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Mr. Ogden Williams

Dear Oggie:

Thank you very much for your thoughtful letter of June 20. It is difficult for me to know how to reply since it would appear that we do not share some basic assumptions about the nature of the Israeli state or the peace process. Time simply does not permit me to address all of these issues and assumptions, but let me cite a few:

1. There is absolutely nothing in common between Netanyahu and Milosevic or between the Israeli democracy and the Serbian dictatorship. If Israel had been engaged in "ethnic cleansing" twenty-percent of Israel's population -- total population is now eight or nine times its size fifty years ago -- would not still today consist of Arabs. The ethnic composition of the West Bank and Gaza today would be as uniformly Jewish as the population of the Krajina is Croatian. Although I do not know it for a fact I am prepared to assume that a certain number of the Arabs who became refugees in 1948 acquired that status because they lived in villages which had demonstrated unemitting and violent hostility to Jews. I have no doubt that many others who fled the new state in 1948 and the occupied areas in 1967 did so because they expected the Jews to do to them what they looked forward to doing to the Jews if they had won. That, however, is not "ethnic cleansing." Neither are continuing efforts to root out demonstrably violent terrorists.

2. Netanyahu's actions often seem clumsy, ill-timed even counter-productive. Some of them are unquestionably so, but others only seem that way because of the distance and utterly different perspective from which we observe them. Netanyahu is Prime Minister of Israel, not Ambassador to the UN or the U.S. and his first concern is the security of his people and the stability of his government. Actions necessary to secure these ends often appear incomprehensible at our remove. In this connection it would be well to remember that, with all of the progress achieved by the late Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, both of whom I was and am privileged to call friends, Peres lost an election fought directly on these issues. His cabinet was based on political parties from the center to the far left. The cabinet that replaced him was based on parties' occupying the center to the far right. If Peres made concessions to his left which he

deemed necessary for the stability of his government, Netanyahu must make similar concessions to his right.

3. Despite this the extraordinary difficulties inherent in advancing a peace process with a government a critical number of whose members are entirely opposed to it, Netanyahu has made historic concessions in the interests of achieving agreement which utterly violate his own party's fundamental ideological basis; namely, that all of the original Palestine mandate should be incorporated into the Jewish state.

4. Well then, you may ask, why doesn't Netanyahu form a new government with the Labor Party and drop those of its members who oppose the peace process altogether. The answer to that requires something of a knowledge of Israeli politics. Even assuming that the Labor Party leader could be persuaded to enter such a coalition - which he opposes because it would deprive the Labor Party of the ability to campaign against Netanyahu on his handling of the peace process - it would be extremely foolish for Netanyahu to do so at the present time. A large number of the people of Israel, not merely of their representatives in parliament and in the government, oppose the Oslo version of the peace process because they do not believe that the majority of Palestinians and of other Arabs is genuinely prepared to live at peace with Israel and they believe that Oslo would end with Israel giving up geographical advantages essential to her defense. If Netanyahu were to form a grand coalition with Labor the representatives of these people on the right, now incorporated in the government majority, would abandon Netanyahu and form a powerful opposition block. The government would be supported by some of Netanyahu's current slender parliamentary majority, the entire Labor Party and other parties to its left. Netanyahu and his supporters would be a minority in, and lose practical control of his own government. Furthermore, he would be signing his own and his party's political death warrant at the next national election in which he would be opposed not only by his grand coalition partners but by his former partners to the right, thereby dividing the vote that would be faced by the candidate of the Labor party. This is not merely a matter of looking out for number one. The hopes of moderate Israelis -- a substantial majority -- who would like to see the peace process succeed but who believe that the Labor party and its further left partners would, if they had won the last election, have given away far too much and undermined Israel's security, rest on Netanyahu's continued political viability and the integrity of his party. Without a strong Likud the Israeli center would crumble, polarizing Israeli politics even more between an extreme right and extreme left.

5. Finally, it is no accident that the peace treaty with Egypt was reached by a Likud prime minister and a Likud-led government. Virtually all Israelis concede that it would have been impossible for a Labor-led government to implement the terms of Camp David over the opposition of roughly half the country. The same thing can be said - in spades - for the implementation of any Oslo-based agreement. The co-optation of the center right and far right in a government which assumes responsibility for negotiating, concluding and implementing and

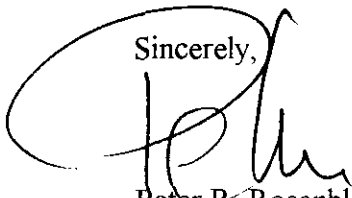
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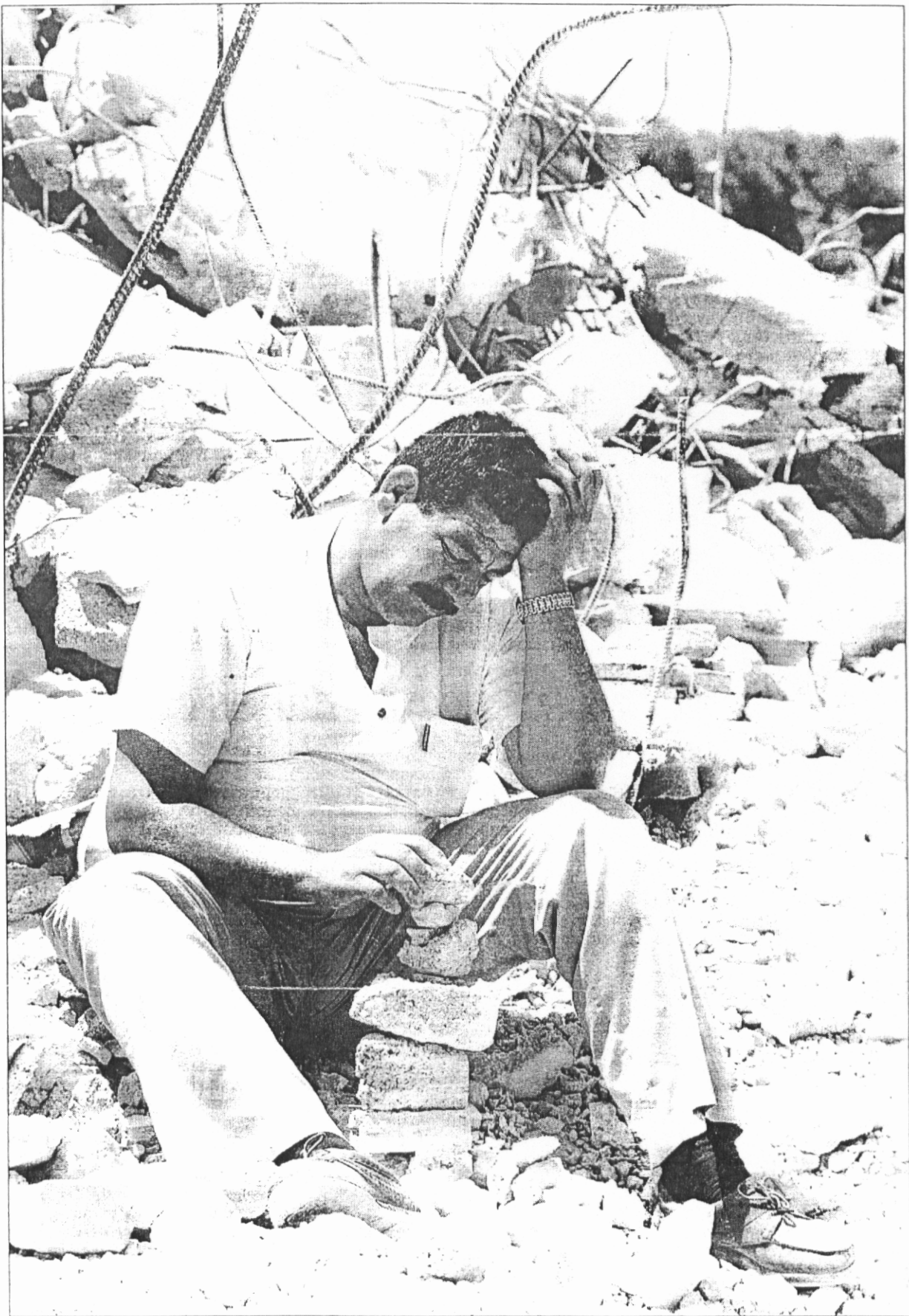
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agreement with the Palestinians is absolutely essential. In order to keep his coalition together Netanyahu has found it necessary to balance concessions to the Palestinians in the current peace process with other positions which are necessary to keep the government going. Many of these positions - which are universally reviled outside of Israel - are largely symbolic in character. I refer to moves such as the opening of the tunnel (which was unconscionably and untruthfully misrepresented by Arafat), the announcement (but no action) of building on Har Homa and, most recently, the proposed enlargement of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to the west (in pre-1967 Israel).

Well, I suppose I could go on but I think you are fair minded enough to see where I am coming from.

With very best wishes,

Sincerely,

Peter R. Rosenblatt



Palestinian Mustafa Dadean ponders his family's fate after Israeli authorities demolished his home yesterday.