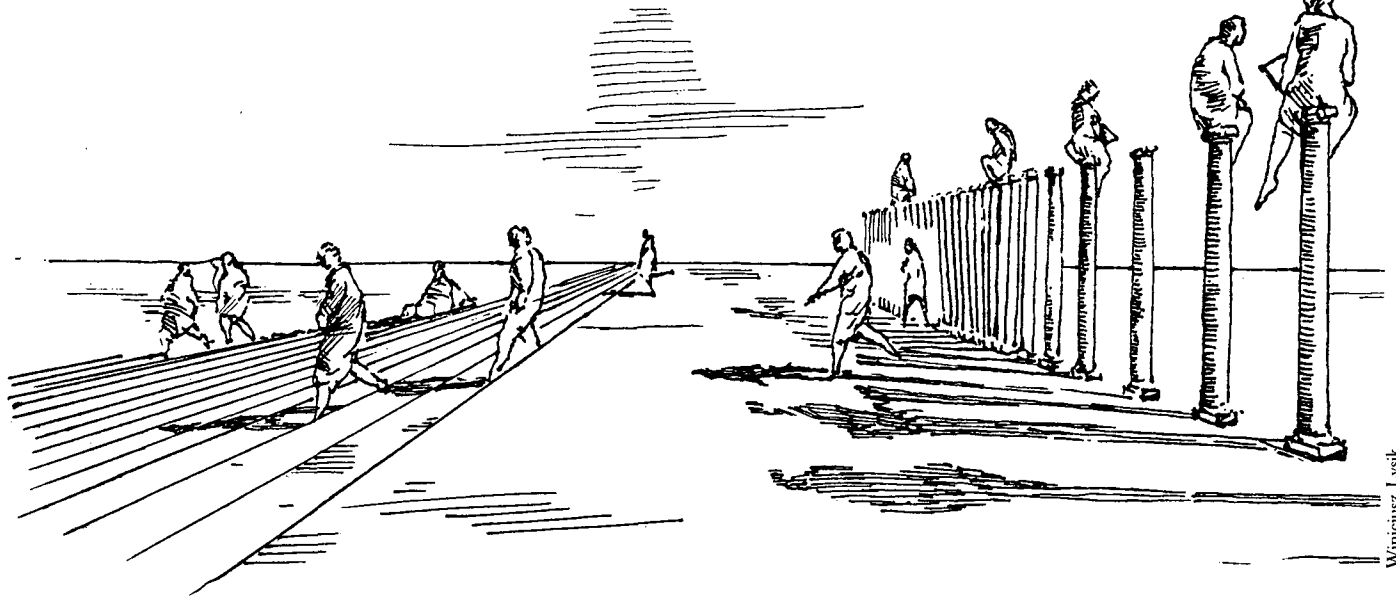


# The Israeli Prescription

by Leon T. Hadar

"Moderation lasts."

—Seneca



Wincisz Lysik

## Intifada

by Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari

New York:

Simon and Schuster;

337 pp., \$22.45

The American public has fallen victim in recent years to a propaganda assault, launched and coordinated by the Israeli Likud party and their American partners, whose theme is clear and simple: the long-term security of the Jewish state lies in its ability to maintain control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with its mainly Arab population. A corollary of this axiom is that Washington should help Israel cling to those territories it occupied in the 1967 war.

Now two highly-respected Israeli journalists, Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, have for all practical purposes demolished these frequently contended arguments. Their study, entitled *Intifada*, focuses on the over two-year-old

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Palestinian uprising, and it is destined to become the Israeli version of David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*—or, even worse, Jerusalem's Pentagon Papers.

*Intifada*, which has been published both in English and Hebrew, charges that the Israeli political elite, through a mixture of ideological blindness, political stupidity, and military incompetence, is directly responsible for the policies that ignited and perpetuated the violence in the occupied territories. Moreover, without beating around the bush, the authors suggest that Israel's national interest dictates that its leadership find a way politically to decouple their state from the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza, and that the American administration should help Israel move in that direction.

Much to the chagrin of American Likud partisans who try to portray anyone who challenges the Greater Israel dogma as a left-leaning "McGovernite," a naive do-gooder, or an "anti-Israeli," both Schiff and Ya'ari are closely linked to Israel's national security establishment. Ya'ari, the military correspondent of Israel's state-run television and a military intelligence officer (res.), and Schiff, a Lippmann-

esque columnist for the daily *Ha'aretz* (the country's *New York Times*), are supporters of a strong Israeli national defense and have very few illusions about the peace-loving tendencies and pacifist attitudes of the Arab side. However, like the American Old Right isolationists and the more traditional realist foreign policy thinkers such as George Kennan, the two have reached the conclusion that national interest and healthy patriotism are not necessarily equated with the building of empires, and that military and diplomatic overreaching involve major costs to the hegemonic power.

Indeed, in a journalistic odyssey that started with their much-publicized critical account of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Ya'ari and Schiff have pointed to Israel's need to redefine its national interest in a way that would fit with its limited resources and political tradition. More specifically, they argue that neither in 1982 in Lebanon nor today in the West Bank can four million Israelis impose their political will on large alien Arab populations without giving rise to the most radical forces on the other side, and without paying a political, economic, and military price.

In Lebanon the Israeli invasion

strengthened the hands of the radical Shi'ite groups, and in the West Bank the violent suppression of the uprising increased the power of religious fundamentalist Moslem groups that oppose any solution with the Jewish state. In addition, the Israeli occupation is eroding Israel's democratic system as the Palestinians are gradually turned into second-class citizens, thereby creating major dislocations in an economy that is dependent today on cheap labor from the territories; destroying the national consensus, with the society divided politically more than ever, much in the manner that America was divided during the Vietnam War; and even drastically weakening the military.

Indeed, one of the book's most poignant chapters deals with the reaction of the top military staff to the *intifada*. As the authors describe it, many of the high-ranking officers feel they have become scapegoats for a bankrupted political leadership that has failed to reach a solution to the uprising. Young Israeli soldiers with no prior training find themselves performing the duties of a police security force. This leads to major psychological problems among the eighteen- to twenty-one-year-old recruits, resulting in both brutal behavior against the Palestinians and in mental problems that lead, in some cases, to suicide.

"The leadership abandoned us here to perform their dirty work here" is the line of thinking that Ya'ari and Schiff detect among the officers who operate in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli chief of staff and his aides argue that the occupation diverts the military from training and preparing for more serious challenges, such as a possible Arab attack upon Israel. Hence, it is not surprising that these very people are supportive of a negotiated solution to the *intifada* problem, including the possibility of an agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Ironically, the civilian leadership of the Likud and their supporters in the United States, who are refusing to give over any part of Israel to Arab control, even in return for a genuine peace agreement, accuse the military of appeasement and "wimpiness" in the face of Palestinian violence. The authors meticulously detail how the Likud-led

government under Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir sabotaged efforts to reach an agreement with King Hussein of Jordan and torpedoed policies aimed at encouraging the rise of a moderate Palestinian leadership in the West Bank. The only choice open to Israel today, contend Ya'ari and Schiff, is to negotiate with the PLO and with its supporters in the territories. A refusal to do that, they warn, will cause Israel in a few years to face a more radical Palestinian leadership that would make Arafat and his colleagues look in retrospect like a unit of the Salvation Army.

The authors' study of the 1982 War of Lebanon revealed that the American administration gave the then defense minister Ariel Sharon a "green light" to launch that disastrous military campaign, and that as a result America must share some responsibility for the bloodshed that ensued in that country. In their current study, they point to the kid-glove treatment with which the Reagan administration handled the Likud's refusal to reach any diplomatic solution to the Palestinian problem and to end the Israeli occupation. By helping to perpetuate the *status quo* in the territories, and by rejecting the use of its \$3 billion in aid to Israel as a means of pressuring the Israeli leadership to

adopt a more conciliatory approach, Washington is also partly responsible for the violent reaction that ensued in Palestine.

The end of the Cold War, together with the *intifada*, are producing some transformations in Washington's thinking, which have led to the possibility that the military and economic aid package to Jerusalem will be gradually reduced, or at least tied to changes in Israeli policy. That, together with a shift in Israeli public opinion, might conceivably help the government to move toward negotiations regarding the future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under Palestinian leadership, a solution the authors recommend in the last chapter of their book, and perhaps even lead toward needed reforms in Israel's bankrupt socialist economy.

Only the adoption of such policies, they insist, will help Israel to end the *intifada*, to secure its long-term survival in the Middle East, to create a hospitable environment for absorbing the hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews who are expected to arrive in Israel in the coming years, and to maintain its friendship with the United States.



#### BRIEF MENTIONS

**THE WONDER OF SEEING DOUBLE: POEMS** by Robert B. Shaw  
Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press; 69 pp., \$17.50  
(hardcover) \$7.95 (paper)

Robert B. Shaw is one of that small group of American poets who has been proving to the world that readable English verse can still be written and published in the United States. The title of his volume is apt, since we sense in Shaw's poetry a kind of wonder at the everyday facts of existence coupled with a continual use of visual and optic metaphors. Browsing through a "Family Album," he advises: "Snap the book shut. Our seeing / will never match the flash / that riveted these frail, / fluttering plumes of beings", before "Turning In," he sees himself "flash by in mirrors and more / obscurely in the black unflattering panes"; and in "The Crossing of a Stream," he wishes "some memorizing eye / or touch quick at a shutter / could have composed us there."

Despite the sobriety and restraint of his manner, Shaw displays a remarkable range both in his subjects and in his approach to them, but it is in the attempt to extract meaning from the matter-of-fact details of ordinary life that he excels: a father lets his son pretend to shave and "Admiring how intently / he pares his sud away, / I view my flesh more gently"; and a mother's vain effort to keep the silver polished reminds him that "the bright idea I had of writing this / itself turns darker at the thought of time." Shaw's volume is a rare example of a poetry that rises to the tedious challenges of contemporary existence.

—Thomas Fleming