty...” He then goes on to say that:

“in the immediate aftermath of the... summit, President Clinton... praised Barak profusely for the courage he demonstrated at the summit. Similarly, European leaders complimented Israel's prime minister for his flexibility. By inference... Arafat was portrayed as responsible for the failure to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian ‘permanent status’ agreement”.

After having assessed the overall negative impact of Camp David and its interpretations in international and regional politics had on the Palestinians and on Arafat, he provides a first assessment of Palestinian gains through the Intifada and its media impact:

“ ... The images in the international media of rock-throwing Palestinian youngsters confronted by armed Israeli military ... allowed a transformation of the Palestinian image from being seen as an obstacle to peace to that of a victim of Israel's strength. Now, instead of defending his behavior at Camp David, Arafat could launch a diplomatic offensive, sending out Palestinian youth to battle the Israeli military at points of friction

in order to create the television images he desired, portraying the Palestinians as the victims of Israeli occupation and violence”.

It should be noted that the newly created myth of the Palestinian child sacrifice (only a few days earlier) is immediately taken up and considerably re-enforced by this sober-sounding assessment of recent events.

Feldman continues:

“Once the initial gain has been made - with Arafat successfully escaping the vector of forces against him in the aftermath of the Camp David-II summit - two additional objectives were pursued: First, to improve the Palestinians’ relative position in any further negotiations by further damaging Israel’s image in the international community; And second, to attempt to bring about the ‘internationalization of the conflict’”.

Most illuminating, however, is the balance sheet of gains and losses Feldman draws at the end of his article, which represents a textbook case for all those wanting to engage in official media campaigns. He first summarizes the gains he thinks the Palestinians have made so far, i.e. until November 2000, the second month of the Intifada:

- “The damage inflicted upon Israel’s image abroad” (having succeeded in persuading Europe and the US “that the Palestinians were waging a justified effort to end Israeli occupation while Israel was using excessive force”).
- International organizations adopted “resolutions condemning Israel”, combined with the fact that the Clinton Administration did not veto UNSCR 1322 condemning Israel.
- Achievement of internal Palestinian unity with the creation of the “Supreme Coordination Committee of the Islamic and National Forces”.

- “Winning all-Arab support”, with a direct impact on Israel, when “Morocco, Tunisia and Oman decided to close their representative offices in Israel and to ask the Israeli representatives in their countries to leave”.
- “The damage they have caused to the Israeli economy”, in particular, tourism, construction and agriculture sectors.

However, the decisive result of Feldman’s article is the final balance sheet he draws and the conclusion he reaches: “The gains made by the Palestinians are more limited than what initially appears to be the case and ... most of these gains are short lived and will likely dissipate with time”.

Here, I want to mention only those aspects related to my topic here, i.e. Camp David and its consequences.

- *“Despite the sympathetic resolutions adopted by the UN and other organizations, Arafat’s efforts to ‘internationalize the conflict’ have so far failed. The resolutions adopted ... did not include meaningful operational steps”*. Neither the international community was ready to send an international force into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, nor there was any sign that it wanted to impose a solution to the conflict.
- *“...The most important dimension of Israel’s external relations - its close ties with the U.S.A. - have remained largely undamaged. In contrast, the Clinton administration was frustrated by Palestinian behavior ... In congress, support for Israel remained strong ... (and) the American press provided much more balanced commentary than its European counterparts”*.

The conclusion is sobering for the Palestinians and obviously comes as a relief for Israel in this initial stage of the Intifada:

“With U.S.-Israel ties unaffected, the Palestinians failed to change the overall configuration of forces that were critical of Arafat’s stance in the aftermath of the Camp David-II summit ...the regional and international environment of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute remained unchanged”.

To summarize, Feldman makes use of the Camp David myth in his analysis, which is submitted as an objective academic analysis, adding to it the newly created myth of Palestinian “child sacrifices”.

After Clinton’s presentation of his parameters on 23 December, 2000, Barak had his media advisor clarify the following points:

- 1- “The state of Israel gave a positive answer in principle to President Clinton that is conditioned on a positive answer by the other side”.
- 2- “If the Palestinians accept ...it will then be possible to continue the process while adhering to our principle of
 - No right of return to Israel....
 - Not to sign any document that transfers sovereignty over the Temple Mount to the Palestinians”.

At the same time, a warning is attached: A Palestinian rebuttal of Clinton’s ideas would lead to “increased violence”. “In such a situation, Israel will take a time-out and prepare for a unilateral separation ...”⁴³

The story continues with an additional element to the Myth of Camp David. Barak himself in a telephone conversation with the US President Clinton, shortly before the end of Clinton’s term in office, on January 1, 2001, ties Arafat directly to terror. For the first time, he goes beyond the previous accusation against Arafat

⁴³ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0ivh0, accessed August 10, 2003.

in the sense that Arafat encourages violence, but rather accuses him directly of encouraging terrorism:

“... He has deep doubts about the seriousness of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat’s intention to reach an agreement...”, adding that “Barak believes that Chairman Arafat intends to work for the internationalization of the conflict ...by continuing to encourage terrorism”.⁴⁴

Here, the stage is set for the final picture Clinton gives of Arafat and hands on to his successor, George W. Bush, a fatal development for the Palestinians, but above all for Arafat, as was proven only little more than one year later in Bush’s June address on the Palestinian question.⁴⁵ At the start of the Taba negotiations, January 21 until January 27, Barak made his positions once again abundantly clear:

- No right of return for the Palestinian refugees.
- No relinquishing of sovereignty over the Temple Mount.
- Annexation of sufficient land from the West Bank so that “80% of the Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza will be in settlement blocs under Israeli sovereignty”.⁴⁶

When the Taba negotiations were suspended in the context of the Israeli elections, which Barak lost in a landslide to Ariel Sharon, all of the previous ideas that had been on the table, both Barak’s or Clinton’s, had become null and void. Barak and

⁴⁴ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0iw70, accessed August 10, 2003.

⁴⁵ During Arafat’s farewell call to Clinton, Clinton told him directly: “You have ruined all my years in the White House by what you did to me in Camp David”. Interview Yossi Beilin, July 17, 2003. He also conveyed his final perception of Arafat directly to Bush. See also Lev Grinberg 2001: The Arrogance of Occupation, in: Maariv, December 16, 2001.

⁴⁶ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0j1m0, accessed August 10, 2003.

Clinton made it clear that all future negotiations would have to start from scratch.⁴⁷

A first full formulation of the by now widely accepted Myth of Camp David can be found in the articles written by Robert Malley and Husein Agha as well as by Deborah Sonntag, in the first international and specifically, American attempt to attack the myth head-on and present a revisionist version of Camp David.

What did the myth have to say in its version of spring/summer 2001? In Deborah Sonntag's words in an article published in the New York Times on July 26, 2001, i.e. exactly one year after the end of Camp David in 2000:

“potent, simplistic narrative has taken hold in Israel and to some extent in the United States. It says: Mr.Barak offered Mr. Arafat the moon at Camp David last summer. Mr. Arafat turned it down, and then ‘pushed the button’ and chose the path of violence. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is insoluble, at least for the foreseeable future”.

According to her, “many diplomats and officials believe that the dynamic was far more complex and that Mr. Arafat does not bear sole responsibility for the breakdown of the peace effort”. She continues quoting Terje Roed-Larsen, the United States special envoy in Jerusalem: “It is a terrible myth that Arafat and only Arafat caused this catastrophic failure. All three parties made mistakes, and in such complex negotiations, everyone is bound to. But no one is solely to blame”.⁴⁸

According to Robert Malley, who participated in the Camp David Summit as Clinton's special assistant for Arab-Israel Affairs, and Hussein Agha, an Arab-American academic and political advisor, who published the path-breaking feature “Camp David: The

⁴⁷ www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0jdj0, accessed August 10, 2003.

⁴⁸ New York Times, July 26, 2001.

Tragedy of Errors” in the New York Review of Books on August 9, 2001, the myth, which they prefer to name an “orthodoxy”, ran along the following lines:

“... We often hear about Ehud Barak’s unprecedented offer and Yasser Arafat’s uncompromising no. Israel is said to have made a historic, generous proposal, which the Palestinians, once again seizing the opportunity to miss an opportunity, turned down. In short, the failure to reach a final agreement is attributed, without notable dissent, to Yasser Arafat”.⁴⁹

The crudest version of the Myth of Camp David, however, was published approximately one year later, in the pages of the New York Review of Books, in an interview which Israeli (foremost revisionist!) historian Benny Morris did with Ehud Barak and in the following exchange of arguments between Malley and Agha on the one hand, Barak and Morris on the other. In the words of the Barak/Morris “team” the myth ran as following:

“And it’s really very simple - Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton put on the table during July-December 2000 a historic compromise and the Palestinians rejected it. ...Barak’s offer at Camp David was unprecedented and ... the upgraded (Clinton) proposals offered the Palestinians 94-96 percent of the West Bank, 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, a sovereign Palestinian state, an end to the occupation, the uprooting of most of the settlements, and sovereignty over Arab East Jerusalem - and Arafat and his aides still rejected the deal and pressed on with their terroristic onslaught”.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ New York Review of Books, August 9, 2001, www.nybooks.com/articles/1430, accessed May 29, 2002.

⁵⁰ Benny Morris 2002: Camp David and After: An Exchange. 1. An Interview with Ehud Barak., www.nybooks.com/articles/15501, accessed April 13, 2003

Apart from these general outlines of the myth, by then hegemonic, they added further elements that remained particular to Morris and Barak and constitute a clearly racist version of the Camp David Myth.

- 1- According to Barak, Arafat put up in Camp David a ‘performance’ geared to exacting as many concessions as possible from the Israelis, without ever seriously intending to reach a peace settlement or sign an ‘end to the conflict’. This ‘performance’, according to Barak, was based on the Palestinians’ “and especially Arafat’s mendacity”:
“They are products of a culture in which to tell a lie ... creates no dissonance. They don’t suffer from the problem of telling lies that exists in Judeo-Christian culture. Truth is seen as an irrelevant category”.⁵¹
- 2- Barak claims that the Palestinians and Arafat in particular, “believe that Israel ‘has no right to exist, and he seeks its demise’”. Instead, “Barak believes that Arafat sees the Palestinian refugees of 1948 and their descendants, numbering close to four million, as the main demographic-political tool for subverting the Jewish state”.
- 3- “The Intifada was preplanned, pre-prepared. I don’t mean that Arafat knew that on a certain day in September [it would be unleashed]... It wasn’t accurate, like computer engineering. But it was definitely on the level of planning, of a grand plan”.
“We know, from hard intelligence, that Arafat (after Camp David) intended to unleash a violent confrontation, terrorism. [Sharon’s visit and the riots that followed] fell into his hands like an excellent excuse, a pretext”.⁵²

I want to move now to the Palestinian reaction to the failure of Camp David, to the US/Israeli story and the subsequent creation of the myth.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

III. Palestinian Reactions to the Myth-in-the-Making

Arafat's focus after Camp David was without doubt the upcoming date of September 13, the date of, according to the original schedule of Oslo, the final status talks should have been concluded and a Palestinian state been established. As dates were not considered "holy" throughout the Oslo Process, the next possible date for the establishment of the Palestinian State was September 13, 2000, even if a year or more late. His statement in Cairo at the end of July, just back from Camp David, quoted above,⁵³ as well as his world tour right after Camp David, bears witness to this. The result achieved, however, was resoundingly negative. There was no support forthcoming for a unilateral Palestinian state proclamation.⁵⁴

At the same time, it is hard to understand why there was absolutely no direct and angry Palestinian response, either in criticism of Bill Clinton's press conference right after Camp David, where the blame-game began, nor in criticism of Ehud Barak, who put the blame squarely on Arafat when claiming: "Arafat was afraid to make the historic decisions required at this time in order to bring about the end of the conflict. Arafat's positions on the issue of Jerusalem are what prevented the attainment of an agreement".⁵⁵

Even if one accepts the argument that it might not have been a good idea for Palestinians to criticize Clinton as president of the U.S.A, surely nobody would have considered it problematic if Arafat or an official Palestinian statement would have put the record right for the Palestinian side. Furthermore, certainly nobody would have criticized the Palestinians if they had answered Barak's invective in firm terms.

⁵³ Enderlin 2002:265.

⁵⁴ Enderlin 2002:269-271. See also Palestine Report, editorials July 26, 2000 and August 16, 2000.

⁵⁵ Enderlin 2002:263, see also in almost identical statements "The Conclusion of the Camp David Summit: Key Points, dated July 25, 2000: www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0hnm0

It was without doubt a major mistake not to respond here directly and vehemently. In a sense, the Palestinian side did miss here the first and probably major opportunity to put a break to the spin and prevent the myth production before it had been even started. There are, however, two semi-official Palestinian statements published not immediately, but only several days after Camp David:

First, the Camp David papers by Akram Haniyeh, serialized in *al-Ayyam*, a Ramallah daily he edited, in seven installments between July 29 and August 10, 2000, the first full personal and authentic Palestinian account of the Camp David II Summit written by a member of the Palestinian team in Camp David. This text was subsequently published as a booklet in both English and Arabic in August-September 2000.⁵⁶

Second, there was an Op-Ed by Saeb Erakat in the *Washington Post* of August 5, 2000.⁵⁷

Erakat's Op-Ed was definitely the better placed and potentially more influential piece although published with quite a lot of delay after the end of Camp David. So, I would like to first turn to this article and its argument.

One would assume that Erakat would take this chance to attack Barak head-on because of his statement on July 25 at the press conference right after Camp David. This would have meant repeating the Palestinians' absolute commitment to peace, with all compromises it entailed. However, it would also have stated the major areas in which their national interest did not allow any concessions or too many concessions, and finally a critique of Barak's precise reference to where he had not advanced far

⁵⁶ I used the English version: Akram Haniyeh 2000: *The Camp David Papers*, Ramallah: *al-Ayyam* Newspaper, in an edition of August 2000. The text is also available in an abridged version in JPS 118 (winter 2001), 75-97

⁵⁷ *Camp David: A Story of Success*, www.nad-plo.org/eye/opeds5html, accessed August 8, 2003.

enough. Over and above everything, however, it would have been absolutely essential to attack Barak on his position that all of what had been proposed in Camp David was now null and void, i.e. strong criticism of the following statement by Barak:

*“Ideas, opinions, and even positions which came up in the course of the Summit are inapplicable and unacceptable as an opening point for negotiations, when these resume. In English, I would say that they are all invalid”.*⁵⁸

Erakat’s piece is well-argued and leading to a very convincing climax and conclusion: “What we learned at Camp David is that the kind of real peace both sides need will require a little more time, a little more effort and a little more pain. But we continue to believe that it is worth the time, effort, and yes, even the pain.

And we know that we can get there”.⁵⁹ What was missing, however, was a counter-attack against Barak, not a polite and considerate statement:

*“It is pointless to play the blame game or resort to prophecies of doom and gloom. No one is at fault because there was no failure. We made real progress at Camp David and the imperative now is to build on that progress and keep the momentum going”.*⁶⁰

While Erakat rightly stressed that both sides made compromises, he should have pointed out not only where the limit to Palestinian compromises was, but also where the Israelis had not taken this into consideration and advanced further in their compromises.

⁵⁸ Statement by Barak on conclusion of the Camp David Summit, July 25, 2000. See also Key points, 5, www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0hnm0, accessed August 10, 2003.

⁵⁹ www.nad-plo.org/eye/opeds5.html, accessed August 8, 2003.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

The comparison between Barak, having to gain parliamentary majorities, and Arafat, also having to respond to his constituency, was an important point, but not strong enough nor convincingly presented.

The worst argument of Erakat, though, was a real self-inflicted ‘goal’. This was all the more the case as this argument dealt with the very issue the Israeli propaganda machine used as its major weapon in the spin, i.e. Jerusalem. Erakat was effectively saying that an agreement with Israel would have been possible if only the interests of Palestinians had been taken into consideration. What prevented the agreement, and that is the central message of this passage, was the interests of two billion Muslims and Christians. It seems worthwhile to quote in full this most problematic passage of the whole article:

*“On the issue of Jerusalem, in particular, President Arafat must have an agreement that will be supported not only by the Palestinian people but also by Arab, Muslim and Christian communities worldwide who also are concerned about the future of the holy city. The interest of 8 million Palestinians cannot be placed ahead of the interest of 2 billion Muslims and Christians”.*⁶¹

Still beyond doubt, it is clear that for the Palestinians, the major issue now was to continue the negotiations as started in Camp David, with Saeb Erakat clearly being the main proponent of this view. He took up renewed negotiations with his Israeli counterparts two days after Camp David and continued them almost non-stop until September.⁶² In one of these interviews, he made a clear statement concerning Jerusalem, which, however, was not published at the time. Answering the question: “Is an agreement possible without full Palestinian sovereignty

⁶¹ ibid.

⁶² frontline, Saeb Erakat interview p.15, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oslo/interviews/erekat.html

over the mosques and East Jerusalem?”, he said quite openly: “I don’t think so”.⁶³

I shall now turn to Akram Hanieh’s Camp David Papers.

The papers were published in seven separate installments. In the first one, under the heading “The Road to the Summit”, the preparatory phase of Camp David is described and analyzed, counter-posing the different positions of the Palestinians, who had argued, “that conditions were not yet ripe for holding a summit”.⁶⁴ The Israeli and US positions pushed for the summit and the Palestinians finally accepted, hoping “Clinton would not attempt to impose what the Palestinians reject”.⁶⁵ In the second paper, the arrival of the two delegations to Camp David is described and the “rules of the game” are presented with an interesting focus on the fact “that the Israeli delegation was deliberately leaking a lot of news”, i.e. a clear awareness of the enormous importance the Israelis gave to the media and to the shaping of public opinion. The third paper is a clear criticism of Clinton, who failed to be the “honest broker” the Palestinians wanted him to be, while he instead chose to act in the context of a “united Israeli-American delegation”, putting pressure only on the Palestinians.⁶⁶ The fourth paper delineates the Israeli position, seen from the perspective of the Palestinians and starts out with Arafat’s quotation: “They are not ready for peace”.⁶⁷ It continues to summarize the perceived Israeli position: “The Israelis came to Camp David with their mythology, arrogance of power, and the mosaic of their internal politics”.⁶⁸ ... “The plan was to close the Palestinian deal at the lowest price”. The paper ends as it started, zooming in on Arafat: “They (the

⁶³ *ibid.* p.16.

⁶⁴ Hanieh 2000: 9.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*p.16

⁶⁶ *ibid.*p.38-39

⁶⁷ *ibid.*p.43

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

American and Israeli team) needed several days ... to realize what it meant to face the man named Yasser Arafat".⁶⁹ The fifth paper summarizes the ongoing negotiations, with a focus on Jerusalem. The sixth paper follows the developments at Camp David after Clinton succeeded in bridging over the premature failure and ending the summit closure. Finally, the last paper, presents the overall Palestinian position and assessment, starting with the title for the paper: "Areas of Failure ... Boundaries of 'Accomplishment'".⁷⁰ It summarizes the last offers presented to the Palestinians by Clinton and the Palestinian rejection. It ends with the focus once again on Jerusalem, put this time in the mouth of an American/Pakistani taxi driver: "Don't surrender Jerusalem!"⁷¹

Obviously, Hanieh's "Camp David Papers" are above all a very pointed and polemical account on what happened during the summit from a Palestinian perspective. It was certainly an excellent way to inform the Palestinian public about what had gone on in the secrecy of Camp David. In that respect, the role of the Palestinian leadership, of the negotiating and expert teams was depicted in fervent colors, making every single Palestinian proud of them.

On the other hand, however, it was far from being a well-conceived counter-attack in the press with the aim of neutralizing Israeli propaganda concerning Camp David, if not actually putting the record straight and forcefully and aggressively presenting the Palestinian reading of the situation, i.e. stressing the Palestinian commitment to peace and to a two-state solution, while at the same time making clear what the Palestinian red lines were and why. Also, it did not even attempt to show clearly and convincingly what the Israelis had started to do after Camp David with their blame-game strategy. It did not even refer to it.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*p.51

⁷⁰ *ibid.*p.85-98

⁷¹ *ibid.*p.98

The papers ended with the departure of the Palestinians from Camp David and from the USA.

Last but not least, there was no special effort made to show the Palestinians' absolute commitment to advancing the Peace Process, a commitment which did not allow any descending to the level of blame-games, a tactic which was well in the reach of the Palestinians and which they could have used against the Israeli media blitz.

Over and above everything, however, the articles and the booklet remained something for insiders. They never made any headway in the international press. Most people, internationally and even in Palestine/Israel, never heard about these articles. The headlines were made by Barak's and Clinton's Camp David story. Before attempting a final interpretation of the Palestinian dealing with the production of the Myth of Camp David, I want to continue the search for other statements and actions on the Palestinian side.

I shall start with statements and speeches by the Palestinian official leadership, and shall then examine some other public Palestinian statements and analyses, taking as an example some pieces written by Hanan Ashrawi.

The interview which Mahmud Abbas, then Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee, gave to Palestine TV on July 29, two days after Bill Clinton's interview on the Israeli TV, comes closest to a first official Palestinian publicized summary statement, if we disregard Arafat's brief statement to the press after his return from Camp David, quoted above.⁷² Although making clear important Palestinian positions at Camp David, Abu Mazen's statement is above all geared for internal Palestinian consumption, made in order to achieve internal political gains, not, however, in

⁷² Mahmud Abbas: No Peace Agreement with Israel without Jerusalem, www.nad-plo.org/speeches/abbas.html, accessed August 13, 2003; see also Yasir Arafat's statement from July 26 in Enderlin 2002:265.

any way directed to countering the US/Israeli spin and attempting to counter the Camp David Myth in the making. On the contrary, the opening passage, while important for increasing support from the Palestinian public which had been very suspicious about the readiness of its leaders for unacceptable compromises, had potentially the opposite effect on the level of international public opinion, where it could very well be used to support the Camp David Myth about the Palestinians' essentially negative role:

*“No human being could withstand the pressure that President Arafat came under during seventeen days at Camp David. There was pressure from the strongest nation in the world, America, and pressure from all sides to accept certain proposals and ideas. But in spite of the pressure, we, the humble side, said no when we saw that the pressure will lead to concessions on some issues”.*⁷³

He explains these issues. However, he could have introduced them in a different way, making his argument positively, i.e. very much along the lines of the Israeli arguments focusing on the readiness to compromise, with a firm statement about the red lines that could not be crossed.

The problem here seems to be not so much the content of the statement but rather its form. Also, of course, a statement like this should have been distributed more widely to the international press. Above all, the basically positive Palestinian perspective on Camp David could and should have been used widely: “I consider the Camp David Summit a success in that it brought an understanding of all the final status issues among the three sides.... For the first time, all the issues were out on the table, nothing remained hidden”.⁷⁴

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ www.nad-plo.org/speeches/abumazen3.html, accessed August 13, 2003.

The next official Palestinian statement was delivered again by Mahmud Abbas during his speech at the session of the PLO's Central Council in Gaza on September 9, 2000. He gave a brief summary to the members of the council of the result of the negotiations at Camp David as a basis for their discussion of the issue of postponing the proclamation of a Palestinian state once again. He exaggerated slightly the amount of land Israel had proposed to annex during the Camp David Summit (10, 5% instead of 9% plus 15-20% instead of 10% in the Jordan Valley as a de facto annexation), but presented both the Jerusalem negotiations and the refugees question issue quite accurately.

He added, and this seems to be important, that in subsequent negotiations between the two sides, Israel had shown slightly more flexibility, especially concerning the return of more Palestinian refugees.⁷⁵

He never enters the blame-game, or takes issue with the Camp David Myth, by then alive and well in its initial form. There is only one indirect reference to the question of blame, again without taking a strong position on this delicate and important matter:

*“We were faced with two choices, to go (to Camp David) knowing very well that the summit will fail and that the Americans may blame us for its failure, or to refuse to attend and be accused of sabotaging the peace process. So we took the first choice”.*⁷⁶

For the first time, however, we hear a Palestinian leader who tries to present the Palestinian position in a positive way:

“We went to Camp David not to say NO to the Americans and to the world Zionists. We went to say YES to a lasting and just peace. To say YES to

⁷⁵ JPS118 (winter 2001): 168-169, in an abridged form.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, see also www.nad-org.plo/speeches/abumazen4.html, accessed August 13, 2003.

international legitimacy and when we failed to reach that, we said No".⁷⁷

Abu Mazen's speech clearly reflects the central Palestinian concern at the time, i.e. 'should or should we not declare an independent state on September 13, 2000'? Under the pressure of this question they obviously remained quite oblivious to the tremendous changes in international and regional opinion as they were brought about by the Barak/Clinton spin.

In a further interview on the Palestine Satellite Channel on September 19, Mahmud Abbas summarized, for a much wider audience, what happened at Camp David and what positions the Palestinians took there. In contrast to previous statements, he depicted Camp David almost only in negative colors:

"Some negotiators said that understandings on some issues were reached in Camp David. They also said that taboos were broken, but I say there was no agreement on anything and there was no progress recorded".⁷⁸

He then, moved on to present the central Palestinian condition for peace:

"When Israel agrees to international legitimacy and to UN resolutions we will be very happy to sign an agreement with her. We did not go to Camp David to sign any agreement at any price. We have the right to say no".

At the end of the interview, there was a first, if not very direct implication, that the Palestinian leadership is aware of the blame-game and the myth: "Are we now termed as extremists because we demand the implementing of international relations"?

This was followed by another demand directed to the Israelis:

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ www.nad-plo.org/eye/sept/news20.html, accessed August 13, 2003.

“Progress must be made on their part and not by us. They are the ones who refuse to implement the international resolutions”. For him, the stage was set then for a Palestinian struggle, which, as he stressed, “does not necessarily mean that we carry arms. Our struggle is in holding strong, there are a thousand ways for saying no. We know the capabilities of the other side, they have all the power and we have nothing, all what we have is the faith of our people and that is more important than any arms”.⁷⁹

The only official Palestinian proclamation I discovered which constructed a direct link between Camp David, Sharon’s entry into al-Haram and the beginning of the Intifada, i.e. in a direct parallel to Israeli attempts in blaming the Palestinians for precisely the same thing, is an interview which Abu Mazen gave to Ramallah newspaper al-Ayyam, on October 10:

“...the latest events which swept the Palestinian territories, were planned by Israel after the failure of the July Camp David Summit....after Camp David, Israel began to fortify settlements and deploy heavy and non-heavy armor in preparation for some action. Then came Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Haram al-Sharif compound ...It seems Israel thought it could convince the Palestinians by force that there is no alternative before them but to accept surrender, and our answer was that we reject surrender”.

He concluded the interview with the demanding to send “international forces to protect Palestinians”.⁸⁰

Two available major speeches of President Yasir Arafat need to be examined insofar as they refer to Camp David and the Myth of Camp David.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ www.nad-plo.org/eye/oct/news5.html, accessed August 13, 2003.

In his speech before the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations on September 6, 2000, Arafat took pains to stress the Palestinian commitment to peace as well as his readiness for compromise, especially concerning Jerusalem: “We have made a strategic decision committing ourselves to the peace process, offering significant and painful concessions in order to arrive at a reasonable compromise acceptable to both sides... As for Holy Jerusalem ... we have agreed to share the city”.

He then, continues with a direct reference to Camp David, specifically thanking Bill Clinton for his efforts, but thanking also and at the same time the other sponsors of the Peace Process, Russia, as well as other powers like the EU, the Arab countries etc., ending with the commitment: “We shall continue to do our utmost during the coming short period of time, in order to arrive at a final settlement between Palestine and Israel, and we invite the Israeli government to do likewise”.⁸¹ However, in the whole speech there is no reference to the blaming or the myth.

In his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, just one day after the end of the Taba negotiations, there is no reference whatsoever either to Clinton’s positions, the Taba negotiations, the Palestinian input in Taba or the progress achieved there. What Arafat focused on instead is Israel’s military strategy against the Palestinians in the Intifada, which he attacked head-on. In clear contrast to this, he goes on to repeat once again his and the Palestinians’ commitment to peace, even at the cost of many concessions:

“... We have made great concessions and sacrifices in order to achieve comprehensive, just and permanent peace”. He then appeals, like Abu Mazen before him “to the whole international community, the United Nations Organization and the vital and

⁸¹ www.nad-plo.org/speeches/arafat8.html, accessed August 13, 2003.

influential international forces, to work for ending this Israeli war and aggression against our unarmed people...We ask for the provision of international protection for our people immediately".⁸²

What contributions have Palestinian public figures made in countering the Myth of Camp David? A first opinion would certainly focus on Hanan Ashrawi, who served as the Palestinian spokeswoman to Washington during the Camp David talks. According to Hanieh in his papers, she was sent there as a counterweight to the Israeli representatives in order to present the Palestinian point of view in the Israeli media, "to take part in numerous TV debates to win over American public opinion. Ashrawi performed very well in them".⁸³

Hanan Ashrawi's Miftah website attacked Clinton's July 27 interview on Israel TV in support of Barak head-on, though with a considerable delay, in terms of media time.⁸⁴

"With one full sweep, US President Bill Clinton succeeded in undermining American standing in the peace process and throughout the region as an "even-handed peace broker," in provoking Arab and Islamic (as well as Christian) public opinion, and in undermining the chances for peace in the region. The notorious Clinton interview on Israeli television was seen, at best, as peevish and petty, and at worst as a cynical manipulation of the peace process for the sake of narrow self-interest and short-term gains. To the Palestinians it was nothing short of blatant political blackmail -a thinly-disguised attempt at coercion and arm-twisting- to bring the Palestinians

⁸² www.nad-plo.org/speeches/arafat9.htm, accessed August 13, 2003.

⁸³ Hanieh 2000:25

⁸⁴ www.miftah.org, Key issues of August 2, 2000, accessed August 6, 2003.

*to their knees, in other words to compliance with the Israeli version of realities and of the outcome of the peace process”.*⁸⁵

Ashrawi too, however, apparently did not perceive the dangers coming from the Clinton-Barak press-campaign and therefore did not even attempt to counter the story and the by then almost fully formulated myth. In an article published two weeks later,⁸⁶ she did take on the USA and Israel with a rather cynical caricature of their policy towards the Palestinians. However, here too, the focus is above all on the question of a Palestinian state, not on the problem of the slanted coverage and its dangerous repercussions in international policy for the Palestinians.

*“Israel, so far and with a great deal of help from its American strategic ally, seems to have succeeded in creating an erroneous impression of Israeli “flexibility” as opposed to Palestinian “intractability” on the substantive issues-primarily Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugee question. To be “flexible” (as per the Israeli-American definition), the Palestinians must accept a solution that incorporates and perpetuates multiple injustices”.*⁸⁷

This reaction, clearly more than wanting in face of the media-blotz and myth, is all the more amazing as Hanan Ashrawi was, after all, the official Palestinian spokeswoman during the Camp David Summit, with her headquarters in Washington. Ashrawi is one of the relatively few people in Palestine with an almost perfect feel for the requirements of media policy, especially as it refers to the international press.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ www.miftah.org Key issues of August 19, 2000, accessed August 5, 2003.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

The Start of al-Aqsa Intifada, the Clinton Parameters and the Taba Conference.

After the Second Intifada, better known as al-Aqsa Intifada, had started at the end of September/beginning of October, Palestinians focused on only two things: the Intifada on the one hand and the on-going negotiations with the Israelis on the other. These negotiations led to two more climaxes: the publication of the so-called Clinton parameters on December 23, and the Israeli-Palestinian bilateral negotiations in Taba between January 21 and January 27. At the end of the Taba negotiations, a joint statement was issued saying that substantial progress had been achieved on all issues. The hope was expressed that negotiations would resume after Israeli elections to be held on February 6. Both represented a significant advance compared to the Camp David Summit, especially concerning the demands of the Palestinians.

While in Camp David, the maximum Israeli offer had consisted of 91% of the West Bank, Clinton⁸⁸ proposed a return of 94 to 96% of the West Bank to the Palestinians, together with a compensation “equivalent to 1-3% of territories annexed”.⁸⁹ In Jerusalem, including the Old City, there was to be a division of sovereignty according to Arab and Israeli quarters (“Arab areas are Palestinian and ... Jewish areas are Israeli”⁹⁰). Concerning al-Haram, he proposed Palestinian sovereignty over it and Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall, with a mutually agreed upon solution concerning excavations under al-Haram. On the refugees question, he summarized the Israel and Palestinian conflicting positions and proposed a solution along the lines that a return to historic Palestine or a return to their homeland would be recognized in principle, while practically speaking a solution had to be found for the implementation of this right, mainly in the

⁸⁸ JPS119 (spring 2001): 171-173.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* p.171.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p.172.

future Palestinian State, but with some refugees allowed into Israel, according to Israeli agreement.

In his speech on January 7, 2001, Clinton announced: “Both Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat have now accepted these parameters as the basis for further efforts. Both have expressed some reservations”.⁹¹ Barak accepted almost immediately, while Arafat came forth with the Palestinian acceptance only on January 3, 2001.⁹²

Based on these proposals, the negotiations in Taba were started, marking a further progress towards a possible agreement.

At the conclusion of these talks, which were stopped by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak because of the approaching Israeli elections, a joint communiqué was published by the negotiating partners:

*“The Taba talks conclude an extensive phase in the Israeli-Palestinian permanent status negotiations with a sense of having succeeded in rebuilding trust between the sides and with the notion that they were never closer in reaching an agreement between them than today.... It is thus our shared belief that the remaining gaps could be bridged with the resumption of negotiations following the Israeli elections”.*⁹³

As to the Taba talks, in contrast to the Camp David Summit, the researcher does have available a compilation of the negotiations, the different positions, the results achieved and the gaps remaining. This compilation, the so-called Moratinos non-paper,⁹⁴ was written by Miguel Moratinos, the special envoy of the European Union to the

⁹¹ JPS 119 (spring 2001): 174.

⁹² PLO Negotiation Department on Jan. 1, 2001: Reservations concerning Clinton proposal (Clinton parameters) JPS 119 (spring 2001): 155-159. Arafat accepted on January 2, *ibid.* p.155.... See also Malley: An Exchange 2. p.5.

⁹³ See JPS 123 (spring 2002): 80-81, or access under www.nad-plo.org/eye/news20.html

⁹⁴ See JPS 123 (spring 2002): 81-89.

Middle East, at the request of the two parties. His report is based on interviews with the negotiators directly after the different sessions. “The final document ... was completed and approved by both sides in the summer of 2001... The document, which was not to be published, was leaked and published by Haaretz on 14 February 2002”.⁹⁵ Also, through a publication in *Le Monde Diplomatique* from September 2001, we have the position papers of both negotiating partners available.

Where did the two sides reach at the end of January 2001, i.e. half a year after Camp David, one month after the publication of the Clinton parameters, and at the end of the fourth month of al-Aqsa Intifada?

Concerning **borders**, for the first time both sides agreed specifically on the borders of June 4, 1967, as the basis for the future borders. There was disagreement between both sides on the amount of land Israel wanted to annex in order to accommodate 80% of Israeli settlers. The Palestinians, based on their map, offered “3.1% in the context of a land swap”, the Israeli side presented a map with “6% annexation, the outer limit of the Clinton proposal”. As to the amount of land swap, “the Israeli side adhered to a maximum 3% land swap as per (the) Clinton proposal”.⁹⁶

As to the **Gaza Strip**, “it was implied that ... (it) will be under total Palestinian sovereignty... All settlements will be evacuated”.⁹⁷

As to **Jerusalem**, “both sides accepted in principle the Clinton suggestion of having Palestinian sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods and Israeli sovereignty over Jewish neighborhoods”.⁹⁸ The Palestinians were ready to discuss granting Israeli sovereignty over the Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, with the exception of Jabal Abu-Ghunaym and Ras al-Amud, while rejecting it over Ma’ale Adumim and Givat Zeev. Palestinians

⁹⁵ JPS 123 (spring 2002): 80.

⁹⁶ JPS 123 (spring 2002): 82.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.83

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

were supposed to receive sovereignty over part of the Old City, while they were ready to grant Israel sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and part of the Armenian Quarter.

As to the **Holy Sites**, both sides “accepted the principle of respective control over each side’s respective holy sites”, however only in terms of religious control of management. Palestinians accepted in principle Israeli sovereignty over the **Western Wall**, with disputes remaining as to its precise delineation.⁹⁹ The question of al **Haram ash-Sharif** (the Temple Mount) was not solved, with both sides being “close to accepting Clinton’s ideas regarding Palestinian sovereignty over al-Haram ash-Sharif”.¹⁰⁰

As to the **Refugees Question**, non-papers were exchanged as a basis for the talks. Talks focused on a “joint narrative for the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees”, with “much progress” achieved.¹⁰¹ The question of return was discussed, with the Israeli side proposing accepting a limited number of refugees, about 25,000 in the first three years, as stated in their non-paper. The question of compensation was also raised.

As mentioned in part I, after Barak’s defeat in the Israeli elections, all the achievements of Camp David, the Clinton parameters and Taba were considered null and void, non-binding to any future Israeli government. According to Barak and Clinton, every future effort to achieve a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians is supposed to start from scratch.

Again, like after Camp David and the immediate production of the Myth of Camp David, the question imposes itself about the lack of a Palestinian effective and strong revisionist effort to reach world public opinion, or at least the political leaders of Europe. To formulate

⁹⁹ *ibid.*p.85

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*p.85-86

it differently, why did not the Palestinians start their counter attack at least then, i.e. right after Taba or the latest after the Israeli elections in February or March 2001? Why did not they make a strong stand against the myth which had by then started to dominate public discourse worldwide, and which had above all begun to determine the political stands taken by the world's leaders, not only the new American leadership, but also the different European leaders? Why was it left for Americans like Robert Malley and Hussein Agha on the one hand, and Deborah Sonntag on the other, to start confronting the myth and presenting a revisionist version of Camp David? In addition, why did this intervention also come one whole year late?

Before trying to answer this question, a short examination of the activities of the Palestinian negotiating team in terms of public relations activities seems in place.

In their assessment of the Clinton Administration's involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process, the PLO negotiating team clearly had a chance to enter the debate on Camp David on January 22, 2001.¹⁰² They opted instead for a sober and basically pessimistic summary of what had gone wrong as a result of political options they argued were chosen by the US, above all the option for "process over substance", for "normalization before an end to the occupation of Arab lands", for "the adoption of an Israeli perspective" over "acting as an honest broker", and finally the option for "US/Israeli domestic political concerns" which then "overrode the goal of a lasting peace". Particular criticism was reserved for US Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross because of his "emotional commitment to Israel" and his inability "to distinguish between (his) personal and professional involvement with it". No mention can be found of the spin put in motion by Clinton and Barak right after Camp David, nor of the step-by-step production of a myth of the summit, which became more vitriolic in every new manifestation.

¹⁰² JPS 119 (spring 2001): 159-161.

On the website of the Negotiations Affairs Department, however, there is one single exception, which seems to have led to some, if belated, consequences drawn by the Palestinian negotiators and resulted in concrete actions.

On March 7, 2001, the former special assistant to Bill Clinton for Arab-Israel affairs, Robert Malley, gave a briefing at the Palestinian Center for Policy Analysis in Ramallah, chaired by Khalil Shikaki, which is quoted in some detail on the website of the Negotiations Affairs Department:

*“There is a ‘ferocious battle’ going on between Israel and the Palestinians, as to ‘conflicting interpretations of what happened’ during the Oslo Process, and in particular during Camp David and its aftermath”.*¹⁰³

This briefing is obviously something of a first version of Malley’s later essay in the *New York Review of Books* as published in August 2001. In Ramallah, however, Malley focused on his criticism of the Palestinian negotiators during the Oslo years in general and Camp David in particular. For our purposes here, the content of the briefing is not the main aspect. What is relevant here is the fact that someone stood up and pointed unequivocally to the problem of conflicting interpretations, i.e. at least indirectly to the spin and the consequent production of the Myth of Camp David? There seems to have been some direct response to this intervention by Malley right in the center of the Palestinian Authority.

Only one month after Malley’s paper in Ramallah, we find the first clear and direct Palestinian response to the Myth of Camp David, which by then had taken hold of the United States and there above all the Congress and the White House. In an attempt to salvage what could still be salvaged Yasser Abed Rabbo sent a letter to the American Congress in the name of the PLO Negotiations Department in response to a letter the Congress had only shortly

¹⁰³ www.nad-plo.org/eye/news30.html, accessed July 31, 2003.

before sent to the new American President George W. Bush, asking him to reassess the relationship of the U.S. with the Palestinians.

In this letter, the Palestinian side is finally and in all detail presenting what happened at Camp David, in a clear attempt to counter every single part of the Myth of Camp David.¹⁰⁴ The importance of this letter can therefore not be overestimated. In July 2001, finally, everybody was able to access on the website of the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department a FAQ under the title “Camp David Peace Proposal: Frequently Asked Questions” in three languages; English, Hebrew and Arabic.¹⁰⁵

This paper clarified the main arguments concerning the Palestinian position taken in Camp David point for point in a very clear and convincing way. There is no more time or space for me to quote these fully. They can be read, however, by anyone interested, both on the website or in the JPS.

Conclusion:

This FAQ, however, just as Yasser Abed Rabbo’s letter to the Congress, came almost one year late. Hardly anybody listened to it any more. Rather, the Myth of Camp David seems to have taken hold by then.

This deplorable state of affairs, against the background of the deteriorating conditions in Israel and Palestine in the context of the Intifada, seems to have provided the motive for Malley/Agha and Sontag, to press ahead with their attempt to attack the Myth of Camp David. Malley/Agha in particular focus on the perceived inability of the Palestinian side to counter the Israeli/American spin and media blitz which created the myth in the first place.

¹⁰⁴ www.nad-plo.org/eye/news35.htm, accessed August 13, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ www.nad-plo.org/eye/news38.html, see also reprint in JPS 121 (autumn 2001): 139-142.

*“Much as they tried, the Palestinian leaders have proved utterly unable to make their case. In Israel and the U.S., they are constantly depicted as uncompromising and incapable of responding to Barak’s supreme effort. Yet, in their own eyes, they were the ones who made the principal concessions”.*¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, almost as an answer to this argument one can read Deborah Sontag in the New York Times on July 26, 2001:

*“Mr. Barak did not offer Mr. Arafat the moon at Camp David. He broke Israeli taboos against any discussion of dividing Jerusalem, and he sketched out an offer that was politically courageous, especially for an Israeli leader with a faltering coalition. But it was a proposal that the Palestinians did not believe would leave them with a viable state. And although Mr. Barak said no Israeli leader could go further, he himself improved considerably on his Camp David proposal six months later”.*¹⁰⁷

The interventions by Deborah Sontag in the New York Times, then by Malley and Agha in the New York Review of Books, and finally also the public stand taken by Palestinians, above all the Negotiation’s Department, resulted in a temporary respite. The world press was full of renewed discussions of Camp David. Many people had second thoughts, not only on Camp David, but also on the Intifada and on developments on the ground in Palestine/Israel. From now on, there are two versions that had to be taken into consideration, the myth or, in neutral terms, the “orthodox” version by Barak and Clinton, and the revisionist one by Malley/Agha and others, not least the Palestinians.

¹⁰⁶ Malley/Agha, reprint in JPS 121 (autumn 2001): 70.

¹⁰⁷ JPS 121 (autumn 2001): 76.

Unfortunately, however, the pattern in the reception of both the orthodox version and the revisionist one seems to have gone along the lines of a separation between the academic, largely revisionist, and the political - largely orthodox discourse, and it is replicated in the sense, that on the level of political leaders in the West, the orthodox version seems to have remained the hegemonic one, while on the street at least there is some advance of the revisionist version to be observed, with some inroads made also in the international press.

To conclude with a first attempt of an interpretation, it seems to me that there clearly was a first crucial time-period, approximately July/August/September 2000, in which the whole matter was still largely open. Since the end of September/beginning of October, however, the world focused on the Intifada and accepted widely the Israeli/American Myth of Camp David as the underlying argument.

The Palestinians had basically had one chance to intervene, in these three crucial months, more precisely between the last week of July and the last week of September, i.e. until Sharon's Haram/Temple Mount provocation. After that, this first round had been squarely lost to Israel.

The Israelis had won it by convincing the world of the rightness of their stand, although this was basically a colonial one, characterized in every step by paternalistic and arrogant, sometimes outright racist attitudes.¹⁰⁸ They succeeded in achieving this with a variety of different means.

First, they did not lose a minute in starting their media offensive, with Ehud Barak taking the lead already in the United States, just outside Camp David, not even waiting for the end of Bill Clinton's press conference.

¹⁰⁸ Grinberg 2001, T.Reinhardt 2001a, Uri Avnery 2001, Hass 2003 and many others like Robert Fisk in his articles in the Independent, see bibliography.

Back in Israel, a concerted effort was undertaken with a whole array of government statements, communications addressed to the United States as well as the world at large, articles in the Israeli press, research papers by pro-Israeli and Israeli think-tanks and academia in Israel, all aiming at the same direction and providing the world with a seemingly unassailable “possession of the truth”. While all these activities were on the one hand, undertaken separately and to a degree independently, with independent effects, they were, on the other hand, assembled together on the official Israeli website, exerting an additional impact on this level.

Second, in terms of content and form, the Israeli media blitz was always on the offensive, never presenting itself in a defensive manner. This seemingly left no option for the Palestinians but to take a defensive stand, which they did for almost one whole year (to some degree with the exception of Akram Hanieh’s Camp David Papers, which did not make it, however, into the international press, and therefore did not leave any real impact).

Finally, Israel used a very simple, but all the more effective tactics: to repeat their stand again and again, irrespective of how credible it was, until everybody had become convinced that this was the truth and nothing but the truth.

On the other hand, my admittedly limited research in this matter did come up with an impressive effort on the Palestinian side, to make their stand known, locally, regionally and internationally. However, it still was far from enough, and it still could not compete with the well-oiled and well-established Israeli propaganda-machine. Suffice it to present a very small but indicative comparison: The Website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs gets about 350 to 400 000 visitors a week, while Miftah, Hanan Ashrawi’s website in Jerusalem/Ramallah has had so far altogether 620 000 visitors, i.e. less than the Israeli F.M. received between the first and the 14th of August 2003 (about 950 000).

When George W. Bush took over the presidency in Washington, Palestinians made, together with international or more precisely

American writers, a second attempt to make their voice heard. They did succeed to a certain degree. However, by then the myth had been established, was there, and it seems, was there to remain.

I think it is relevant in this context to quote a small passage from an article placed on the website of Israeli newspaper Haaretz in August 2003, as it is another shocking proof of how alive, well and above all effective the Myth of Camp David is until today:

“The peace process will die if the P.A. does not remove Yasir Arafat from all positions of influence”, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said in an interview published Wednesday in the French daily *Le Figaro*, Israel Radio reported. Sharon also called for cutting Arafat off from having any say over the PA’s finances.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz also had harsh words for Arafat on Wednesday, saying that the PA Chairman was doing everything in his power to undermine current peace efforts and that Israel would not continue with these efforts unless the PA dismantles terrorist organizations, Israel Radio reported.

“I won’t be surprised if Arafat is behind the terror attacks in recent days... He is doing all he can to torpedo the peace process and Abu Mazen’s leadership...”¹⁰⁹

I should like to conclude with the following questions:

- Was there in July/August/September 2000 an alternative for the Palestinians in the sense that they could have reacted to the spin and possibly prevented the myth-production, or at least held their own narrative on an equal level against it?
- Did they have a realistic chance to enter the public arena at the end of July 2000, when the spin was started and thereby prevent the production of the myth?

¹⁰⁹ www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=329201, accessed August 13, 2003.

- What was preventing them from taking up the gauntlet thrown by Barak and Clinton and then the Israeli propaganda machine?

While we all know the existing balance of power, I should like to argue that especially against the background of this negative balance for the Palestinians, it is absolutely necessary to grasp every single chance to move things in their favor. Today, in the age of globalization with the central role the global media play in this context, the questions I proposed for discussion should be addressed sooner rather than later, not least in the interest of achieving the goals Palestinians have wanted to achieve for so long: the end of occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

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Comments

The Political and Scientific Relevance of the Failed Camp David and Taba Negotiations

Martin Beck*

Only recently, two years after their failure, the negotiations of Camp David and Taba have become a major subject of scientific research. This recent interest of the research community was preceded by a public debate focusing on political rather than scientific questions. Politicians and journalists primarily discussed the normative dimension of who is to blame for the failure of the negotiations. As described by Helga Baumgarten in detail, it took only a few months before a clear majority of commentators came to the definite conclusion that Yasir Arafat could be held responsible for the negative outcome.

I believe that the original contribution of the scientific community to the debate on the failure of Camp David and Taba should finally redirect attention from a normative to an explanatory perspective, attempting to answer the basic question: why the negotiations of Camp David and Taba and the Oslo Peace Process as a whole failed. A satisfactory answer to this question would require broadening the horizon first, by putting the negotiations of Camp David and Taba in the context of the Oslo Peace Process as a whole, and second, by using the theoretical insights offered by conflict theories as a tool to be applied to the present case.

Although the scientific community does not yet enjoy the privileged position of knowing all facts necessary for a final assessment of Camp David and Taba, there are some good reasons to assume that, given the Israeli and Palestinian preferences, nobody is to blame for the failure of Oslo. Based on an analysis of the positions presented by Israel and the PLO in the course of

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the negotiations held in Camp David, Helga Baumgarten confirms this view by stating that “A sober assessment of the summit would conclude that the problems were extremely difficult *given the demands of both sides (...)*” (emphasis added, M.B.).

The long history of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is full of failures.¹ Negotiation theories, which among other things cover the normative problem of whom to blame for failed negotiations, face severe problems to contribute to an explanation of this history. The reason behind this is that discussing preferences is beyond the scope of mainstream negotiation theories, which assumes that preferences are (normally) prior to negotiations and are hardly subject to change in their course. Well, Oran Young’s interesting concept challenges this mainstream opinion by arguing that actors of negotiations in many cases only have loose preferences. Thus, due to a “veil of uncertainty”, preferences indeed can be changed during negotiations as a result of communication, thereby opening a window of opportunity for an agreement not perceived by the actors prior to the negotiations.² However, due to the long-lasting history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and negotiations, it is not plausible to assume that the actors of Camp David and Taba were not well aware of their own positions as well as the adversary’s preferences and its limits of flexibility.

Thus, the genuine scientific contribution to the failure of Camp David and Taba should consist of answering the basic questions of what obstacles prevented the actors to establish the framework for peace prior to the negotiations of Camp David and Taba. Besides a precise definition of the nature of the conflict and its

¹ Laura Zittrain Eisenberg/Neil Caplan: *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace. Patterns, Problems, Possibilities*, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998.

² Oran R. Young: *The Politics of International Regime Formation: Managing Natural Resources and the Environment*, in: *International Organization* 43.3 (1989): 349-375.

situation structure, hurdles to peace both on the international and the national level of the two actors should be examined in a systematic way.³

Helga Baumgarten is not at all to blame that she does not cover these basic questions. On the contrary, since political science cannot ignore political debates prior to scientific research, a first major task of scientists is indeed to shed light on major political debates. Due to the political relevance of the normative debate on whom to blame for the failure of the negotiations of Camp David and Taba, the classical task of a historian to clarify facts is an extremely important assignment. Thus, in a first step, Helga Baumgarten describes “what actually happened in Camp David” and Taba. Due to the lack of official documents, she faces a severe methodological problem, which she attempts to solve by basing her thorough analysis on Palestinian, American and Israeli narratives. Thus, she presents evidence that what happened in Camp David and Taba is not compatible with the dominant public perception as nicely summarized by Deborah Sontag in one of the first critical articles on Camp David: “Mr. Barak offered Mr. Arafat the moon at Camp David (...). Mr. Arafat turned it down, and then ‘pushed the button’ and chose the path of violence.”⁴ In a logical second step, Helga Baumgarten attempts to deconstruct this dominant perception as the “myth of Camp David”, thereby explicitly attacking the Palestinian leadership for having failed to “effectively counter the myth of Camp David”.

When Helga Baumgarten takes the first step of her approach, she proves to be a solid historian. When she takes the second step, she slips into the role of a critical political scientist. Her second task is insofar more ambitious, posing an extremely demanding

³ For some aspects of a first attempt in this direction see Martin Beck: Resuming the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, in: Security Dialogue 34.2 (2003): 235-238.

⁴ Quoted after Helga Baumgarten.

methodological challenge as she puts a contra-factual question. Thus, since we lack the chance of an experiment, the results of the second part of her paper might trigger more controversial discussions.

Helga Baumgarten's answer to the question why the Palestinian side lost the "blame game" against Israel is divided in two parts. First, contrary to Yasir Arafat who remained fairly passive, the Israelis under the leadership of Ehud Barak "did not lose a minute (...) in starting their media offensive". Second, Israel managed to always be "on the offensive", whereas the Palestinians took a "defensive stand". Helga Baumgarten convincingly describes the means and tools used by Israel in order to win the public campaign. Yet, when she blames not only Yasir Arafat for his passivity, but also other members of the Palestinian leadership, who participated in the media debate, for their strategic mistakes, alternative viewpoints could be taken. Helga Baumgarten's argument against Saeb Erakat's "well-argued" contribution is that rather than "a polite and considerate statement", a "counter-attack against Barak" was missing. Although this interesting and refreshing perspective sheds new light on the discussion, it may be questionable whether this statement is really fair. The same is true when Baumgarten blames Hanan Ashrawi that "she too, however, apparently did not perceive the dangers coming from the Clinton Barak press campaign (...) and therefore did not even attempt to counter the spin". Anyway, due to the counter-factual nature of the question posed by Helga Baumgarten, it is very difficult to decide such a debate in a scientific way. Let us assume for a moment that the two politicians criticized by Baumgarten would have done what she expected them to do, namely to play the blame game by coming up with a "direct and also angry Palestinian response" to Barak and Clinton. Furthermore, let us assume that, despite such an action, the Palestinians would have lost the blame game. In this case, one could argue that it was a strategic mistake of the Palestinian side to get involved in the blame game instead of arguing that, in the words of Erakat, "it is pointless to play the blame game or resort to prophecies of doom and gloom. No one

is at fault because there was no failure. We made real progress at Camp David and the imperative now is to build on that progress and keep the momentum going.”⁵ Such an interpretation could claim the same degree of plausibility as the one presented by Helga Baumgarten, especially since she gives some evidence that Bill Clinton’s support for Barak, coupled with Israel’s privileged access to international mass media, plus Arafat’s passivity, left the Palestinian side with few chances to win the media campaign regardless of which strategy would have been taken.

In order to come closer to an answer of the very complicated question why the Israeli side managed to take some benefits of the failed negotiation process, whereas the Palestinian leadership was more or less paralyzed, one should start with one or several theoretical insights, testing whether they can help to solve the puzzle. One approach of this kind to be discussed here briefly starts with the widely accepted theorem that democracies are superior to authoritarian regimes in terms of political effectiveness. Keeping in mind that, due to a severe power asymmetry on the international level, the Palestinian side was anyway at the disadvantage vis-à-vis Israel; such an approach may provide us with at least three important insights. First, as covered by Helga Baumgarten, although the failure of Camp David and Taba was a major blow to the political career of Barak and Arafat alike, only the former showed some leadership quality by playing the blame game, whereas Arafat remained passive. Instead of facing the difficult situation, he arrogantly declared that those who do not like “independence for our state with Jerusalem as its capital” might “just as well drink the waters of the Dead Sea”.⁶ Second, the Israeli government paved the road for a major policy change by declaring the achieved progress in Camp David and Taba for null and void. Barak obviously did so in order to give utmost

⁵ Quoted after Helga Baumgarten.

⁶ Quoted after Helga Baumgarten.

flexibility to any future Israeli government to exert its superior power capabilities against the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people. Third, although Barak won the “blame game” on the international level, he had to pay a high price for the failure of Camp David and Taba on the national stage. The Israeli people forced Barak to take political responsibility for the failure of the Oslo Peace Process by voting him out of office, whereas the Palestinian system lacked the ability to adapt to the new situation by producing a new coherent strategy and/or a fresh leadership.

Helga Baumgarten’s paper is a very important contribution to the debate on the “blame game”. If her findings will be taken seriously by the Palestinian, Israeli and international public and the scientific community alike -and I strongly wish so-, this will add to a revision of the orthodox history on Camp David and Taba.

Palestinians and Myth Production in the Context of Camp David

Suleiman Rabadi*

Dr. Helga Baumgarten in her article “The Myth of Camp David or the Distortion of The Palestinian Narrative” stated by embarking on achieving three objectives:

- 1- To examine what has actually happened in Camp David, by reviewing the primary and secondary literature.
- 2- To trace the creation of the Israeli reading, the Myth of Camp David, and the success of the Palestinians in undermining this myth.
- 3- To provoke a discussion of the role of the spins of myth creation, and of the media in major international conflicts.

I think in the three mentioned objectives, Dr. Baumgarten did an excellent job in clarifying the three aforementioned issues, putting things in perspective, explaining, in a rather detailed, sometimes exhaustive, manner the relation between the three issues at hand. The paper is a must reading to understand the process of blaming the Palestinians for the failure of Camp David II, and how this blame was transformed to a process of undermining the Palestinian leadership. I am not going to discuss the details of the process for they are rather self evident in the paper.

It was clear from the beginning that the paper was not an assessment of Palestinian negotiation performance in Camp David, or at least it was an undeclared positive assessment of Palestinian performance, taking into consideration the pressures that the Palestinians were facing, which was practiced by all the parties,

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including the Arab World, and the biased international media. Palestinians refused in the Camp David negotiations to succumb to Israeli terms that were backed by the US Administration, which necessitated the creation of the Camp David Myth by the Israelis and the Americans.

What was the real focal point in the paper is the ability or lack of it, on the Palestinian side to counter argue the Myth of Camp David, that singled the Palestinians as the responsible party to sabotaging any agreement, while the Israelis' were portrayed as the party who made painful concessions in that summit. Dr. Baumgarten thinks that the Palestinians failed in exposing the Myth of Camp David and were too late in counter arguing the main assumptions of the myth. The three questions at the end of the paper are quite important and are crucial in any debate to assess the extent to which the Palestinians failed or succeeded in their endeavor to explain to the world their point of view. I will attempt to tackle the raised questions, which are: Could the Palestinian have reacted to the myth production and prevented it? Did the Palestinians have a realistic chance in the public arena, the media and prevent the production of the myth? What prevented them from taking up the gauntlet thrown by Barak and Clinton and the Israeli (and also the American) propaganda machines.

It goes without saying that the Palestinians lack the necessary tools, infrastructure, and foremost real political support that the Israeli side has internally and worldwide. This does not mean that the Palestinians are excused in their incapability of using the entire available resources in a more professional and aggressive manner to explain their position to the world. The Palestinians came a long way in that respect, but still, much has to be done at the level of political vision and political performance in order to be able to rise to the challenges that they are facing. Influencing Western public opinion, or being real players in the internal system of public opinion-making

in the West requires pre-conditions that the Palestinians and the Arabs do not possess, and due to the way things are evolving after the 11th of September, one can't see it happening in the near future.

Myth Creation

The Israelis have mastered and perfected the profession of myth creation, starting with the first Zionist congress up to date. The Palestinians learned from this experience, and attempted in the years since the establishment of the State of Israel to counter argue Israeli myths, successful at times but unsuccessful most of the times. The well-oiled and well-established Israeli propaganda-machine, mentioned by Dr. Baumgarten, was able to situate itself well at the organizational and political levels in the West and especially in the USA. The Israeli narrative captured the minds and hearts of the West, using to the utmost the Eurocentric/Americana vision of the Judeo-Christian civilizations' superiority to all other civilizations as the suitable backdrop to any attempt at dismantling the marriage of convenience and mutual interests that existed between Israel and the West. Israel's presence, through the Jewish communities, in the internal political game, especially in the US and to a lesser extent among the main European powers, made it more difficult to achieve any success in that direction.

Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in the West were and are disorganized and self-indulged rendering them unable to play the same role the Jewish communities played in influencing the internal political game, or in showing any real presence in the media. What the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities have been doing in the West is, either try to totally assimilate in these societies, or isolate themselves in ghettos. In both cases, they can't be effective advocates of any Arab or Muslim cause.

In this situation, it is really unrealistic to ask the Palestinians to create all these pre-conditions that are necessary to be able to

influence the political game, the media and society at large with no real foot soldiers to the work and a well-oiled infrastructure to face myth creation in the different aspects perpetuated. In this sense, Dr. Baumgarten has been reiterating the old unrealistic dream, which was voiced by Edward Sai'd, Hisham Sharabi, Ibrahim Abu Lughod, and others, of trying to gain ground in the West at the political and cultural levels, like the Jewish communities have done in the West. We have to admit that we can't do it, and stop tormenting and whipping ourselves for our impotence vis-à-vis this issue. This does not mean that we have to ignore this arena, and it does not mean that we are excused in our unprofessional performance, but we have to be humble in our goals, do our best and elevate the anti to a higher level. We have to take into consideration the balance of power, and to downplay our illusions about the West, and for that matter, the role of the Arabs and Muslims in the West.

The hard core fact is that myth creation has and will always be the tool of the powerful and the only way to dismantle myths is to change the balance of power. It is important to counter argue myths, but it is not enough; things have to change on the ground to give power to the counter argument. In that sense, the Palestinian narrative can't, in the foreseeable future, be at the same level against the Camp David Myth or any other myths created by Israel. Palestinians have to improve their performance and timing and this task needs much work and less self-whipping.

Western Media and Public Opinion

It seems that Dr. Baumgarten is too optimistic about Western media and Western public opinion. The American/British invasion of Iraq, against the will of most of the world and the United Nations, should yet teach us another lesson about the role of the media and for that matter, Western public opinion. The media is becoming less and less critical of governments, especially when it has to do with international conflicts, and at

the best quite shy in the name of ‘impartiality’. The media in the US/ UK has actually played the role of the war Drummer, perpetuating the myths about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Public opinion has been active especially in UK but with no real influence on stopping the war. When the war started, everybody rallied behind the boys at the front. The media used the most censored, sentimentalized sorry telling in the history of modern coverage. We shouldn’t be surprised then that Western media did not seek the real story of what had happened in Camp David. Western media have joined the game of dividing the world to good guys and bad guys (terrorists), and anybody who is against the unholy US/UK alliance is earmarked as pro-terrorist. The belief that the Palestinians should have done more is obvious from the narrative in the paper, but I wouldn’t have given it the weight that Dr. Baumgarten has given to it in effecting the public opinion or Western attitude.

Did Palestinian Negotiators, Intentionally, Stayed out of the Blame Game?

I wouldn’t be that optimistic about the suaveness or political acuteness of Palestinian political leaders. The Palestinian leadership itself, has a lot of illusions about the role of the United States as a broker, about the Israeli political system Israeli Public opinion and about the making of public opinion in the West. These illusions have to be deconstructed in order to get out of the viscous circle of the creation of Palestinian myths that are sometimes more destructive than the myths created by Israeli propaganda machine. The question to be posed is were the calculation of leadership correct in trying to change the situation on the ground since they were unable to match the Israeli and American propaganda machine in the blame game.

The argument in the paper, although not explicit, would give a positive answer to the previous question. In the section about

the Intifada, Clinton parameters and the Taba conference, it is argued that the changes in the Israeli and American positions, although not long lasting, in their annulment after the Israeli elections, the Taba conference came as a result of the Intifada and what was happening on the ground. It did not come as a result of a media blitz to counter argue the Israeli/American Camp David myth. As I said earlier, it is wishful thinking that the Palestinians could win the war of media and perceptions, without gaining on the ground. Maybe the illusions of the Palestinian leadership have delayed their response to the myth creation, but maybe their illusions this time played well in an intentional way, and maybe Arafat's tactics of changing the situation on the ground were needed more than a media blitz, but the militarization of the Intifada was the biggest sin that undermined any attempt to achieve further gains on the ground.

Using the Myth to Change the Palestinian Leadership

The most interesting part of the Camp David Myth is how it was used to create an atmosphere that perpetuated the myth of the inevitability of Palestinian violence and how the Palestinians fell in the trap by militarizing the Intifada. The other interesting aspect is the long term preparations of trying to create the pre-conditions to undermine and eventually, dispose of the Palestinian leadership as outlined in the paper. After Camp David II, the Israelis and the Americans attempted systematically to set the ground for an alternative Palestinian leadership by character assassinating Arafat and depicting him as the cause of all evils. I think these two issues are of utmost importance and should be subjected to further discussion.

Changing the leadership to a village league style leadership has been always an Israeli dream. The character assassination of Arafat, which goes beyond Arafat persona, is to change the

Palestinian leadership and substitute it with village league style leadership in order to insure Palestinian signature on final status issues that would be tailored according to Israeli vision and considerations. For sure, major changes in the Palestinian Political System, including the role of the presidency, should take place, but it has to be as an outcome of internal political debate and a drastic change in the whole political environment. The problem is that neither the US nor Israel are really concerned about a more democratic system in Palestine; they just want a village league style leadership and a subservient Palestinian population that would sign a treaty succumbing to the Israeli conditions. I think they also have illusions that they have to deal with.

Palestinians should rethink about their methods and tools of fighting occupation, and the usefulness of these tools in creating facts on the ground that would be instrumental in supporting any negotiations. Media should be given more attention and a better infrastructure should be in place. I think a demilitarized Intifada, coupled with a better vision, better media coverage, and real internal reforms could be instrumental in affecting international politics than just engaging in the blame games.