

‘To Be Ethical and Still Succeed’

Maxim Ghilan is a writer, journalist, and poet, based in Israel and France, who is the editor of I&P, the Israel & Palestine Strategic Update, founded in 1971 by Ghilan and Louis Marton. Maxim Ghilan is also founder of the International Jewish Peace Union (IJPU), the first Jewish organization to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a partner in dialogue.

The following is the conclusion of an interview with EIR, conducted in early May by Michele Steinberg, in collaboration with Dean Andromidas. The first part of the interview appeared in EIR’s June 4 issue (“Israel’s General Staff: A Bunch of Dr. Strangeloves”).

Rarely do international, especially American, audiences hear directly from Israelis who have dedicated their work and their lives to a finding a just solution for peace. With 60 years of experience in Palestine and Israel, Maxim Ghilan brings an insider’s view of the pulse-beat of the region. In the first part, he discussed the danger to global stability posed by the alliance between the current regimes in Israel—run, in effect, by fanatics in the Army General Staff—and in Washington, run by Dick Cheney.

Ghilan warned about Sharon’s so-called “Gaza disengagement” plan, that “Ariel Sharon has never changed, and he never will. He wants a ‘Greater Israel,’ or, if you want, a Jewish-superiority state in all parts of historical Israel/Palestine.” Sharon is clever enough to know the mood in Washington, and to say the opposite. The current Israeli army general staff, said Ghilan, is “perhaps the most dangerous bunch of men on earth at the moment,” especially because they are backed by Washington.

“Yes, the Israelis can destroy the world, or ignite a world war that will,” Ghilan said. “The Israeli military has the necessary means to do so. And until Bush and Cheney came to power there was no other non-conventional power that considered using tactical nukes.” He noted, emphatically, “I am absolutely not against a small country also having defensive non-conventional weapons as the big countries have—as long as it is not ruled by demented leaders with paranoid ideologies. Here we have a bunch of Dr. Strangeloves. Shaul Mofaz and Bogey Ya’alon—or Dick Cheney—are not the proper depositories of world-destroying weapons.”

This conclusion begins with Ghilan’s judgement of the political future of the peace camp in Israel.

EIR: As a veteran of the peace camp in Israel—a founder of it—for many decades: How can the peace camp regain power in Israel?

Ghilan: You have in Israel, two sides, two peace camps. You have one, which is another silent minority; I’m speaking about the non-Zionist peace camp. In other words, those who say, “We don’t want to control anybody. We want a free Palestinian state, based on economic prosperity, beside Israel, and maybe in the later future, a Middle East Confederation or community.” They are a minority among the peaceniks everywhere. Then, you have a majority, which is the Zionist peace camp; and I mean people such as Beilin’s new Yahad Party, including Meretz; the left wing of the Labor Party (which is not very left wing, but—); even some people inside the Likud; some people inside the Shinui, which are economically reactionary, but pro-peace for the Palestinians; and the poorer rank-and-file of Shass, the Orthodox Oriental party who are against the Palestinians but for social justice. . . .

The equation is the following: If one supports the Zionist peace camp majority at some of its happenings, such as the massive demo that was held in Rabin Square, Tel Aviv, on May 15th with 200,000 participants, one really helps Shimon Peres who launched with his speech there a campaign for a new united national government with Sharon and Tony Lapid of Shinui at the top. If you don’t go to such events, if you remain pure and honest, you are confined to the rather small ghetto of the peace-and-justice camp.

I decided to participate, and as one of my friends told me: “We go there and when Peres starts speechifying we hold our noses and avoid the stench.”

In any case and unfortunately, a real, just peace, a really lasting solution, may only be reached after much more blood is spilt, maybe 25,000 more Israeli dead and about three times as many Palestinians. In the meantime one must evolve and disseminate a non-Zionist Israeli ethos for the future, an alternative code of beliefs and behavior that is both humanist and practical.

And continue fighting for justice and human rights wherever they are violated.

EIR: That is a perfect summary, which leads me to the last topic. Tell us about your background, your struggle for a peace.

Ghilan: I came to Palestine in 1944 as a refugee from Franco’s Spain, where my father was assassinated by Franco’s Falanges. As a young boy, I became a member of the Haganah, the Jewish Defense Organization which became the Israeli army later on. But when the Haganah sank the “Altalena,” an Irgun ship, and killed Jews, I moved over to the Stern group. Then, in the early 50s, I witnessed personally Arabs being tortured, and I gradually moved over from my nationalist views, to advocating two states, one Arab-Palestinian and the other Israeli, living side by side in peace. two states for the two peoples. This is my position since 1961.

I was the first Israeli to create a non-communist Jewish-Arab organization in Israel. It was called Koah Yozem, or “start-up force.” We have revived Koah Yozem as an affiliate to the International Jewish Peace Union and are already doing a lot of work in Jaffa, a mixed Arab-Jewish town, and will work with Israeli Bedouins in the Negev Desert. The Bedouins are the poorest of the poor Palestinians.

I was instrumental in the struggle against a military regime for Israelis and Arabs, which existed in the 1950s. I am a journalist, was editor of a major Israeli magazine and Deputy Editor of Uri Avnery’s weekly *Haolam*.

In 1971, in Paris, I created a publication called *Israel and Palestine* and, with some others, was the first Israeli mainstream person instrumental in establishing and helping a dialogue between part of the Israeli peace camp, and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO. I was very much active in the field, for 23 years, travelling from Paris to Beirut, Tunis, Geneva, Vienna, New York, Washington, and so on.

Because of my pro-peace efforts, I had to become a political refugee and was warned I would be arrested if I went back to Israel. I went, and saw all the Palestinian leadership—in order to facilitate contact with the Israeli and Jewish peace camps—being supported secretly by Dr. Nahoum Goldman, then World Jewish Congress President and World Zionist Organization leader. I actually prevented, through secret diplomacy, killings of Jews, and through political action with the Quai d’Orsay (the French Foreign Office), saved Arab Palestinians who succeeded in leaving Beirut when Sharon invaded Lebanon, in 1982.

Yasser Arafat received me about 40 times; I saw other leaders, for instance Abu Jihad in Beirut as early as 1977, Abu Iyyad, Khaled al Hassan in Tunis and Paris, and so on. In 1993, when Arafat was allowed to return to Palestine, I was likewise allowed to come back to Israel, but not before a Cabinet member, Education Minister Shalamit Aloni, in Prime Minister Rabin’s government, intervened in my favor.

Since then, I have been active in Israel, in the U.S., and in Europe, sharing my time between Paris and Tel Aviv. I continue publishing *Israel and Palestine* as a newsletter.

With a number of Israeli and Jewish intellectuals and academic researchers, I created a Hebrew journal called *Mitan*, (“Charge”) that publishes the views of all segments of the Israeli non-Zionist peace-camp. *Mitan* is a free tribune.

I also keep in touch with Jewish and non-Jewish personalities throughout the world to encourage peace and pro-human rights activities. Let me add I appreciate the views of people who have an independent analysis of world events, such as Mr. Lyndon LaRouche, and I respect many, but not all, of his views, and agree with the conclusions of quite a few of his analytical articles.

Finally, I think Israel and the Israelis have to open themselves to the world, and stop being so ultra-ethnocentric. I think the Jews should again play the moral role they played for the last 2,000 years, serve as a bridge between ancient

philosophies and modern democratic views and cultures.

EIR: Our readers would appreciate knowing more about your life. Have you ever run for political office?

Ghilan: No, I never ran for office, and have not been affiliated with a political party, anywhere, since 1949.

After I witnessed torture of Arabs in 1954, it still took me 6 years—from 1954 to 1960—to become convinced that we need a two-state solution, even though I had progressive views.

In 1983 I created the IJPU, the International Jewish Peace Union, which was the first global Jewish organization to recognize Arafat’s PLO as a talking partner, and which convinced a peace-oriented Jewish-American group, the New Jewish Agenda, to adopt the same position.

EIR: So you forged a path in history.

Ghilan: Maybe, and I was also instrumental in such things as helping the dialogue between Israeli leaders and even ministers, and the late Hissam Sartawi, a Palestinian PLO leader who was assassinated by Abu Nidal on behalf of the Iraqis, for his contacts with people like me. Sartawi and myself also went to Washington to meet Jewish-American leaders, but he was expelled from the United States by Henry Kissinger.

For my pains, because I worked for Israeli-Palestinian peace, Saddam Hussein’s agents tried 3 times to assassinate me—as they assassinated, finally, Hissam Sartawi. For 3 years I walked about in Paris with a heavy hand-gun in my pocket. It was a pain. Talk of romantic, gay Paree!

So much for a bit of background. Up to this point, it has been a very adventurous, and very frustrating life, but a very satisfying one, because I did precisely what I thought I had to do. There are very few people in the world who can say that.

If you want a few more details: my father was a French-Jewish businessman who took Spanish nationality, and during the Spanish Civil War helped the Republicans, and was then killed by Franco’s thugs. He was also a Socialist. My mother, Jewish and born in Berlin, was at one stage a secretary at the German Foreign Office, the *Ausswertigesamt*, and helped foil a takeover of the democratic government by Kapp and his putschists. She met my father during the Versailles Peace Conference. She went there with the German Foreign Minister after World War I.

My paternal grandfather was a rabbi, and a cabbalist, and strangely enough, a Trotskyist at the same time. And he went the way of many Jews—to Buchenwald, where I know for a fact he was gassed, because the International Red Cross found the records of his gold teeth and of the hair of his beard that had been carefully stored by the S.S.M. for industrial use. “Ordnung muss sein” as they said, you must keep things in good order. Tidy.

So, I have an investment in the fate of the Jews, a personal and family investment, which coincides with the interest of all human beings; and first of all—of the Palestinians.