

The United States has cooperated with Israel in all stages of the war, in all phases of the war. Israel would never have *dared* to start this war without the consent of the United States. Throughout the war, the United States has done everything possible to prevent a ceasefire, and I have a strong suspicion that the United States would have really liked Israel to provoke Syria into a war, as a part of the general move to enlarge its confrontation with Iran.

I don't think that the United States will exert any pressure on Israel to come to an agreement with the Syrians—except if there is a major change of policy in Washington, D.C.

Q: Do you think that the call by some peace activists to boycott Israeli cultural figures or divest from Israeli corporations—do you think those measures are likely to be productive against Israel the way they were against South Africa? The way they were helpful in getting rid of apartheid in South Africa?

Avnery: I think this comparison with South Africa is misleading, because the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are quite different, and circumstances are different. In South Africa, the solution was to create a unified state in which

the black majority would rule democratically. The solution of our conflict here could not possibly be one state in which Palestinians and Israelis live together. This is an unrealistic idea. What everybody is calling for now is a two-state solution. The state of Israel living side-by-side with the state of Palestine. This is what my my friends and I have proposed more than 50 years ago, when we were a handful of people all over the world who believed in this idea, and this has now been adopted by practically the whole world, including the United States, Europe, Russia, and the United Nations.

So this is what we have to do: If we want to put an end to the war between Israel and the Arab world, then we must first of all solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The solution is clearly to allow the Palestinians to set up their state in all the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with its capital in Arab East Jerusalem.

This I think is the solution which everybody knows is the right one, but for reasons for which we are to blame, but not only we Israelis, this solution does not come about. Instead we have a very brutal war in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, which has been overshadowed by the Lebanon war, but

Uri Avnery: Peace Warrior

Uri Avnery is a man of principle, who, at every point in Israel's history, acted on the basis of doing what was moral, and could achieve justice for all the human beings concerned. Throughout his long political career, he has organized friends, "enemies," Knesset members, and American Jews, among others, to also act morally. (Gush Shalom, the Israeli Peace Bloc which Avnery heads, has posted an extensive biography of Avnery at <http://www.avnery-news.co.il/english/uri2.html>, of which the following is a condensation.)

Born in Beckum, Westphalia, Germany in 1923, he and his family moved to Palestine in 1933, just after Hitler came to power. His family was very poor, and Avnery left school at age 14 to work. At 15, he joined the Irgun, the underground force fighting the British colonialists, but he left the group after three years because of its anti-Arab attitudes, its terrorist methods, and its right-wing ideology.

Avnery's first political group, in 1946, "Young Palestine," contended that the new Hebrew nation was "part of Asia and the natural ally of the Arab nation." A year later, he published a pamphlet calling for "an alliance of the Hebrew and Arab national movements in order to liberate the common 'Semitic Region' . . . and create a Semitic

community and common market, as part of the emerging third world." He used the term Semitic in order to avoid the colonial designation of "Middle East."

He served in the 1948 war as a combat soldier, and his reports from the battlefield were published in *Ha'aretz*. These reports were collected into a book that became a bestseller, but a follow-up book, *The Other Side of the Coin*, which described the war atrocities and the expulsion of the Palestinians, was boycotted.

Avnery was severely wounded just before the war ended. After a long convalescence, he joined *Ha'aretz* as an editorial writer, but left because he was not allowed to say what he thought, especially about the Ben Gurion government's expropriation of Arab lands. He then started his own mass-circulation magazine, *Haolam Hazeh*, which aggressively attacked the Israeli establishment, exposing political and economic corruption, and proposing alternative national policies. It advocated a secular state, equal rights for all citizens, and, since the 1950s, the creation of a Palestinian state.

Perhaps the most telling compliment paid to Avnery was the accusation by a right-wing ideologue that Avnery had "poisoned" two generations of Israeli youth, turning them toward an ideology of "integration in the Semitic Region." He was also labeled "Public Enemy Number 1," by Israel's secret service chief; his editorial offices were bombed several times, wounding staff members, and he himself was ambushed and had both his hands broken.

has not gone away. It's going on all the time—before, during, and after the Lebanon War.

Q: Some of us read that Israel can't make peace with the Palestinians right now because there's no one to talk to, and they've elected a government that is against the very existence of Israel. How do you feel about that?

Avnery: I think that this is a stupid idea, because the Palestinian people is there. They have elected a government. With this government, you must negotiate. When you are playing football, you cannot appoint the opposite team and the opposite coach. You have to play with the team which is in the field. If the Palestinians have—for reasons which we don't need to go into, but which are perfectly understandable—if the Palestinians have elected the Hamas movement as its leader, then we have to negotiate with Hamas, as much as we have to negotiate in the north with Hezbollah.

It's no use to demonize the other side, and say we can't talk with them because they are like this, or that. We have to negotiate with whoever is leading the Palestinian people, and I don't care a damn who he is. What I care for is what terms

Avnery created a new political party in 1965, and gained a seat in the Knesset the same year. In 1969, his party gained two seats. During his years in the Knesset, Avnery made more than 1,000 speeches, and served as a beacon for justice. Golda Meir was so irritated by Avnery that in a Knesset speech she announced, "I am ready to mount the barricades in order to get Avnery out of the Knesset."

As an advocate for Palestinian independence and a two-state solution, Avnery was at first attacked by the Palestine Liberation Organization, but by 1974, as the PLO position changed, he was holding secret meetings with PLO officials. In 1977, he joined with other peace groups to form a new party, and again served in the Knesset in 1979, giving up his seat two years later for an Arab colleague.

Avnery first met with Yasser Arafat at the height of the battle of Beirut in 1982, and subsequently met with him several times. The Gush Shalom group grew out of a Jewish and Arab Israeli protest to expulsions of Palestinians in 1992. In recent years, Avnery and Gush Shalom have held hundreds of joint Israeli-Palestinian demonstrations against settlements in the Occupied Territories, house demolitions, and land confiscation.

Avnery's regular commentaries on the peace front and the crimes of the establishment are available on the Gush Shalom website.

—*Marjorie Mazel Hecht*

can we achieve.

Hamas is ready to negotiate. I can say this from personal knowledge because I have conducted contacts with the leadership of Hamas. They are ready to negotiate, and we must come to terms with Hamas on the same basis as we should have come to terms with Fatah and Yasser Arafat.

Q: Can you say something more about the relationship of the Israeli peace camp with the Palestinians after the election of the Hamas government?

Avnery: Well, we had the same difference of opinion as we had about the Lebanon War. Peace Now and this part of the peace movement has refused to negotiate with Hamas. As my friends and I and the radical peace movement have said, as I said just now, we must negotiate with Hamas, because Hamas has been elected. We cannot choose the Palestinian leadership. The Palestinian people have elected both Mr. Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) as its President, and Hamas as its government, and we must negotiate with any or both of them. It really does not make a big difference.

The question is not with whom we negotiate. The question is what do we want to negotiate about. Are we ready to relinquish the Occupied Territories, the territories which we have occupied since 1967. Are we ready to give them back? Allow the Palestinians to create a real, viable Palestinian state within the borders of 1967, or not? If we are not ready to do that, then it's not really important with whom we do *not* negotiate, and with whom we do *not* reach agreement.

If we are ready to do that, we shall, and we must negotiate with anyone whom the Palestinians accept as their leadership. Otherwise, it is stupid to conduct negotiations with somebody who cannot deliver. The only force which can deliver is the force which has been elected by the Palestinians.

Q: Isn't there a risk that if Israel returned the West Bank, that there would be rockets fired against its cities, as there is today in Gaza?

Avnery: There are rockets in Gaza because the war is going on. Rockets are a part of the war. We sent our airplanes to destroy houses and kill, assassinate, Palestinian leaders, and they sent rockets. That's what the war is all about. It's the same as we had in Lebanon. We bombarded Lebanon almost back to the Stone Age, and they sent rockets against our towns and villages. This is war. We are not talking about the situation of the war, we are talking about peace. When you have peace, you don't get rockets.

Q: What kind of activity from the Israeli peace camp is most likely to help sway public opinion there? What's most productive for Gush Shalom and your allies on the left?

Avnery: Our job is to convince public opinion. As I said, at this moment, there is a general dissatisfaction with the war in Lebanon. People realize that we did not win the war. This by