

Dear Friends of the **Palestine-Israel Journal**,

A new and important book has just been published entitled, *Holy Land Mosaic: Stories of Cooperation and Coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.). The author, Daniel Gavron, served as the Israeli Co-Managing Editor of the **Palestine-Israel Journal's (PIJ)** first issue in 1994. He included a chapter on joint media initiatives consisting of his memories of the **PIJ's** origins along with reflections and comments based on discussions with the editors.

We recommend that you read the entire book.

Thank you for your continued support!

Hillel Schenker

Co-Editor

Palestine-Israel Journal

www.pij.org

Holy Land Mosaic: Stories of Cooperation and Coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians

By Daniel Gavron

(Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.) 2007

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Joint Media Initiatives

The problems were mainly technical. That is how I remember it, looking back from the perspective of a dozen years to the first edition of a new joint magazine of Israelis and Palestinians. I was co-managing editor with Khuloud Totah, a Palestinian lady who had been living in Jordan. Both of us had been recruited by Ziad Abu-Zayyad and the late Victor Cygielman, the founding editors of the journal.

The name, by the way, was entirely fortuitous. We were sitting around putting forward ideas at random, and tending toward *Israeli-Palestinian Magazine*, or something of the sort, when Doreen, the South African-born wife of Dr. Simcha Bahiri, one of the founding team, who happened to be present, interrupted us: "Why does Israel always have to be first?" she demanded. "Give the Palestinians a chance."

When Abu-Zayyad heard this, he fastened on to the idea with great determination. The rest of us were prepared to go along, and so it became *Palestine-Israel Journal*. I was quite keen on "quarterly," but the two editors, who had started their venture with a very modest budget, did not want to commit themselves to four times a year at that point. They were not quite sure how things would work out.

Cygielman had been a leading member of the editorial board of the recently defunct *New Outlook*, a dovish Israeli monthly; Abu-Zayyad, an attorney, for a time had edited a biweekly Hebrew magazine for Palestinians and Israelis called *Gesher* [bridge]. They got together and conceived the idea of an English-language joint project. Cygielman had some difficulty in making the transition. In his special article for the first edition, he quoted his Palestinian friend the late Rashid Hussein to explain how the establishment of Israel, a triumph for the Jews, had been a tragedy for the Palestinians Arabs.

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"Victor," I protested. "You are no longer at *New Outlook*. You don't have to explain the Palestinian side to an Israeli audience. This is a joint magazine: let the Palestinians explain their version-your job is to put over an Israeli point of view."

My next task was to propose to Manuel Hassassian, a Palestinian academic from Bethlehem (who is currently the PLO representative in London) that he should forgo some of his more extreme language when describing the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Khuloud, my Palestinian colleague, had to deal with similar problems, but my abiding memory is of the two of us struggling with an impossible computer system in Abu-Zayyad's East Jerusalem office.

I could only blame my own side, because the system had been installed by Israeli technicians. Often we lost whole passages of text. Frequently we swore and gnashed our teeth as the computer refused to indent paragraphs, change fonts, or excise words. We were often on the verge of despair—not about the content, but because of the frustration of putting words on the page. In the end, we managed it somehow, and in January 1994, the first edition of the new magazine appeared. Khuloud and I were physically and mentally exhausted. It was not because of the contents and style of the journal about which we sometimes argued, but on which we always reached consensus. It was because of that terrible computer program, which almost prevented the emergence of any content at all, whatever the style. The second edition was produced on a modern computer, but neither of us stayed around to enjoy the relative ease of production. Khuloud decamped back to Amman; I left to write a book.

New managing editors Leila Dabdoub and Dan Leon were to take the journal forward and set it on strong foundations. It has been going for a dozen years and some forty editions. The latest, volume 13, number 3, is technically vastly superior to that first production, but I still think that Khuloud and I deserve some credit. Without our Herculean efforts, the first edition would not have appeared, and maybe the subsequent achievements would not have been possible. I continued to serve on the editorial board, but after a few more editions, I dropped out of that also, so I can relate to it with detachment. The forgoing paragraphs, then, are in the nature of a declaration of interest.

A perusal of the articles in *Palestine-Israel Journal* enables one to follow Middle East developments of the past decade or so. In these years, the journal has published articles by Israelis, Palestinians, Europeans, Americans, and others. It has held regular roundtable discussions covering every crisis and each problem. It has discussed politics, security, religion, culture, borders, refugees, terror, occupation, trauma, human rights, and rival narratives.

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The first edition in the winter of 1994 dealt with such subjects as "Time for Reconciliation," "The Road to Mutual Recognition," and "From Armed Struggle to Negotiation." These were appropriate matters in the optimistic Oslo years. The latest edition in the winter of 2006 considers "Conflict Management, Not Overall Solution" by Moshe Amirav and "The Concept of Hudna [Truce] in Islamic Sources" by Mustafa Abu-Sway, reflecting the more modest expectations that the past six years of violence have wrought. Amirav, a member of the new centrist Kadima Party in Israel, states that conditions are not ripe for a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He proposes an Israeli withdrawal from most of the West Bank and a cessation of hostilities for a defined period of ten years. In other words, he is suggesting an Islamic-style *hudna*, or truce. In his article, Mustafa Abu-Sway, the director of Islamic Research Center at Al-Kuds University, asserts that the traditional Muslim concept of *hudna*, a ten-year truce, allows the parties to reconsider its terms, but mutual respect for its terms can lead to a renewal, equivalent to a permanent treaty.

From the above it is clear that the journal is not negative or pessimistic, but, like everyone else, its idealism has been battered by current reality. The editorial board has grown from ten to twenty-five; the sponsors from fifteen to twenty-six. The budget, boosted by a big grant from the European Union, has increased at least tenfold. Ziad Abu-Zayyad remains the Palestinian editor; the current Israeli editor is Hillel Schenker, a former American who has lived in Israel since 1963.

Abu-Zayyad, an attorney and journalist, was one of the first Palestinians to reach out to Israelis after

the Six Day War of 1967. His father had been an employee of the Jerusalem Municipality during British Mandate times and he immediately made contact with one of his father's former Jewish colleagues. "I called him at the office and nobody there spoke Arabic or English," he recalls. "I thought to myself that it was absurd that we couldn't communicate, when we lived so close to each other."

Before the end of 1967, Abu-Zayyad was studying Hebrew at the Beit Ha'am Community Center in West Jerusalem, and shortly afterwards he began addressing a variety of Israeli audiences in halls, private homes, kibbutzim, and other venues. He became an early supporter of the two-state solution, but was firmly opposed to participating in the Jerusalem Municipal Council. He felt (and still feels) that participation in a joint council would be tantamount to recognizing the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. Despite this, he rejects an often-heard Palestinian argument that any cooperation with Israelis signifies recognition of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. "Any Israeli, who is against the occupation and sees me as a partner and recognizes my rights, is my ally," he declares. "Peace is a shared interest of Israelis and Palestinians-nobody is doing anybody a favor."

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In 1986, he left the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Fajr* to found *Gesher*, a Hebrew biweekly, which aimed to carry the Palestinian point of view to Israelis, including a section on local culture, literature, and folklore. It never made a profit, but he kept it going for five years. He had returned to practicing law when Victor Cygielman approached him with the idea of a new journal in English. It was established during the Oslo years when everyone was optimistic about peace, but it has survived successfully during the violent confrontation of the past six years.

When the second Intifada erupted in the fall of 2000, the Palestinian minister in charge of NGOs gave an order that all joint activities with Israelis be frozen, but Abu-Zayyad stood firm. The purpose of *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Abu-Zayyad notes, is to oppose the occupation and bring it to an end. The Israelis and Palestinians working there are on the same track. "I continue to work with Israelis," he explains, "because I believe that it is *not* normalizing the occupation. Our line is clear."

In 1996, Abu-Zayyad was elected as an independent member of the parliament of the Palestinian Authority, but he recently lost his seat to the Hamas Islamic Party. He is a practicing Muslim who prays five times a day and attends mosque on Friday, but he is not close to Hamas politically. The journal gives a platform to anyone except those who deny either side's right to independence and freedom. The editors work together amicably, he says. They argue, but they don't fight. They find shared points of view and sometimes manage to convince each other. Ziad draws the line at Jewish settlers. He cannot envisage giving them a platform, as they are the instruments of occupation. Apart from that, the journal wants to reach as wide an audience as possible on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide.

This is confirmed by Israeli editor Hillel Schenker, who says that AbuZayyad is just as concerned as he is to maintain contacts with the Israeli mainstream. He has even expressed concern that one of the more radical Israeli staff members should not drag the journal "too far to the left."

"There are mutual examples of concessions," notes Schenker. "We agreed not to have settlers contributing, and Ziad agreed to include the topic of Holocaust denial, although he thought it was not a topic for the journal. We explained that it was important to Israelis and he accepted that." Schenker was a member of the left-wing Hashomer Hatzair youth movement in the United States and a kibbutznik before joining *New Outlook*, an Israeli magazine founded jointly by Israeli Jews and Arabs in 1957. For two decades, the magazine struggled to present a dovish view to the Israeli public. After the 1967 war, *New Outlook* was in the forefront of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians. The first meetings of Peace Now were held in its editorial offices.

Representing the magazine in New York, Schenker linked up with the Palestinian paper *Al-Fajr* to organize a high-level meeting of Israelis and

Palestinians at Columbia University in the days when Israelis were forbidden to meet with members of the PLO, although its “academic” sponsorship made it “legal.” Later, Nabil Shaath, who served as foreign minister of the Palestinian Authority, would say that it was the first time that he realized that the Palestinians had “real partners” on the Israeli side.

Schenker, who became managing editor of *Palestine-Israel Journal* in 2003 and editor the following year, is intrigued by the internal disputes among the Palestinians. He thinks that since Hamas won the PA elections in 2006, pro-peace Palestinians have been less ambivalent about working with Israelis. There are still Palestinians who say, “No normalization until the end of occupation,” but their voice has become weaker.

Despite the violence of the past six years and the ongoing deadlock, Ziad Abu-Zayyad remains hopeful. Palestinians have invested in their children’s education, he says. “Once we invested in land and the Israelis took away our land,” he remarks. “Nobody can take away education. For example, so many of the doctors in the Arab countries are Palestinians-and not just in the Arab world: look at your Israeli hospitals! The occupation is not natural. It won’t last, and then we will live together in mutual respect and cooperation.”