

Yinon Plan

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The **Yinon Plan** is a plan for future Israeli expansion, titled 'A Strategy for Israel in the 1980s'^[1], published in an article on February 1982 in the Hebrew journal *Kivunim* ("Directions"). *Kivunim* was a quarterly periodical^[2] dedicated to the study of Judaism and Zionism which appeared between 1978 and 1987,^[3] and was published by the World Zionist Organization's department of Information in Jerusalem.^[4] The article was penned by Oded Yinon, a former senior official with the Israeli Foreign Ministry^{[5][6][7][8]} and journalist for the Jerusalem Post.^[9] It is cited as an early example of characterizing political projects in the Middle East in terms of a logic of sectarian divisions.^[10]

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Argument of the paper

Yinon argues that the world was witnessing a new epoch in history without precedent, which required both the development of a fresh perspective and an operational strategy to implement it. The rationalist and humanist foundations of Western civilization were in a state of collapse.^[11] The West was disintegrating before the combined onslaught of the Soviet Union and the Third World, a phenomenon he believed was accompanied by an upsurge in anti-Semitism, all of which meant that Israel would become the last safe haven for Jews to seek refuge in.^[12] The Muslim Arab world circling Israel had been arbitrarily spliced up into 19 ethnically heterogeneous states by imperial powers, France and Great Britain,^[13] and was just a 'temporary house of cards put together by foreigners', composed of mutually hostile ethnic minorities and majorities, that, once disintegrated into, in Ahmad's interpretation, feudal tribal fiefdoms, would no longer challenge Israel.^[14] Centrifugal factors would give rise to a dynamic of fragmentation that, while highly perilous, would offer Israel opportunities it had failed to exploit in 1967.^[13]

He then proceeds to analyze the weaknesses of Arab countries, by citing what he perceives to be flaws in their national and social structures, concluding that Israel should aim to bring about the fragmentation of the Arab world into a mosaic of ethnic and confessional groupings.^[7] 'Every kind of inter-Arab confrontation,' he argued, would prove to be advantageous to Israel in the short term.^[15] He saw contemporary events in Lebanon as a foreshadowing of future developments overall throughout the Arab world. The upheavals would create a precedent for guiding Israeli short-term and long-term strategies. Specifically, he asserted that the immediate aim of policy should be the dissolution of the military capabilities of Arab states east of Israel, while the primary long-term goal should work towards the formation of unique areas defined in terms of ethnonational and religious identities.^[16]

Blueprint for the Middle East

Egypt

Yinon thought the 1978 Camp David Accords, the peace agreement signed by Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat, to be mistaken. One of Israel's aims for the 1980s would be, Yinon claimed, the dismemberment of Egypt, a country he described as a "corpse", in order to reestablish the status quo ante, when Israel had controlled the Sinai Peninsula.^[12] Yinon hoped to see the formation of a Christian Coptic state on Egypt's northern borders. Yinon pinned the expectations on a rapid Israeli re-invasion of the Sinai triggered by a future rupture by Egypt of the American-brokered terms of peace, something which, under Hosni Mubarak, failed to eventuate.^[15]

Jordan and the West Bank

In his account of Russian foreign policy and the Arabs, Yevgeny Primakov contextualizes Yinon's paper in terms of the content of what former United States Ambassador to the United Nations, George Ball, stated in testimony in August before the U.S. Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee. Ball, discussing the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon^[9] earlier in June, referred to conversations with Ariel Sharon, in which Sharon reportedly stated that his long-term strategy consisted of "squeezing the Palestinians out of the West Bank..allowing only enough of them to remain for work."^[5] Yinon's paper suggested that Israeli policy, both in war and peace, should aim for one objective: 'the liquidation of Jordan' as ruled by the Hashemite Kingdom, together with increased Palestinian migration from the West Bank into eastern Jordan.^{[5][15]} The dissolution of Jordan, Yinon thought, would bring an end to the problem of the existence of dense concentrations of Palestinians in the Palestinian territories Israel had conquered in the Six Days War in 1967, allowing them to be spirited away into that former kingdom's territory.^[17]

Lebanon

Yinon's paper fed an old Lebanese conspiracy theory against its territorial integrity going back to 1943, according to which the country was to be cantonized along ethno-nationalist lines. In particular during the 1970s^[18] the idea took wing and, especially after civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1975, came to be associated with the figure of Henry Kissinger whose Middle East diplomacy was thought to be greatly detrimental to Lebanese interests, and who was rumoured to be planning the partition of Lebanon into two states.^[19]

Iraq

Yinon considered Iraq, with its oil wealth, to be Israel's greatest threat. He believed that the Iran-Iraq war would split up Iraq, whose dissolution should be a strategic Israeli aim, and he envisaged the emergence of three ethnic centres, of Shiites governing from Basra, the Sunni from Baghdad, and the Kurds with a capital in Mosul, each area run along the lines of the administrative divisions of the former Ottoman Empire.^[15]

Contemporary reception

An English version by Israel Shahak soon appeared in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*.^[20] According to William Haddad, the publication of the article caused a sensation at the time.^[21] Mordechai Nisan likewise notes that it made waves, stirring both curiosity and wrath, the latter since it fed into regional suspicions that Israel was intent on "balkanizing" the neighbourhood.^[22] Haddad notes that the American syndicated columnist Joseph Kraft, a month later, echoed Yinon's ideas in an article that Syria would implode into confessional fragments composed of Alawite, Druze and Sunni communities were the country to be occupied after an Israel invasion, and that such an event should cause reverberations throughout the Arab world, resulting in a reconfiguration of ethnic microstates guaranteed to introduce an era of peace. The idea was dismissed at the time.^[21] Yinon's article drew several other responses, and was reviewed in *Newsweek* (26 July 26, 1982, p. 32) and the *Wall Street Journal* (8 December 1982, p. 34).^{[23][24]} The French philosopher, convert to Islam, and Holocaust denialist, Roger Garaudy, who was married to a Palestinian woman, used the text the following year in the English version of his book, *L'Affaire Israël: le sionisme politique*, to support his argument that a mechanism was in place to drive Arabs out of what was defined as Eretz Israel and disintegrate Arab countries.^[25]

Interpretations

According to Noam Chomsky, the views espoused by Yinon were to be dissociated from the official Zionist mainstream outlook of that time, in embodying 'ideological and geopolitical fantasies' that could be identified with the line developed by the ultranationalist Tehiya political party, created in 1979. Nonetheless, an argument could be made, he continues, that part of the mainstream of Labour Zionism in his view had entertained similar ideas. Chomsky cites in support of this David Ben-Gurion's strategy when the State of Israel was founded of crushing Syria and the Transjordan, annexing southern Lebanon while leaving its northern residue to Maronite Christians, and bombing Egypt if it were to put up resistance. Chomsky warned against complacency about these fringe ideas since, he argued: '(t)he entire history of Zionism and later that of Israel, particularly since 1967, is one of gradual shift towards the positions of those formerly regarded as right-wing extremists.'^[26]

Amos Elon reviewed the essay for Haaretz and worried that American commentators on Israel were turning a blind eye to the kind of irrational attitudes evinced by Yinon's article. Those who did point out such tendencies within Israeli politics were subjected to defamation.^[12]

Ilan Peleg described it as 'an authentic mirror of the thinking mode of the Israeli Right at the height of Begin's rule.'^[27]

Virginia Tilley argues that there was a strong tension between the US as a global hegemon relying on strong regional state systems, and Israel's interests in a weak state system in the Middle East beyond its borders on the other hand. In this context she cites Yinon's views as spelling out the latter logic, but specifies that they were not quite unique at that time, since Ze'ev Schiff writing in Haaretz in the same month, 5 February 1982, had asserted that Israel's geostrategic interests would be best served by the fragmentation of Iraq, for example, into a tripartite entity consisting of Shiite and Sunni states hived off from a northern Kurdish reality.^[28]

Israel Shahak in the foreword to his translation interpreted the plan as both a fantasy and a faithful reflection of the strategy being developed by Ariel Sharon and Rafael Eitan, and drew parallels with both the geopolitical ideas that flourished in Germany from 1890 to 1933, later adopted by Hitler and applied to Eastern Europe,^[29] and modern American neoconservative thinking, which influenced Yinon, to gather from the sources cited in his notes.^[30] Linda S. Heard (<http://gulfnews.com/opinion/thinkers/linda-s-heard>), writing for CounterPunch in 2006, reviewed recent policies under George W. Bush such as the war on terror, and events in the Middle East from the Iran-Iraq war to the Invasion of Iraq in 2003, and concluded:

There is one thing that we do know. Oded Yinon's 1982 "Zionist Plan for the Middle East" is in large part taking shape. Is this pure coincidence? Was Yinon a gifted psychic? Perhaps! Alternatively, we in the West are victims of a long-held agenda not of our making and without doubt not in our interests.^[15]

The Canadian economist Michel Chossudovsky on his website Global Research reproduced Shahak's translation in April 2013, arguing that it threw light for the concept of a Greater Israel in the policies of the Likud-led government coalition led by Benjamin Netanyahu and circles within the Israeli military and intelligence establishment.^[31]

Notes and references

Notes

1. Yinon 1982, pp. 49–59: *Estrategiah le-Yisrael bi-Shnot ha-Shmonim*.
2. Karmi 2007, p. 27.
3. Bernstein 2012, p. 13.
4. Chomsky 1999, p. 471 n.19.
5. Primakov 2009, p. 201.
6. Legrain 2013, p. 266, n.19.
7. Masalha 2000, p. 94.
8. Feeley 2010, p. 79.
9. Sleiman 2014, p. 94.
10. Legrain 2013, p. 266 n.19.
11. Yinon 1982, pp. 49–59.
12. Chomsky 1999, p. 456.
13. Labévière 2000, p. 206.
14. Ahmad 2014, p. 83.
15. Heard 2006.
16. Tilley 2010, pp. 107–108.
17. Ahmad 2014, p. 82.
18. Sleiman 2014, pp. 76–77.
19. Sleiman 2014, p. 77.

20. Haddad 1985, p. 116 n.18: Israel Shahak, 'Strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties' in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 44-45 Summer/Fall 1982 pp.209-214.
21. Haddad 1985, p. 104.
22. Nisan 2002, p. 332 notes 14,15.
23. Helms 1990, p. 48.
24. Peleg 2012, p. 310 n.56.
25. Garaudy 1983, p. 133.
26. Chomsky 1999, p. 456-457.
27. Peleg 2012, p. 43.
28. Tilley 2010, pp. 107–111; 250 note 19.
29. Shahak & Yinon 1982, p. v.
30. Shahak & Yinon 1982, pp. iii, v.
31. Chossudovsky 2015.

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External links

- The Zionist Plan for the Middle East (<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/pdf/The%20Zionist%20Plan%20for%20the%20Middle%20East.pdf>) Translated and edited by Israel Shahak

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