THE KOENIG REPORT AND ISRAELI POLICY TOWARDS THE PALESTINIAN MINORITY, 1965-1976: OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES
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INTRODUCTION

THE KOENIG REPORT IS FREQUENTLY referred to as a major turning point in the relationship between the Israeli State and the Palestinian minority. This Report, leaked to the Israeli newspaper Al-Hamishmar and published on 7 September 1976, is the first publicly available document, which shows that the policies of discrimination and containment to which the Palestinian-citizens have been subjected since 1948, reflect planning and deliberations at the policy-making circles. Its publication exposed the policy options that Israeli policy makers were considering prior to the Land Day, as its first (main) section was finalized on 1 March - one month before the Land Day's events.

The Koenig Report - named after its main author Israel Koenig, then the North District Commissioner - is comprised of a peculiar reading of the status of Palestinians in Israel and recommendations regarding the State's policy towards the minority. It intended to provide the Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin with an array of policy options. The racist language of the Report and its draconian suggestions caused wide-ranging indignation by Palestinians.2 However, State officials dismissed this reaction as unwarranted. They maintained that the Report represented the opinion of its author(s), and did not represent an official policy nor did it reflect the mode of thinking in decisionmaking circles. The debates that followed the Report's publication have mostly centered on the limits of freedom of expression (and racism) that civil servants ought to observe, instead of dealing with the premises of the State policy towards the minority.

The focus on the style of the Report instead of on its content reflected a widely held belief regarding Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. Most scholars and Israeli-Jewish politicians have tended to attribute to the Israeli leaders a tactic of "wait and see" in the first decade after 1948, and a policy of contingency thereafter.3 After all, between 1948 and 1967 Israeli governments had dedicated three meetings to discuss Arabs' affairs, and between 1967 and 1990 they held few such meetings, which mostly ended without operational decisions.4

Moreover, Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister, showed little interest in the Palestinian minority and delegated the responsibility for its affairs to MAPAI's (a Hebrew abbreviation of The Workers’ Party of the Land of Israel) functionaries in the party and the Histadrut.5 Even researchers who did identify certain principles that guided the official policy towards the Palestinian minority (and occasionally in an insightful manner) have done so largely on the basis of observations, analysis of data and announcements of politicians as well as by comparing the Israeli regime with a comparable situation, primarily, Apartheid South Africa.6 Yet they have not presented official documents that validate their arguments. I am not arguing that social sciences should primarily use hermeneutic research methods and be engaged in the analysis of texts; rather, I maintain that the study of official documents could be helpful in shedding light on understudied social and political issues and might disprove some firmly held hypotheses.

My proposition in this article is that the Koenig Report does not represent a fundamental shift in Israeli policy towards the minority, nor does it signal a new phase where policy makers have moved towards a more comprehensive and calculated policies in dealing with the Palestinian minority. Rather, I shall attempt to demonstrate that this Report is part and parcel of the prevalent discourse regarding the minority in bureaucratic and policy-making circles. This postulate is firmly supported by a declassified document from the Labor Party Archive (at Beit Berl) - the Tolidano Testimony - which will be summarized and discussed, as well as by supplementary secondary sources. However, before going any further in outlying and discussing the available documentation and data, I will briefly summarize the Report's main recommendations.

KOENIG'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The underlying premise of the Report's recommendations is how to contain the minority through coercive measures. It consists of policy proposals in five areas: demography and national sentiments, political leadership, economy and employment, education, and law enforcement. The first section on demography and nationalism is overshadowed by the fear that the Palestinians would in the near future comprise a majority of the population in the Northern District, thus endangering Israeli sovereignty over the Galilee, particularly the parts of this region that were designated to the Palestinian Arab State according to the 1947 U.N. partition resolution. The recommendations included the expansion and deepening of Jewish settlements in Palestinian populated areas, and at the same time, the exploration of ways to dilute the concentrations of Palestinian population; the introduction of a policy of reward and punishment towards leaders and settlements that express hostility towards the state and Zionism; and the establishment of an Arab political party that would raise the banner of integration instead of Palestinian nationalism.
Section two on leadership includes tactics that should be pursued to create a new brand of leadership, a leadership of collaborators who are fundamentally different from both the "dignitaries" on the one hand and the Communists and the nationalists on the other. RAKAH (the Communist party) leaders should be discredited by exposing their personal lifestyles and habits. Achieving that, however, is dependant upon a successful wide-ranging reshuffle in governmental and quasi-governmental organizations, which handle Palestinian affairs. "Arabists," bureaucrats and security services personnel who have been associated with the old policies should be replaced. Along with that, the support that the State has given to the traditional retrograde leaders should be withdrawn. Instead, the new personnel of the official organizations should "start immediately to create new figures of high intellectual standard... They should be helped to establish an Arab party as mentioned above."

Section three which deals with economy and employment includes suggestions to confine the proportion of Palestinians among the workforce in vital economic enterprise to a maximum of 20 percent; the intensification of tax collection in Palestinian localities; the creation of new marketing arrangements wherein the impact of Palestinian distributors be minimized. Moreover, social benefits paid to large families should be withheld from Palestinians; and central institutions should give Jews preferential treatment.

The proposals for the educational policy, outlined in section four, deal exclusively with higher education, thus skipping any discussion on the State's under funding of elementary and secondary Arab education and its disadvantaged conditions. The suggestions included the setting of universal criteria of admission to the institutions of higher education; the channeling of Palestinian students to sciences faculties, where due to excessive workload, they would not be able to engage in politics; the encouragement of Palestinian students to pursue their studies abroad while making their return and employment difficult; the exercise of forceful measures against Palestinian student political activists on campuses; and the initiation of plans to find employment for the most successful graduates.

Finally section five on law enforcement includes the following proposals: literal and firm implementation of the law in Palestinian communities; the adoption of legal steps against bureaucrats and institutions who fail to enforce the law in their areas of responsibility; the introduction of lawsuits against Palestinian law breakers in the areas of income tax and illegal building as a deterring measure; and the increase of the security services' presence in Palestinian localities.

 Doubtlessly, the Koenig Report represents a break from the public discourse of modernization that Israeli politicians and mainstream academics have assiduously propagated since 1948. According to this discourse, the State has acted as a modernizing agent in guiding the Palestinians from traditionalism to modernity. Yet, according to the Koenig Report, the State policy should be geared towards the containment and the marginalization of the minority. Moreover, in contrast to the official discourse, the Palestinians are treated in the Report, not as citizens in a democratic State, but rather as a hostile population engaged in subversion.

As mentioned before, State officials were publicly dismissive of the Report arguing that it represented the opinion of its author(s). However, if this explanation is credible, then, why did Prime Minister Rabin refrain from replacing Koenig from his position as the senior civil servant in charge of the Northern District where the majority of the Palestinians live? Furthermore, why did Rabin insist on the nomination of Zvi Aldoraty, a Labor Party member and a coauthor of the Koenig Report, to the position of the Labor Party's Arab department director?

Despite the significance of these queries to the exploration of Israeli policy towards the Palestinian minority, the research question should focus on the nature of Israeli policy at the level of planning and practice - i.e., consciously devised and executed measures - rather than at the declarative one. Specifically, the assumption regarding the characterization of State policy as determined by contingency should be tested.

THE TOLIDANO TESTIMONY

There is an abundance of documents that give details of policy plans, general ideas, deliberations and policy proposals towards the Palestinian minority hi various aspects of life. These documents are, by and large, still unexplored. For example, in the field of education a detailed plan was outlined by Abba Hushi - who for many years had a major impact on the planning of the official policy towards the Palestinian minority - parts of which were published in Ma'ariv newspaper on 2 June 1960.10 In this section I will discuss the testimony given by Shmouel Tolidano, who held the position of the prime minister advisor on Arab affairs between 1965 and 1977 to the Committee Dealing with Arab Affairs.11 This committee was composed of Labor Party members, Labor Party Arabists, ministers, the advisor to the prime minister on Arab affairs, leaders of the trade union - the Histadrut, and was headed by Abba Hushi - on 20 June 1968.12 Tolidano was asked to give a summary of the official policy towards the Palestinian citizens. The main principles of this policy are summarized in the following:

A) Arab organizations: we ("we" in this testimony refers to State agencies) decided to:

1) Prevent the establishment of independent Arab political parties or nation-wide organizations. In this respect the State was successful in preventing the establishment of political parties, like the attempts which were made by Elias Kussa, the Popular Front, Al-Ard movement. We have succeeded in the prevention of such endeavors during 20 years.

2) Prevent the establishment of nation-wide Islamic organizations on religious or national basis. We did not establish nation-wide Islamic religious organizations and disallowed (popular) celebration of Islamic religious festivities. In this respect we also were successful.

3) Prevent the establishment of Arab municipal organizations beyond the locality level. We endorsed the establishment of local authorities, but prevented the foundation of regional authorities or a union of (Arab) local authorities.
4) Prevent the establishment of large Arab economic enterprises - an independent bank, Arab labor unions, and chambers of commerce. Moreover, we endeavored to preserve the economic dependency of Arabs on the Jewish sector. In this respect we also were successful.

5) Prevent the establishment of independent social institutions and sport clubs. Instead, we encouraged the integration of Arabs in existing Israeli frameworks. We blocked an initiative to the establishment of Arab sport clubs in the Triangle area. Now 20 years after the establishment of the State, there is no single Arab sport club.

B) Reward and punishment: our conduct has been as follows:

1) Awarding preferential treatment in socio-economic development to certain villages and religious sects.

2) Giving side benefits to collaborators and withholding them from negative elements.

3) Cultivating leaders at various levels - Knesset Members and heads of local authorities - by channeling benefits through them to the general public.

C) Demography: we were guided by the following policy principles:

1) The inculcation of the family planning notion among the Arabs in Israel.

2) The initiation of various measures for the liberation of women, particularly the raising of their educational standards. This was done in order to decrease the rate of the Arabs' natural growth. However, high level of education is associated with nationalist consciousness, thus we had to choose between a big minority with low national consciousness, and a small minority with strong national awareness. We opted for the second alternative.

4) The encouragement of Arabs particularly the Bedouins to settle in the mixed cities, while encouraging Jews to move in the opposite direction from the city to the village.

5) The splitting up of the concentrations of Arab population in the Galilee, the Triangle and the Negev by Jewish settlement or State's facilities (army and police compounds).

6) The deceleration of the disintegration of the tribe, the hamula and community. Yet, if this policy proves unattainable, we should move to support new leaders. And, [continue to] single out and award preference to the Druze and Circassian communities and to a limited extent to the Greek-Catholic community (until 1967).

D) Land: we decided to:

1) Conclude agreements on the pending cases of "present absentees."

2) Conclude the land settlement in the North and embark on such an arrangement in the Negev. We thought it would be of our interest to give the Bedouins legal holding of 100 thousand dunam, instead of the current situation whereby they control 700 thousand dunams.

3) Stop the confiscation of land, until such an act is necessary. However, this principle will soon be violated, as the army is interested in a certain territory, which ought to be expropriated.

E) Jewish-Arab relations:

Friction between Jews and Arabs should not be allowed.

F) Illegal building:

We reached the conclusion that zoning plans for Arab villages ought to be prepared. In cases where such plans are prepared we will begin demolishing houses (which fall out of the building areas).

E) The Bedouins: we decided to:

1) Move them northward in an organized manner.

2) Settle them and change their source of livelihood from agriculture to wage labor.

3) Eliminate gradually their livestock. In this respect we have not been successful.

The Tolidano testimony clearly shows that there were policy principles, which guided the Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. Moreover, as Tolidano himself argued at the end of his testimony, the 1967 War and the Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip created new challenges to Israeli policy planners and policy makers. His testimony ended with a series of questions, which Israeli policy-makers had to tackle. Such queries included for example: Should Israel allow the formation of nationwide Arab organizations, political parties and associations? Should the State keep its support of the current leadership? Or should it cultivate a new breed? Should the Muslims be requested to serve in the Army? Should the State openly encourage Arabs to migrate from Israel, as it had been doing in the West Bank and Gaza? What criteria for family unification should be put into effect? 13 Should the army continue its trainings in areas...
adjacent to Arab localities? Should the granting of loans from governmental funds continue to be stipulated by the approval of the security services?

Should the State allow the publication of independent Arab journals and newspapers? Should it tolerate critical public announcements of Arabs in the official media similar to those made by Jews? Should the State continue in the concentration of lands in Arab populated areas in order to provide land for the building of Jewish settlements and State facilities? And, should the State continue awarding preferential treatment to certain communities? These questions illustrate that the official policy has reached a crossroad, and that a need has emerged for the formulation of new policy guidelines.

The following section deals with the political changes which had taken place between the Tolidano testimony and the publication of the Koenig Report.

FROM TOLIDANO TESTIMONY TO KOENIG REPORT

The testimony of Tolidano, outlined above, comprised the greater part of a Memorandum that he submitted to Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1973. In the Memo he added a few dimensions, primarily one aspect dealing with the loyalty of the Palestinians. In this respect Tolidano adhered to a Ben-Gurionian principle according to which the Palestinians should neither be expected to identify with nor to be loyal to the State. Tolidano thought that the loyalty question should be treated in practical rather than ideological terms. He maintained that the Israeli dimension in the everyday life of the Palestinians should be fostered by the improvement of their living standards. The memo was submitted in 1974 to the Ministerial Committee of Security and was adopted as the official policy towards the minority. Later, Tolidano estimated that the tenets of this memo continued to constitute the basis of the official policy until 1991.

However, between 1968 and 1976 various policy guidelines were amended. The most conspicuous change concerned the establishment of nationwide indigenous organizations. Alarmed by the increasing support for RAKAH (the Communist party) among the Palestinians, Tolidano acted energetically behind the scenes to facilitate the establishment in 1974 of "The National Committee of Chairmen of Arab Local Authorities," a nationwide organization, which was dominated for a considerable period of time by Labor Party supporters. It is worth noting that The National Committee of Chairmen had failed to endorse the Land Day strike in 1976. Moreover, Ibrahim Nimer Hussein, a long-standing chairman of The National Committee - holding this position between 1981 and 1999 - was a supporter and later on a member of the Labor Party.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The documents discussed above show that the differences between the approaches of Tolidano and Koenig are not substantial. Both of them adhered to the same discourse and sought similar objectives. They shared the goals of decreasing the proportion of the Palestinians among the country's population, the splitting up of the concentrations of Palestinian population by Jewish settlement and security instillations, the use of reward and punishment policy, the creation of a new leadership of collaborators, the fight against independent, nationalistic and Communist leaders as well as against indigenous organizations, disallowing the establishment of a worthwhile Palestinian economic base, and preventing the Palestinians from holding significant positions in the economy. The difference between them, however, relates mostly to style and tactics. While Tolidano emphasized the instrumentality of economic dependence in the achievement of these goals, Koenig underscored the use of coercion. This discrepancy is also the main dividing line between the advocates of "moderate policy" (such as Tolidano) and the supporter of "activist policy" (such as Israel Koenig, Amnon Linn, Uri Lubrani and Moshe Arens).

One of the main questions that students of the Palestinian minority are interested in concerns the impact of such policy-guidelines on the daily life of the Palestinians. For example, Benziman & Mansour (1992) argue that senior civil servants and security officers - the advisor to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs, Military Governors, and Commissioners - by and large have had marginal effect on the formulation of State policies. Their role was mostly executive, although they occasionally endeavored to introduce new ideas to the decision-making bodies. Tolidano gave a different appraisal. In his above cited testimony he argued that:

[Some people] say that there is no coordination between the various ministries concerning areas of responsibility, and there is no policy concerning the Arab sector. I think that is ridiculous.... We have a broad committee which meets on monthly basis... And there is a central committee that meets on bi-weekly basis - in accordance with the needs; and there is a coordinating internal committee. Practically, today every act big or small - like the confiscation of land, the building of a Mosque, the enlargement of building area ... the permission to a woman (from the occupied territories) to join her husband (in Israel), the connection of a house to the electricity grid, the appointment of Kadis (religious judges), the opening of a workshop or a health clinic - all of these activities are coordinated, and no ministry does any move before getting the OK of the intra-ministerial committee.

As to the issue of policy, the principles, which I mentioned compose the general guidelines. It is true that we don’t always find all the solutions, yet we know what we strive for, and we disallow what we disapprove of.

If State policy is evaluated according to its impact on the daily life of the minority rather than by abstract ideas and tokenism, then the Tolidano testimony and Memo are most revealing. They unveil the objectives that the State aspired to achieve, and the way in which the various State organs coordinated their activities for the achievement of these goals. Moreover, the veneer of procedural democracy, which has been presented by mainstream academics and officials as the dominant explanatory factor of State-minority relations, looses much of its impetus. The Tolidano documents also give insights to various queries raised above; such as why did the Prime Minister refrain from dismissing Koenig,
and why the reaction of the Palestinians to the Koenig Report was seen by state official as exaggerated.

In summary, although stated in bold and racist language, the Koenig Report does not represent a break from the discourse which prevailed in the bodies dealing with the Palestinian minority. Given the official policy as outlined by Tolidano, the Koenig recommendations were about the style of governance and nothing more.

The Koenig Report—named after its main author Israel Koenig, then the North District Commissioner—is comprised of a peculiar reading of the status of Palestinians in Israel and recommendations regarding the State's policy towards the minority. This Report, leaked to the Israeli newspaper Al-Hamishmar and published on Sep 7, 1976, is the first publicly available document, which shows that policies of discrimination and containment to which the Palestinian-citizens have been subjected since 1948, reflect planning and deliberations at the policy-making circles.

Copyright Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc. Summer 2003 | ENDNOTES | 1. This article is a part of a larger project which aimed to reconstruct the history of the Palestinian minority in Israel after Al-Nakbah (1948). In this article the English translation of the Report, which was published in Journal of Palestine Studies, is used. Israel Koenig, "The Koenig Report," Journal of Palestine Studies, 3 (1976), 190-200. | 2. The Palestinians held a two hours strike against the Koenig Report on 28 September 1976. see Majid Al-Haj & Henry Rosenfeld, Arab Local Government in Israel (Tel-Aviv: International Center for Peace in the Middle East, 1988), 148-9. | 3. This has been a firmly held view. see e.g., Jacob M. Landau, The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1993) (in Hebrew); and Uri Benziman & Atallah Mansour, Subtenants: Israeli Arabs, Their Status and the Policy Towards Them (Jerusalem: Keter, 1992), 72. This state of affairs is interesting given the fact that many of the first generation of Israeli academics (and some of those currently active) who wrote about the Palestinian minority worked in the State's system of control such as the Military Government and the Office of the Prime Minister's Advisor on Arab Affairs. On some aspects of the connection between the academia and the State system of control see Dan Rabinowitz, Anthropology and the Palestinians (The Institute for Israeli Arab Studies, 1998). | 4. Benziman & Mansour, Ibid. 52-3. | 5. Ibid: 51 see also Amnon Linn who was one of these functionaries. Amnon Linn, Stormy Skies: Jews and Arabs in Israel (Kami, 1999) (in Hebrew). | 6. See e.g., Jan Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority (Austin: Texas University Press, 1980); Elia Zureik, The Palestinians in Israel: a Study of in Internal Colonialism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Sammy Smooha, Israel: Pluralism & Conflict (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). | 7. The emphasis added. | 8. This notion was discussed in Ahmad H. Sa'di, "Modernization as an Explanatory Discourse of Zionist-Palestinian Relations," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 24, (1997), 25-48. | 9. Lustick, Ibid: 68. | 10. M. Mezles, "The Master Plan of Abba Hushi," Ma'ariv, 2 June 1960. | 11. The Committee Dealing With Arab Affairs, "Stenographic Protocol: From the Meeting of the Committee Dealing With Arab Affairs, 20.6. 1968," Labor Party Archive, Files, 7-23-68. LPA hereafter. | 12. Among the participants in this meeting were: Yigal Allon (who held many ministerial positions), Abba Hushi, Shmouel Tolidano, Roeven Bareket (who held the position of the general secretary of MAPAI), David Zcharia (held many position in MAPAI, including the head of the Party's Arab department), Amnon Linn (a long standing Arabist in MAPAI, the Labor Party and later in The Likud Party), Yackov 'Aini (Arabists and MAPAFs activist in the Histadrut's Arab section) and Gadish (an Arabist and a former mayor of Acre). | 13. He used the appalling phrase "The import of women," which reflects his attitude towards this subject. | 14. Benziman & Mansour, Subtenants, 71-2. | 15. Ibid: 77. | 16. Ibid: 88. | 17. Al-Haj & Rosenfeld, Arab Local Government in Israel, 142-3; see also Benziman & Mansour, Subtenants, 192. | 18. Benziman & Mansour, Subtenants, 51. | 19. LPA, 7-23-68, 14-5. | 20. Ahmad H. Sa'di is with the Department of Politics and Government, BenGurion University of the Negev.

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