**Netanyahu is pulling the rug out from underneath our feet**

**Shaul Arieli, October 10, 2019**

Two historic announcements made in November forced the Zionist movement to decide and determine its position on the conflict with the Palestinians. While its position in relation to the Balfour Declaration of 1917 enjoyed legitimacy and support from the international community, its position under Netanyahu's rule regarding the PLO's 1988 recognition of UN Resolution 242, which includes recognition of the State of Israel, is contrary to the international community's position, and even threatens to sabotage the very legitimacy that was given to the Balfour Declaration.

The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, which is also according to Edward Said, who was a member of the PLO Executive Committee, is "The Legal Basis of the Zionist demand of Palestine" (in his 1978 book "Orientalism"), forced the Zionist movement to define the essence of its political claim. Indeed, in the decision of the First Zionist Congress in Basel, 1897, it was stated that "Zionism seeks to establish a Jewish home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel," but the substance of that home was not established.

Until the occupation of the country by the British, the Zionist movement refrained from presenting clear claims. The Ottoman government rejected all the generous suggestions offered by Herzl and others. In October 1898, Herzl wrote in his journal of the trip to the land of Israel about the concern of the old Jewish Yeshuv with supporting Zionism: "the Sephardi Rabbi Meir made it clear to me what the position of the chief rabbis here is; that they do not want to jeopardize their relationship with the Turkish authorities."

Until and shortly after the Balfour Declaration, some of the leaders of the Zionist movement continued to conceal or obscure their goal: the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. When Haim Weizman arrived in the land of Israel after the Balfour Declaration, in which the concept of a "National Home" was first established, David Ben-Gurion asked him why the Zionist Organization did not demand "simply a Hebrew state in the land of Israel?", Weizman answered: "We didn't demand... because we wouldn't have gotten it. We only demanded conditions that would allow for a Jewish state in the future. This is a question of tactics".

Ze'ev Jabotinsky explained in a cynical tone in his 1923 "Iron Wall" article, what do the words "conditions that would allow" mean for Arabs and Jews, and first and foremost, concerning Jewish immigration: "Many of us still believe in our innocence, as if some misunderstanding occurred: the Arabs did not understand us, and only for that reason, they are against us, but if we could explain to them how modest our intentions are, they would immediately reach out to us. This is a mistake that has already been proven ... Of course, the Zionists do not now dream of the expulsion of the Arabs, neither of oppressing them or of a Jewish government; Of course, at the present moment, they want only one thing - that the Arabs will not interfere with immigration. The Zionists promise that they will immigrate to Israel only according to the economic absorption capacity of the Land of Israel. But in this regard, the Arabs never had any doubts: ... "Only this" do the Zionists want; And precisely this is not what the Arabs want, because then the Jews will become the majority, and then a Jewish government will be established, and then the fate of the Arab minority will depend on the good will of the Jews."

Later, the Arabs prophetically explained their opposition "only" to this important condition: "the day is not far when Zionism will succeed in wiping the footprints of the Arabs from the land," the newspaper Al-Jameh al-Arabiya stated in an editorial from July 10, 1936, adding: "Will the establishment of the Jewish National Home be complete when the number of Jews in Palestine reaches five hundred thousand, one million ... or ten millions, or after the Jews purchase all of Palestine?".

Others in the Zionist leadership demanded a position to be made clear, even if it leads to a struggle with the Arabs of the land. On January 2, 1918, Elijah Golomb said at the first Constituent Assembly of the Yeshuv in Jaffa: "After the Declaration (Balfour Declaration) we can no longer deny our desire for governance over the Land of Israel. And the Arabs will not give up the land in which they are the majority of inhabitants. We need to make our ambition a real right by action, and by strength to support our historical and moral rights and give them a realistic existence". Ben-Gurion also clearly stated the purpose, in the Third Constituent Assembly, on December 20, 1918: "Our national demand ... has one name only, it is the same name that Dr. Herzl called his notebook: 'The State of the Jews.' Although for political reasons, the explicit name was not pronounced in the Basel platform (in the Zionist Congress), but now that the political conditions have changed, the movement must not give up its two-thousand-year-old dream, and so "a Hebrew state - this is our demand."

Jabotinsky found in the international commitment a "Zionist answer" to the expected Arab opposition: "Why do we need the Balfour Declaration? What do we need the mandate for? Their significance for us lies in the fact that an external force has undertaken to create such conditions of administrative support and security in the land, where the local population, despite all its wishes, is denied the possibility of interfering with our settlement administratively or physically. And we all, without exception, urge this external force, every day, to play its role firmly and without hesitation".

PLO's November 15, 1988, acceptance of UN Resolution 181 (Partition) as part of the Declaration of a Palestinian State, and its continuation by Yasser Arafat in December 1988, at a Geneva Press Conference, states: "We ... recognize 242 and 338 as the basis for negotiations with Israel". His successor, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), also said more clearly, in an interview he gave to the Al-Arabiya channel on April 23, 2008: the 1947 opportunity for division (of the land) was lost, and beforehand the opportunity during the Phil commission. We do not want to miss another opportunity. We therefore received the 1948 and 1967 divisions, which do not include more than 22% of historic Palestine". Later, in an interview he gave to Channel 2 in Israel, on November 2, 2012, he said: "Palestine is now within the 1967 borders and its capital is in East Jerusalem. Now and forever. Only the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are Palestine."

This dramatic change in the Palestinian leadership's position, at once removed the basis for the claim that no Palestinian partner recognizes Israel and is ready to accept international decisions, and thus refuted Israeli justification for continued control of the occupied territories. The decision again forced Israel to decide whether, as it has declared for decades, it seeks to resolve the conflict under international decisions or not.

The Israeli response began with the Oslo Accords, led by the Labor Party, headed by Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, aimed at settling the dispute in a final settlement on the basis of Resolution 242. Ehud Barak was far from meeting the international interpretation of that resolution in his proposals at Camp David 2000 and Taba 2001 and the only one who made the historic "leap of faith", which left only technical gaps between the parties, was Ehud Olmert in Annapolis 2008.

On the other hand, the rejecters of compromise based on international decisions, led by Benjamin Netanyahu and the Nationalist Messianic parties, had to seek and present other reasons for their principled refusal to establish a Palestinian state. Their refusal was absolute. The basic lines of Netanyahu's first government in 1996 read: "The government will oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state," and no mention was made of the implementation of the pending clauses of the interim agreement. In response to criticism coming from right-wing circles about his transfer of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority, Netanyahu said on September 6, 1997: "There will be no Palestinian state ... There will be no foreign sovereignty between the Jordan and the sea. Jewish presence and Jewish settlement in all of Judea and Samaria will live, prosper and will exist forever. "

In his recent governments, Netanyahu maintained the same policy. In March 2015, he promised, "If I get elected, there won't be a Palestinian state in my term"; and he kept his promise. In March 2019, Netanyahu said at a Likud gathering: "Anyone who opposes a Palestinian state needs to support the transfer of funds to Hamas. Maintaining the separation of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza helps us to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state".

In order to rationalize his recalcitrant position, Netanyahu had to re-adopt the concept of "the phases theory": "the PLO's policy is built on gradual phases and its purpose is to destroy the State of Israel and not reach a settlement with it ...", he wrote in his book "A Place under the Sun"; he threatened that "The PLO state, which will be transplanted 15 km off the coast of Tel Aviv, would be an immediate threat of death to the Jewish state". In 2001, Israel's channel 10's microphone captured Netanyahu's remarks during a consolation visit to Ofra settlement, recounting how he procured from the Clinton administration a written statement that Israel alone would set the boundaries of its "military sites" in the West Bank that would remain in its hand. By defining the entire Jordan Valley as a security site, Netanyahu explained: "I stopped the Oslo Accords." In other words, without the valley, no agreement will be signed with the Palestinians and no Palestinian state will be established. Netanyahu clung to that line in the 2019 election, announcing his intention to annex the Jordan Valley.

His natural partners of Gush Emunim's successors remained true to the position of their leader, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who stated after the Six Day War: "This land is ours, there are no Arab territories and Arab lands here, but the lands of Israel, the eternal inheritance of our ancestors, and it, in all of its biblical boundaries belong to the rule of Israel". They were quick to reveal their goal - the realization of the messianic dream. In September 2016, the head of the Jewish Home party, Naphtali Bennett said: "On the subject of the Land of Israel, we need to move from containment to decision. We need to mark the dream, and the dream is that Judea and Samaria will be part of the sovereign land of Israel".

With Donald Trump's election to the US presidency, all inhibitions and pretending were removed: "There is room here for defining and realizing the national aspirations of only one people - the Jewish people. This hope, which is the mother of all sin, I kill to them. National aspirations? Palestinians? not here. Not at our expense". Bezalel Smutrich announced in September 2017.

In February 2019, dozens of coalition ministers and Knesset members signed a statement in this language: "I hereby pledge to be loyal to the Land of Israel, not to give up on our ancestral inheritance... I pledge to cancel the declaration of two states for two peoples, and replace it with this statement: Eretz Israel ... - One country to one people!" Netanyahu did not linger behind, announcing in April 2019: "We will gradually apply Israeli sovereignty over parts of Judea and Samaria."

With these intentions and declarations, if they are fulfilled, Netanyahu and his partners take away the political-legal groundwork for the establishment of the State of Israel. First, in the absence of any intention to grant full civil rights to the people of the West Bank (and the Gaza Strip), they violate the Balfour Declaration which read: "His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people… it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. Second, the denial to the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state in the Land of Israel is contrary to the partition decision, which is the legal basis for declaring the State of Israel, which states explicitly that the State was established "on the basis of the United Nations Decision."

The Israeli leadership would do well to adopt Abbas' sober approach to these two historic declarations. In his address to the UN assembly on September 16, 2016, he began with the words: "100 years have passed since the infamous Balfour Declaration", but he continued: "Therefore, we ask Britain to learn the lessons and be responsible in all areas for the implications of the Balfour Declaration ... including the establishment of a Palestine state. This is the least that Britain can do."

In the same vein, Abbas wrote in The Guardian in November 2017: "The physical act of signing the Balfour Declaration has taken place in the past and cannot be changed. But it can be repaired. It requires humility and courage. It will require dealing with the past, recognizing mistakes made, and taking tangible steps to correct those mistakes. This is the time for the British government to play its part, in taking concrete steps to end the occupation on the basis of international law and international decisions ... Recognizing Palestine in the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital may bring about the political rights of the Palestinian people. "