

# THE MYTH OF BARAK'S "GENEROUS OFFER"

The conventional wisdom on the Israeli-Palestinian summit at Camp David in July 2000 is that Ehud Barak made an unprecedented "generous offer" which Yasser Arafat perversely rejected. In fact, the Israeli proposal fell far short of the minimum requirements for a just and viable resolution of the conflict. (See reverse for a map of the Israeli proposal.)

## Palestinian Flexibility

The Oslo process began in 1993 with Palestinian recognition of Israel and abandonment of any claim of sovereignty over the 78% of historical Palestine that lies within Israel's internationally-recognized borders. This means that, before Camp David, the Palestinians had agreed that the boundaries of the future Palestinian state would be limited to the 22% of Palestine that now comprises the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

Consistent with this position, the Palestinians have offered to solve the refugee problem in a way that does not endanger the Jewish majority within Israel (i.e. through compensation and limited return). They have done so even though international law requires a total return of all refugees.

The Palestinian formula for peace is thus a two-state solution with compensation for refugees, shared sovereignty over Jerusalem, and an end to the Israeli occupation. This formula has long been recognized as the most viable, achievable and fair solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, the Israeli side rejected it at Camp David.

## Shortcomings of Israel's Proposal

### ▪ No solution to the refugee problem.

The Israeli proposal at Camp David included no provisions for return or compensation of the 4 million Palestinian refugees. This by itself would have been a deal-breaker, since it meant relinquishing the valid legal and political rights of over half the entire Palestinian population.

Today's refugee problem has its origins in the 1948 war, which drove 700,000 Palestinians into exile in surrounding countries, many forced out by Zionist forces that attacked Palestinian towns and villages. Israel then closed its borders to prevent the refugees' return, razed over 400 Palestinian villages, and confiscated refugee land and property for use by Jewish immigrants. At Camp David, Palestinians were in effect being asked to sweep under the rug the principal historical injustice Israel had inflicted upon them.

### ▪ No Palestinian sovereignty or security.

The Israeli-proposed Palestinian "state" would have been divided into four non-contiguous enclaves completely surrounded by Israeli-controlled areas. The "state" would have no control over the border with Jordan, the Gaza Strip sea border, or passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It could thus be shut down at Israel's whim – hardly an exercise in Palestinian sovereignty. Such a "state" would not allow Palestinians to achieve meaningful self-determination and would not safeguard Palestinian security and rights. Instead, it would perpetuate hostile Israeli control over Palestinian daily life.

### ▪ No significant dismantling of settlements.

The Israeli proposal involved annexing 9 percent of the West Bank including all major settlement blocs, which contain around 150,000 Jewish settlers outside Jerusalem. Israel, not content with the 78 percent of Palestine that Palestinians had already conceded, was demanding even more territory. Israel was also insisting that Palestinians accept the legitimacy of illegal settlements built for Jews only on confiscated Palestinian land during the 35 years of Israeli occupation.

### ▪ No real sharing of Jerusalem.

Under the Israeli proposal, Israel would keep control over all Israeli settlements in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as some centrally-located Palestinian neighborhoods. Palestinians would get sovereignty over some outlying Palestinian neighborhoods, but not the old city of Jerusalem where the third holiest site in Islam, the Haram al-Sharif, is located. This meant that Palestinian access to the old city and the Haram al-Sharif would remain subject to Israeli discretion. At the Haram al-Sharif compound itself, Palestinians were offered only a notional "custody."

## Whither Negotiations?

Barak's "generous offer" at Camp David was anything but generous. The Palestinians were right to turn it down – accepting it would have been glorified surrender.

After Camp David, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations resumed at Taba in January 2001. The Israeli side broke off those talks, and has since refused to return to the negotiating table. Now as ever, Palestinians await an Israeli partner for peace.

Sources: Robert Malley, "Fictions About the Failure at Camp David," *New York Times*, July 8, 2001; Jerome Slater, "What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," *Political Science Quarterly*, Summer 2001.

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# Israeli Proposal for the Palestinian State at Camp David II

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