

This paper, by ADC Communications Director Hussein Ibish, is a direct response to “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians” by Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) On October 23, 2000, a few weeks into the new Intifada, Cordesman and CSIS rushed this lengthy intervention on the uprising into print on its website, www.csis.org. The purpose of the Cordesman’s paper is manifestly to influence the way in which the uprising, and more importantly, Israel’s brutal response to it, are received in policy making and opinion shaping circles in Washington, D.C. It also clearly attempts to prepare its readers for accepting far greater levels of Israeli repression, abuses, and even war crimes in coming months. ADC’s response is designed to demonstrate why Cordesman’s “analysis” and the implications of his paper ought to be rejected on pragmatic grounds, opposed on legal grounds, and repudiated on moral grounds. Ibish’s response to Cordesman was presented at a conference on the new uprising at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine (CPAP) in Washington D.C. on November 17, 2000.

Rationalizing Occupation: CSIS, Cordesman and the New Intifada

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A few weeks into the so-called “Al-Aqsa Intifada,” on October 23, 2000, Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), published a lengthy paper on the conflict on the Center’s website. “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians” presents itself as a “rough working draft,” and announces that it is a draft of a chapter for a forthcoming book. This disclaimer may indemnify the author and Center from observations about the numerous typos and grammatical and syntactical errors that pepper the text, but having rushed the document into internet publication, both are bound to its substantive content, which is the subject of this critique. The haste with which CSIS and Cordesman moved to introduce this analysis to the press, public and government circles is instructive. Its mission statements stress that the purpose of CSIS’ work is policy impact, and the Center is widely regarded as deeply intertwined with the Washington establishment. Numerous former government officials make up its staff, and Cordesman himself held several important posts in the executive branch. Indeed, given the intimate relations between CSIS and various elements of government, it is probably not an exaggeration to describe CSIS as a “quasi-official” American institution. Therefore, any significant intervention from CSIS, especially on unexpected, poorly-understood and dramatic developments for US policy such as the eruption of the new Intifada, is likely to reflect and, more importantly, lead thinking in Washington to a significant extent. Moreover, Anthony Cordesman is a well-established analyst of military and strategic issues in the

Middle East, having authored a number of books on the subject and held important media as well as government positions. The influence of CSIS and Cordesman, combined with the speed with which this analysis was introduced into the conversation on the new Intifada, strongly suggest that “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians” constitutes a serious intervention designed to influence U.S. reception of and policy responses to the uprising. Given the intense pro-Israel bias of the paper, its almost complete disregard for Palestinian perspectives and concerns, and its conclusions endorsing the widespread use of torture and human rights abuse to crush Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, this is deeply alarming.

Even if his conclusions are startlingly brutal, the basic analysis and attitude of Cordesman’s paper should be quite familiar to those who have followed the op/ed pages of major American newspapers during the first few weeks of the uprising. I would argue that extended policy analyses such as this (the paper runs to well over a hundred pages) constitute a crucial link between journalism and policy making, amplifying and extending the basic analyses sketched out in opinion pieces and staff editorials in newspapers which also enjoy a cooperative relationship with the government on most foreign policy issues. Patterns such as blaming the victim, ignoring history and international law, humanizing one set of victims while dehumanizing others, uncritically repeating official Israeli claims, and reporting on events in the occupied territories as if there were no occupation in place have been on full, dismal display in American press coverage of the uprising.¹ There have also been a number of deeply disturbing instances of intemperate, hostile and even obscene language and outright invective

used to describe Palestinians by otherwise respectable journalists in mainstream American publications. While Cordesman's intervention is free of such crude vulgarities, it engages in many of the same errors of judgement as the deeply flawed press coverage. A profound pro-Israel bias and blindness to the fundamental realities of the Palestinian experiences once again link bad reporting and spurious scholarship about events in the Middle East. This bias both reflects and informs the official and policy-making discourse on Palestine in Washington. Papers such as "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians" provide a valuable insight into the discourse which produces and legitimates a wholly one-sided policy favoring Israel, even at the expense of broader American interests in the region.

In characterizing Cordesman's intervention as an exercise in "rationalizing occupation," I mean, of course, both that it considers occupation to be a tolerable, even desirable, status quo and that it attempts to propose a coherent, efficient and effective strategy for enforcing that occupation. Cordesman's paper is not the analysis of the strategic positions of both sides given their aims and positions that it purports to be, but rather focuses almost exclusively on the challenges facing Israel in suppressing any major Palestinian effort to end the occupation. Palestinian aims, options and challenges are virtually absent, save for a few token and half-hearted passages which reflect little interest in these questions. A quick review of the endnotes to Cordesman's paper gives a clear indication of the concerns and perspectives that inform his analysis. 74 citations come from western sources, mostly major American newspapers or official documents from government agencies such as the State Department and CIA, many of which

reflect the deep pro-Israel bias we are discussing. 35 come from Israeli or overtly pro-Israeli sources, many of which are intensely ideological, as we shall see, and provide much if not most of the substance of the CSIS paper. The Palestinian or pro-Palestinian sources constitute a mere 6 citations out of 113 notes. In and of itself, such a remarkable imbalance of sources does not necessarily condemn a paper to excessive partisanship. But unfortunately, as we shall see, in this case it is reflective of extreme bias towards Israel and outright disinterest in the Palestinian perspective.

Cordesman notes that the recent violence “shows just how unstable the peace process is and how quickly it can turn to war.”² He blames this instability on the “deeply asymmetric goals and expectations” of the two sides to the negotiations and the conflict.³ But, in keeping with most of the American press and Clinton administration officials, Cordesman examines these “deeply asymmetric goals and expectations” without regard to the legal or historical context in which they have developed. While purporting to evaluate strategies for peace and security, he carefully avoids any mention of the UN Security Council resolutions such as 242, 338, and 476, among others, which form the legal basis for the resolution of the conflict and which mandate the terms any “peace” must reflect. Cordesman also fails to mention the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which regulate the behavior of occupying powers. Cordesman rarely describes the situation in the Occupied Territories as an occupation, although he does speak of Israel’s option to “reoccupy” Palestinian cities.⁴ By not honestly and frankly acknowledging that the basic reality in which the political and military developments he is discussing take place is a belligerent military occupation, indeed the

only ongoing occupation recognized by the UN Security Council, Cordesman misleads his readers and fetters his analysis with deeply distorting ideological constraints. These distortions become even clearer in the specific language Cordesman uses to describe areas of the Occupied Territories. At the start of a lengthy passage of several pages examining deaths of Israelis at the hands of Palestinians since 1993, Cordesman refers to the deaths of “civilians and soldiers in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip,” without qualifying these terms or placing them in quotation marks.⁵ This pseudo-biblical terminology is used only by Israeli government officials and extremists in order to imply that the Occupied Palestinian Territories conquered by Israel in 1967 are a natural and integral part of the Israeli State and to obscure their as-yet undiluted Arab and Palestinian character and their legal status as territories under belligerent military occupation. No observer who aspires or purports to have any objectivity uses such language given its obvious negation of basic realities and frankly ideological nature. Cordesman also provides numerous lengthy quotations from far-right wing Israeli sources which employ this terminology, without comment.⁶ So, while the traditionally accepted phrase to describe the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem (as well as the Golan Heights), the “Occupied Territories,” a term directly derived from the language of UNSCR 242, is largely missing from “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians,” references to “Judea and Samaria” are numerous. Cordesman repeats the implication that the Occupied Territories are part of Israel by writing that “Almost regardless of whatever happens within the Gaza [sic], however, the IDF has the military strength to quickly seal it off from the rest of Israel...”⁷ The Gaza Strip can, of course, only be “sealed off from the rest of Israel” if it is already a part of Israel. This effective denial of

occupation is consistent with official Clinton administration rhetoric and most media coverage of the conflict which typically avoid any reference to the occupation. It was particularly noteworthy that in his speech at the Sharm Al-Sheikh summit, President Clinton referred to “the territories,” omitting the operative word “occupied.” However, the fact that official and quasi-official American voices find themselves no longer able to pronounce the word “occupation” in regard to the Occupied Territories, does nothing to change the fundamental realities on the ground or the legal status of Israel as an occupying power, which was reiterated in UNSCR 1322, adopted on October 7, 2000. All that is accomplished is a distortion of thinking and clouding of judgement in Washington through the imposition of an ideologically motivated linguistic barrier between rhetoric and reality.

Not only does Cordesman employ language that denies the existence of the occupation, in his evaluation he makes no distinction between the goal of the occupiers to extend and enforce the occupation and the goal of the occupied to win liberation from occupation. Indeed, by focusing almost exclusively on the strategic and tactical means through which the occupation can be successfully imposed on the Palestinian people, Cordesman in effect endorses the aims of the occupier. What is elided is the rather simple observation that the conflict is driven by the occupation and that peace depends on bringing it to an end in accordance with international law and the dictates of the very UN Security Council resolutions cited in every “peace process” document as the guiding principles for any peace. This leaves Cordesman with no legal or moral compass with which to evaluate developments in the Occupied Territories and unable to distinguish

between the actions of the occupier enforcing an occupation and the occupied pursuing liberation. For example, when considering the possibility of “major firefights between the IDF and Palestinian security forces,” he suggests that “both sides may be equally to blame, if blame can be assigned in an asymmetric war”.⁸ More importantly, by banishing from his calculations any recognition of the legal and human realities of occupation and the existence of Security Council resolutions that constitute a binding legal framework for peace to which all parties are bound, Cordesman leads his analysis and his readers to a fundamental error: that “peace” can be achieved without an end to occupation. This is the same error built into the American-dominated Oslo process, and which produced the collapse of that process and the ensuing uprising.

As Cordesman sees it, the path to peace necessarily involves no end to the occupation. At the outset, Cordesman asserts that “Any compromise acceptable to both sides must leave Jerusalem and the West Bank deeply divided. Much of the West Ban [sic] would remain under Israeli control and at least the greater Jerusalem area would remain open for Israeli settlement”.⁹ Such a “compromise” may well be acceptable to Israel, but what, one must ask, suggests to Cordesman that it would be acceptable to the Palestinians? On the contrary, the whole of Palestinian society, including the Palestinian Authority, would seem to have made it perfectly clear that they will not accept any such “compromise.” Another clear indication of the “peace” that Cordesman envisages is his assertion that “Israel will not withdraw all the way to its pre-1967 borders, Jerusalem will remain entirely under Israeli rule, most Jewish settlers will remain in West Bank blocs, and no foreign army will be allowed west of the Jordan

River.”¹⁰ It is quite unclear why Palestinians would prefer such an arrangement to continued conflict. However, Cordesman makes it clear that insofar as they are willing to accept these conditions, i.e. the indefinite enforcement of the occupation, Palestinians may be considered “pro-peace” and rewarded with economic aid and freedom from systematic human rights abuses. As for Palestinians foolhardy enough to consider objecting or resisting this scenario, according to Cordesman, their fate ought to be a grim one, as we shall see.

Cordesman evinces keen interest in and understanding of Israeli concerns and positions, but no corresponding attention to those of Palestinians. This disparity is especially glaring in the analysis of forces involved in the current conflict or which could come into play on either side. While much of the paper consists of a recitation of all Palestinian armed factions and groups in the Occupied Territories, their ideological and military characteristics and the role they could play in any conflict, there is no corresponding section detailing the different sections of the Israeli military and security services, and no investigation of the death squads and urban warfare units commanded by the Israeli state. These would seem to be basic elements of any comprehensive analysis of the strategic balance of forces in existing or potential Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, yet there is no mention of them. Given that his concern appears to be restricted to an analysis of how to suppress the Palestinian population in the event of an insurrection against the 33-year long Israeli occupation, perhaps it should be no surprise that Cordesman does not bother with these details. As opposed to 23 pages and 4 full-page graphs devoted to an exhaustive listing of all Palestinian factions, he

devotes a whopping 8 sentences to “Israeli hard-line movements and extremists.” Cordesman provides no sustained investigation of the heavily armed settler movement and its various factions, which have played a major role in anti-Palestinian violence during the new Intifada, as a military factor. Given that the avowed purpose of most of the settlements was the institutionalization of the occupation and that the settlers function as an important element of the Israeli military presence in the Occupied Territories, this is another striking omission. Indeed, Cordesman seems to hold contradictory and incompatible views about the settlers. On the one hand, there are references to the extremism of the settlers and their potential for radical violence.¹¹ On the other hand, Cordesman asserts that the settlers “must be equipped for defense and armed accordingly,” a need for security he does not acknowledge as applying to any group of Palestinians who might also have good reason to “be equipped for defense and armed accordingly”.¹²

A similar double-standard applies when evaluating past acts of violence. Cordesman’s last table, which virtually ends the paper, is entitled “Key incidents of terrorism since the Oslo Accords in September 1993” (pp. 110-112).¹³ Almost all incidents listed are Palestinian attacks against Israelis, although some are violent incidents by unknown attackers for unclear reasons such as the shooting of a Hungarian yeshiva student in occupied East Jerusalem. Also included are at least two incidents, the bombings of the Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association in Buenos Aires and a plane over Panama, that may or may not be in any way connected to events and actors in the Middle East. However, the most egregious aspect of the table is the absence of Israeli acts of anti-

Arab terrorism. To take just one glaring example, the massacre of 29 Palestinian worshipers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron by IDF reserve officer Baruch Goldstein on February 25, 1994, is not included. By omitting such incidents, Cordesman seems to be implying that Israeli acts of terrorism against Arabs either are not terrorist acts, or that they simply aren't important enough to include in a list of "key incidents of terrorism." Either way, again we find Cordesman highly sensitive to Israeli perceptions and completely oblivious to Palestinian experiences.

In future versions of this "rough working draft," especially since we have now publicly identified this glaring omission, Cordesman may well amend the table of "Key incidents of terrorism since the Oslo Accords in September 1993." No doubt we will be told this was an "oversight" in a "rough draft," its internet publication and widespread circulation notwithstanding. If we are to accept, for the sake of argument, that it is indeed merely an "oversight," and without getting into all the other Israeli acts of anti-Arab violence since September 1993 which would meet any consistently applied standard defining terrorism, we would have to note that this "oversight" was only one example of the numerous distortions Cordesman's paper suffers due to its heavy reliance on Israeli sources, many of them highly questionable. The "key incidents" table is sourced to the right-wing "International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism in Israel," as well as to the State Department's "Patterns of Global Terrorism" reports. Were the Institute's input into "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians" limited to the inaccurate "key incidents" table, it would hardly require further comment. However, Cordesman's paper

relies extensively on information and numerous lengthy quotations from the Institute's publications. As a result, it is worth pointing out that the Board of Directors of the "International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism in Israel" is chaired by Shabtai Shavit, former director of Mossad and also includes, among its other two members, Aharon Scherf, former director of Israel's Foreign Affairs Division. The Institute, which appears to run a number of for-profit "security" services, is so deeply intertwined with Israeli intelligence, whose former members make up much of its staff, that it clearly lacks any element of objectivity or even independence. Cordesman includes several pages worth of lengthy quotations from Institute staff member Reuven Ehrlich.¹⁴ Until recently Ehrlich was deputy coordinator of Israeli activities in Lebanon and assistant to Uri Lubrani, coordinator of activities in Lebanon for the Israeli government. He is therefore a man well acquainted with Israeli policies of occupation and suppression of subject populations. Ehrlich's analysis is as tendentious and ideologically informed as the title of his paper, which Cordesman repeatedly quotes, "Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy," would suggest. It is replete with intensely ideological references to "Judea and Samaria," descriptions of an alleged "Islamic Jihad" attack on a military position of Israel's proxy South Lebanon Army as a "terrorist attack," and far-reaching allegations about Syrian and Iranian control of organizations as varied as Hamas, Hizballah, Islamic Jihad, and the PFLP-GC among others. This discourse strongly reflects the positions of the Israeli foreign ministry, as should not be surprising given the nature of the Institute for which it is written. That is not to say that it is of no value or lacks any degree of credibility. It is a source with its own clear biases and not-so-hidden agendas, but there is no reason not to cite its work with a due degree of

caution, awareness and balance. Unfortunately, Cordesman not only quotes page after page of Ehrlich's paper on Syria and another paper by the same group on "Iran and Terrorism," he does so completely uncritically, without any apparent awareness of the agenda of this source and without any form of balance. In effect, Cordesman is simply repeating claims from Israeli intelligence sources as if they were established facts or reflected the normal processes of scholarship and research. Much the same applies to his significant reliance on documents produced by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think-tank subsidiary of the pro-Israeli lobby group, AIPAC. As a result of his dependence on such ideologically-driven quasi-official Israeli sources, Cordesman produces an analysis that more often than not simply reflects what the Israeli government wishes the outside world to believe.

Another telling example of the constraints imposed on Cordesman's analysis by his excessive reliance on Israeli statistics is his table 7.3, "Changes in Israeli Settlers [sic] in Gaza and the West Bank: 1992-1998 (Not including Israelis in annexed Jerusalem)."¹⁵ Why "not including Israelis in annexed Jerusalem?" Presumably because his principal source for the figures, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, does not consider Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem to be settlers and therefore does not supply those extremely important statistics. Cordesman himself repeatedly stresses the degree to which differences over Jerusalem could prevent an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, and acknowledges that "Israeli settlements are a major source of tension," although he does not try to explain why).¹⁶ One would gather from this that Israeli settlements and settlers in Jerusalem are among the most important in the occupied territories. Indeed,

this is the case, and Cordesman does provide some statistics on these settlements (which he calls “neighborhoods”) in another table, but they are missing from table 7.3.

Cordesman makes a few token efforts to acknowledge Palestinian national rights and strategic concerns, but these are so limited as to be dismissive.¹⁷ Israeli desires for maximum security, expansion of settlements, retention of large areas of the occupied territories and other ambitions contrary to international law are treated as natural and justified concerns. Palestinians are said to have “an equally strong incentive to create a contiguous state and obtain the return of as much territory as possible.”¹⁸ The problem, according to Cordesman, is that “both sets of demands are just in theory, but may not be achievable in practice,” apparently because they are mutually exclusive. Again the refusal to admit the historical and legal realities into a discussion of the justice of the relative claims of Israelis and Palestinians allows Cordesman to place the goal of the occupier to consolidate occupation on a moral and legal par with the goal of the occupied to achieve liberation. The Palestinian need for liberation from occupation becomes, in Cordesman’s paper, merely “political demands” and “Palestinian expectations” without basis in international law. What is more, Cordesman is quick to rationalize Israel’s refusal to meet these “demands.” Full withdrawal from the West Bank, as required by international law, is out of the question, Cordesman implies, because, “Israel would lose much of its strategic depth if it returned all of the Occupied Territories (It would then be only 14 kilometers wide from West to East in its narrowest area near Tel Aviv).”¹⁹ Interestingly, it is in this sentence negating the logic of UNSCR 242 that the phrase “Occupied Territories” makes one of only 4 appearances in

Cordesman's text. Typically, he never stops to consider what kind of contiguous territory, let alone "strategic depth" will be left to the Palestinians as a result of this calculation.

Cordesman also dismisses the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees and clearly has little understanding of the issue. First of all, he is deeply confused about the number and status of the refugees, reporting that "there are up to 1.5 million people who claim Palestinian refugee status" and who could "return to Israel."²⁰ In fact, there are over 3.5 million Palestinians registered as refugees with UNRWA, the UN agency charged with responsibility for the Palestinian refugees.²¹ In an earlier passage, Cordesman acknowledges the existence of 3.8 million Palestinian refugees, but seems to become confused about the status of the Occupied Territories, which he again implies are part of Israel. He also fails to comprehend the right of refugees to return to the specific land they formerly inhabited and owned, and that refugees in the Occupied Territories are not in Israel but, like the other refugees, have a right to return to their former homes in Israel. Secondly, Cordesman states that "serious questions arise as to whether the refugees fled because of Israeli military action and persecution, on their own, or because Arab leaders encouraged them to do so."²² It is disturbing that the hoary canard about Arab leaders encouraging the Palestinians to flee in 1948 should appear in a paper written in 2000 when it was thoroughly debunked in the 1960's. This is yet another indication of the extent to which Cordesman's paper is informed by right-wing Israeli propaganda and is distant from mainstream, let alone cutting-edge, historical

scholarship on the period in question. As Kathleen Christison noted in 1999, “The ‘broadcasts myth’ became a central element in Israeli and U.S. images of the 1948 conflict. It was used to demonstrate that the Palestinians’ attachment to their land and homes was weak, that by clearing the way for Arab military forces to ‘drive the Jews into the sea’ the Palestinians showed that they were bent on Israel’s destruction, and that in the end Israel bore no responsibility for the Palestinians’ displacement and homelessness. Although it has been discredited in most scholarly circles, the myth remains widely believed outside academia..”²³ Increasingly, the work of western and Israeli historians is confirming what Palestinian scholars such as Walid Khalidi had long demonstrated - that the exodus of Palestinians from their land in 1948 was largely the result of a calculated Israeli plan of ethnic cleansing on a massive scale enforced by numerous massacres. At any rate, this entire argument is utterly beside the point. The rights of refugees are not contingent on the circumstances in which they became refugees - they are absolute. The Right of Return is firmly rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and is specifically applied to the Palestinian refugees by UN Resolution 194. None of these documents imply a hierarchy of rights based on whether refugees were ethnically cleansed, fled of their own accord or were urged to flee by their own leaders. Cordesman also raises the question “as to whether refugee status can be inherited,” a concept that should warm the hearts of would-be ethnic cleansers everywhere who would merely have to exclude an expelled population for a few decades in order to be rewarded with immunity from claims by subsequent generations the displaced and dispossessed.²⁴ The fact is that the Right of Return is an absolute and inalienable human right, but as we shall see,

Cordesman does not conceal the fact that he is fully prepared not only to ignore but to dispense with human rights altogether when it comes to Palestinians.

The only Palestinian concerns discussed at length in Cordesman's paper are economic problems, and by virtue of the attention he gives them, acknowledged as genuinely legitimate and important, in stark contrast to the short shrift accorded to Palestinian political and national concerns. This is in keeping with the tradition begun in the Balfour Declaration of regarding "non-Jewish communities in Palestine," i.e. the Palestinians, as having "civil and religious rights" but not national or political rights. Eighty years on, the contemporary Clinton administration/Labor Party version of this formulation is that Palestinians also have legitimate economic concerns and even grievances, but still no national or political rights. The "economic development" theme has been a consistent subtext to the entire failed Oslo discourse, and not surprisingly Cordesman echoes it on cue. Cordesman argues that "Israel cannot hope to create future stability in Gaza, the West Bank, or Jerusalem if it ignores the need to preserve Palestinian dignity and create a secure climate that promotes economic cooperation and an improvement in Palestinian living conditions."²⁵ The obvious implication of this passage, and indeed the entire paper, is that Israel *can* hope to "create future stability" without ending the occupation but by addressing non-political Palestinian concerns only. This is a fantasy one can cling to only in blissful disregard of all available evidence. Palestinian economic concerns are emphasized in this discourse because they do not challenge any fundamental Israeli ambitions in the Occupied Territories and are seen as a source

of resentment and resistance that is unnecessary. The unstated hope has been that by providing the Palestinians with an improved standard of living, the “peace process” could win over the population without actually giving them their political freedom; that Palestinians could, in effect, be “bought off.” Needless to say, nothing of the kind has taken place over the past 8 years, which has resulted in regular lamentations from American officials including the President. Like so much else about the Oslo process this was always an illusion. Economic development could hardly take place in the context of a massive expansion of colonization and settlement, with the addition of tens of thousands of new settlers in the past 7 years. Even if there had been some sort of boost to the Palestinian economy, through a massive aid program for instance, how far could it go and how long could it forestall national requirements frustrated for over 50 years? Like the rest of the logic of Oslo, this economic component was driven by the vain hope that Palestinians would somehow be satisfied or pacified by something less than their own liberation. Writing as he does in the present moment, it is no surprise that Cordesman sees the economic situation in the Occupied Territories essentially as a “security problem” for Israel, insofar as it fuels resentment among Palestinians. But the fundamental error remains the same - an emphasis on economic concerns without a recognition that Palestinians understand, even if some western analysts do not, the organic connection between the circumstances of their political subjugation and disenfranchisement and their economic dispossession and impoverishment.

According to “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians,” it is the role of the PA to teach Palestinians to accept the occupation with equanimity. Cordesman writes that

“The Palestinian Authority did far less to educate its population and try to reduce extremism between the Oslo accords and September 2000 than the Israelis and this can easily lead to lethal violence against IDF soldiers and Israeli civilians that is not under the control of the Palestinian Authority.”²⁶ This suggests that if Palestinians are unsatisfied with the terms of modified occupation created by the Oslo process and the expansion of this arrangement proposed by Israel at Camp David in July 2000, and if they revolt against an occupation that has no end in sight, it is because they have not been properly socialized. It is difficult to reconcile this assertion with the facts about lethal violence during the current uprising, which has almost exclusively involved “peace-educated” Israeli occupation troops killing “not-sufficiently peace-educated” Palestinian civilians, many of them children. It also does not account for the affects produced by living under occupation, none of which Cordesman seems to understand, let alone acknowledge, which made the uprising both predictable and inevitable. His paper is so blind to the human realities of Palestinian life under occupation and the political consequences of these objective circumstances, that it is strongly reminiscent of now-notorious studies conducted during the Vietnam war which analyzed the strategic situation in a completely decontextualized manner. The lack of insight or honest inquiry into the human and political circumstances in Vietnam in these evaluations and the consequent serious miscalculations in the strategic analyses they produced led the United States into one of its greatest military and political disasters. No analysis that asks to be taken seriously should repeat such fundamental errors, and policy-makers should be extremely cautious about the recommendations, especially implicit ones, emerging from a document rife with such oversights.

Cordesman provides extensive rationalizations for the brutal Israeli response to the uprising which has been condemned by the UN Security Council and Human Rights Commission and by most international human rights groups including Amnesty International. He strongly implies that Israel has had no choice but to kill over 200 Palestinians, mostly unarmed civilians, because “troops cannot let mobs armed with stones or Molotov cocktails close on their positions, or rely on riot control gear used in dealing with civil disobedience.”²⁷ He does not acknowledge that the IDF does not even attempt to use “riot control gear” against Palestinian demonstrators, including Palestinian citizens of Israel, but gives its soldiers no options other than lethal force. He also fails to note that governments the world over have not resorted to shooting down rioters and demonstrators and that Israeli forces have often confronted stone-throwing, violent Jewish demonstrators and have never opened fire on them. Moreover, many if not most of the incidents that lead to Palestinian fatalities have not involved “mobs armed with stones or Molotov cocktails” actually threatening the lives of Israeli troops, and that because of this there have been few if any incidents of armed Israeli troops being killed by such mobs (the killing of two Israeli soldiers by a mob in Ramallah being a highly unusual circumstance). Still, Cordesman asserts that Israel is being blamed unfairly because “these problems are poorly understood in the media.”²⁸ Besides, Cordesman believes that Palestinians make cynical use of the killing of their own unarmed civilians to win world sympathy, and “using its own suffering, if not actually encouraging its own casualties.”²⁹ He describes this suffering as a “political advantage” the Palestinians enjoy over Israel.³⁰ Cordesman implies that Palestinians actually want

to be killed by Israelis in order to score propaganda points, an assertion that evinces no sympathy for the impossible situation Palestinians living under occupation face and the utter desperation that leads an unarmed population out into the streets, stones in hand, ready to face the might of one of the world's largest and most ruthless armies. At its core, such thinking fails to acknowledge the fundamental humanity and love of life that Palestinians share with all other people. At any rate, Cordesman fails to register the obvious implications about the justice and fundamental realities of the situation when, in his own estimation, getting killed en masse by Israeli soldiers is one of the few and most valuable weapons available to Palestinians.

Astonishingly, even these measures are not sufficient for Cordesman. At its conclusion, "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians" degenerates completely from a one-sided rationalization of current Israeli abuses and a recitation of some of the most dubious aspects of Israeli propaganda to an agenda for the systematic torture and political repression of Palestinians on a massive scale and other extreme measures by Israel. Should the uprising against the occupation escalate, Cordesman writes, Israel may be "forced" to take numerous "draconian" measures.³¹ (All emphases in the following quotations are added.) Israel could be "*forced* to make extensive use of the IDF and methods like reoccupation, expulsion and/or creating security zones that isolated Israelis from Arabs."³² "Securing the area and East Jerusalem could *force* Israel to a) rely on a combination of police and paramilitary operations on a community-by-community - and sometimes house-by-house basis, b) rely on curfews and strict limitations on local movement, c) return to demolitions and limited *expulsions*, d)

suppress all signs of violence or protest with force, often *deadly force*, e) hunt down and seize or *kill suspected enemies*, and/or f) *expel large blocks of Palestinians* from such areas.”³³ Note that in case of an expanded uprising against Israeli occupation, Cordesman is arguing that Israel would not only be justified in taking these measures, but would have no choice, be “forced,” in his words, to do so. Cordesman, and hence CSIS, all but recommend these measures to Israel in case of an expanded conflict. Can anyone seriously imagine CSIS or any comparable institution making similar suggestions to China with regard to an insurrection in Tibet or to India with regard to its war in Kashmir? Indeed, NATO went to war last year against Yugoslavia to reverse these same abuses in Kosovo, declaring them to be an intolerable evil. And none of those cases involves a UN Security Council recognized foreign military occupation.

Even this is not the nadir of Tony Cordesman’s handbook for enforcing occupation. Cordesman plainly states that, in the best case scenario, the “peace” he is concerned with defending, which has been outlined above, must be enforced by a program of the most ruthless and barbarous repression against Palestinians. Indeed, the final section of the paper is entitled “Peace and Security as the Natural Enemies of Human Rights,” although it might be more accurately titled “Spurious Scholarship and Foolish Analysis as The Natural Enemy of Human Rights.” At least Cordesman does not mince his words. The role of both the PA and Israeli forces in his analysis is to suppress resistance to occupation ruthlessly and without regard for human rights. Cordesman’s now-notorious conclusions are that “Effective counter-terrorism relies on interrogation methods that border on psychological and/or physical torture, arrests and detentions

that are 'arbitrary' by the standards of civil law, break-ins and intelligence operations that violate the normal rights of privacy, levels of violence in making arrests that are unacceptable in civil cases, and measures that involve the innocent (or at least not provably directly guilty) in arrests and penalties".³⁴ "Such measures tend to work," he assures us. In that case, perhaps Cordesman should be put in charge of the "war on drugs." But such measures are reserved, in his analysis, for Palestinians only. He makes no such suggestions about dealing with Israeli extremists. And, these measures need not be restricted to Palestinians suspected of violence, but only "extremism," which would seem to mean political opposition to the occupation/ "peace" Cordesman envisages. He writes that "more broadly, Israeli security forces must operate against extremist and terrorist forces that have learned to cloak their activities under 'respectable' political cover, to deliberately manipulate the rhetoric of human rights and democracy, to manipulate human rights groups and the media, and to exploit every weakness in the law and legal procedures."³⁵ It is to be open season, then, on any seemingly respectable political group, human rights and democracy activists, and media figures who have the wrong opinions. No doubt these would constitute many of the "not provably directly guilty" persons to be arbitrarily jailed, tortured and murdered. This is an unflinching and shameless call for a war on dissent, a war on democracy and a war against an entire people, in the event they are obnoxious enough to insist on their own liberation from foreign military occupation.

This is what is on offer to the Palestinians, according to Cordesman, if they choose to accept the "path of peace": that they join forces with the Israelis in a ruthless war of

torture and murder against their own people to enforce their own subjugation to an unjust occupation. Contrast this seductive scenario with Cordesman's evaluation of the possible outcome of a "second intifada": "So much depends on the role of outside actors and political events that there is no way to predict who would 'win' and how much both sides would lose."³⁶ I'm not sure Cordesman quite makes the case he intends, advocating the first of the two options Palestinians have in his estimation. Indeed, the Palestinian people already would seem to have decided that, given the "peace" on offer, they have little to lose by continuing and even expanding a popular uprising against Israeli occupation.

CSIS and Cordesman's intervention in the current uprising is cause for serious concern, given that "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians" advocates human rights abuses and repression against Palestinians on a massive scale. Certainly, these activities would be considered crimes, even war crimes, under most moral and legal systems, and would be in violation of countless binding international conventions. Taken to their logical conclusion, they may well rise to the level of crimes against humanity. It is a measure of how deep the antipathy towards Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular runs in establishment circles in the United States that one of the most prominent and well-connected think-tanks in Washington can, rather casually, advocate such outrageous abuses without provoking a firestorm of outrage (although a former senior State Department official privately remarked that "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians" contains language which could well have been written by Reinhardt Hydrich about Czechoslovakia). Yet such reprehensible and irresponsible

recommendations cannot go un rebutted. Not only are the conclusions of “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians” morally and legally repugnant, the analysis that is supposed to support them is misguided and ill-informed. By depending so deeply on quasi-official Israeli sources, Cordesman sees, at most, only one side of the equation clearly. Moreover, his analysis is abstracted from the political and human realities of the situation in the Occupied Territories. He simply fails to acknowledge the Palestinian experience of occupation or understand the minimal requirements of their liberation movement. As a result of these massive blind-spots, Cordesman repeats the fundamental errors that led U.S. policy in Palestine and the failed “peace process” to produce, not peace, but open conflict throughout the Occupied Territories. The worst of these errors is illusion that peace can be achieved without an end to the Israeli occupation. Cordesman’s paper, therefore, combines the worst features of any strategic analysis: he advocates criminal abuses in behalf of a policy that is bound to fail. “Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians” should be rejected on pragmatic, legal, and moral grounds. Almost certainly, it will be long remembered as a benchmark of how vicious and self-defeating the discourse on U.S. policy in Palestine had become at the start of the 21st Century.

Notes:

1) American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, “Press Coverage of Palestinian Uprising Reveals Extreme Anti-Arab Hostility,” press release, Oct. 15, 2000. <http://www.adc.org/press/2000/15october2000.htm>; see also Hussein Ibish, “Hostility against Palestinians taints the news,” The Oregonian, October 22, 2000.

2) Anthony Cordesman, "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians," Center for Strategic and International Studies, www.csis.org, accessed November 10, 2000. p.1.

3) Cordesman, p.5.

4) See for example, Cordesman, pp. 87, 92.

5) Cordesman, p. 13.

6) See for example, Cordesman, pp. 20, 27, 31.

7) Cordesman, p. 51.

8) Cordesman, p. 98.

9) Cordesman, p. 6.

10) Cordesman, p. 72.

11) Cordesman, p. 10.

12) Cordesman, p. 10.

13) Cordesman, pp. 110-112.

14) Cordesman, pp. 20, 21, 27, 28, 31-33.

15) Cordesman, p. 77.

16) Cordesman, p. 63.

17) Cordesman, pp. 5, 73, 74.

18) Cordesman, p. 73.

19) Cordesman, p. 63.

20) Cordesman, p. 75.

21) "Top Palestinian official briefs Jordan on peace developments," AFP, September 23, 2000.

22) Cordesman, pp. 67-8.

23) Kathleen Christison, Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999). See also, for example, Dan

Kurzman, Genesis 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War (New York: New American Library, 1970), pp. 190-191; Erskine Childers, *The Spectator*, 12 May 1961, reprinted in Walid Khalidi, ed., From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), pp. 795-803; and Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 290, 287.

24) Cordesman, p. 68.

25) Cordesman, p. 107.

26) Cordesman, p. 9.

27) Cordesman, p. 8.

28) Cordesman, p. 8.

29) Cordesman, p. 8.

30) Cordesman, p. 8.

31) Cordesman, p. 64.

32) Cordesman, p. 87.

33) Cordesman, p. 88.

34) Cordesman, p. 108.

35) Cordesman, p. 100.

36) Cordesman, p. 10.