

10: ... And Then the World Changed

This is the tenth and final part of our series, "A Short History of Israel". If you wish to read the preceding parts, see the **Table of Contents** for links to them. We welcome comments and criticisms. Do tell us what you think.

The fundamentalist Islamic terrorist organisations, Hamas (founded in 1982) and Islamic Jihad (founded in 1979) began to compete with the PLO for support and power. Violence against Jews was one of the principal means of acquiring both.

In 1987, a campaign of relatively low-level but non-stop violence, known as the Intifada, began in the West Bank and Gaza. Often presented by the Western media as 'children throwing stones at tanks, and being shot at in return', it was actually quite a complex war. Rioting crowds of youths throwing rocks and sometimes petrol bombs kept Israeli soldiers on the streets to protect their bases, Jewish settlements, and Jerusalem. Stabbings and occasionally sniping and grenade throwing caused deaths among Israelis, but during the Intifada, Arabs murdered far more Arabs than Israelis: Between 1987 and 1991, about 20 Israelis were murdered in the Intifada, about half of them civilians (though thousands were injured), but during the same period, 528 Arabs were murdered by the PLO, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The victims were 'collaborators' – which in practice could mean not only any Arab who warned Jews of impending attacks, but any Arab who had any sort of friendly dealings with Jews. Personal and political scores were also settled. Also during those four years, 697 Arabs were killed by Israeli soldiers, the overwhelming majority of them during riots. 78 of them were under 15 years old.

Throughout the Intifada period (and to this day), terrorist murders by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including suicide bombings, continued. Some analysts believed that support among Palestinians for these Islamic organisations might soon exceed that of the secular PLO; furthermore, a new generation of young radicals, the local leaders of the Intifada, were also challenging the ageing PLO leadership who were in exile with Arafat in Tunisia. For

the first time, it appeared that the PLO and Israel might have a

common interest, in counteracting those forces.

The Israeli elections of 1992 brought in a Labour-led coalition under Yitzchak Rabin. In January 1993, in total secrecy, Israeli and PLO negotiators met in Oslo to begin what later came to be known as the 'Oslo Peace Process'. This culminated in 1994 and 1995 with the Cairo Treaty and an agreement known as 'Oslo II'. These brought an end to Israeli rule in Gaza (excluding only the Jewish settlements there),

plus an area to be known as 'Area A', which contained all the Arab cities of the West Bank with the exception of the small Jewish enclave at the centre of Hebron. Israeli forces would withdraw completely from those areas. A new organisation, the Palestine Authority, with the triumphantly returning Arafat as its Chairman, would have "legislative, executive and judicial powers and responsibilities", with complete control over the internal affairs of Gaza and Area A, including control over a Palestinian police force, armed by Israel. It would also exert civilian control over another area of the West Bank, 'Area B', which contained most of the Arab villages, but Israel would retain its military presence there. The IDF would retain control over the remainder of the territory, Area C, which contained 4% of the Arab inhabitants of the West Bank and all the Jewish settlements. The PLO, in return, renounced terrorism, agreed to prevent terrorism by other organisations, cease anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli incitement, and alter the term in its Constitution that called for the destruction of Israel. Free and fair elections would be held. Negotiations about the 'final status' would begin immediately, and a timetable was agreed for settling all the disputed issues, including the status of Jerusalem and of Palestinian refugees, culminating in the creation of a State of Palestine alongside Israel.

In the Oslo agreements the PLO accepted the principle of partition – a 'two-state solution' – which the Arabs had rejected in 1947 and which previously only Egypt had accepted. Arafat won the Nobel Peace Prize for this, along with Rabin and Shimon Peres, Israel's foreign minister and architect of the Oslo agreements. However, within a few days of the Cairo treaty, Arafat had made a speech in a mosque saying that the Palestinians would 'continue their jihad until they had liberated Jerusalem'. This was dismissed by many as mere rhetoric, but from then on, Arafat and other PLO leaders began making systematically different statements when they were speaking in Arabic from when they were addressing Western audiences. In the latter case, they maintained the line that they had taken the historic decision to renounce violence and accept the partition of Palestine; in the former, they said that the Oslo peace process was merely a stepping stone to their original objective of a unitary Arab state in the whole of Palestine. The PLO's renunciation of the relevant item in its Constitution was equivocal. The PLO's emblem remained a map of the whole of pre-1947 Palestine. The emblem of Fatah (Arafat's faction which is the principal constituent of the PLO) remained a similar map covered by crossed rifles and a grenade. Palestinian schools in Gaza and Areas A and B taught the doctrine of a unitary Arab state following the destruction of Israel.

Anti-Semitic incitement and blood libels became part of the culture

to an extent not previously known in history with the possible exception of Nazi Germany. In 1999 Arafat's wife Suha, in a speech in the presence of US First Lady Hillary Clinton, accused Israel of using poison gas on Arab children, and of causing "cancer and other horrible diseases". In Hamas-run schools and nurseries, **children were taught** that their purpose in life was to kill Jews and to become 'martyrs' (i.e. suicide murderers). The PLO swept aside the structures of civil society, such as the civil service and free press, and established totalitarian control with all positions of even the slightest influence filled by PLO loyalists and controlled ultimately by Arafat alone. Opponents were systematically intimidated or murdered. Only Hamas and Islamic Jihad survived to oppose the PLO, and even they had many members imprisoned.

Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty with similar provisions to the treaty with Egypt. The treaty has been scrupulously adhered to, and in practice, Israel's relations with Jordan are somewhat warmer than the 'cold peace' that prevails with Egypt. Several other Arab countries have established trading, but not full diplomatic, links with Israel. Other Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Libya, remain implacably opposed to Israel and maintain the old boycotts and support for terrorism.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in about 1989, Russia and former Communist Bloc states had re-established full diplomatic and other relations with Israel (and the Czech Republic resumed a fairly warm friendship). Now, another batch of states such as India, China and the Vatican, which had previously been hostile to Israel, followed suit.

One of the provisions of the Israel-Jordan treaty was that Jordan abolished its law that had in effect made selling land to Jews punishable by death. Ironically, the incoming Palestine Authority revived that law. Property owners who had sold their land to Jewish settlements, and real-estate agents who had brokered such deals, were executed. The new Mufti of Jerusalem (now a PLO appointee) ruled that such criminals must be denied a Muslim burial.

In 1995, Rabin was murdered by a religious Jew opposed to the Oslo peace process.

He was succeeded as Israeli Prime Minister by Peres, who lost the subsequent election and a Likud-led coalition took power.

An election in the Palestinian-controlled areas confirmed Arafat in power with 90% of the vote and no serious opposition. Terrorist violence and murders of Israelis by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including occasional spectacular mass murders, increased.

In 1999, Ehud Barak was elected Prime Minister (under a slightly altered electoral system that elected the Prime Minister directly and hence gave him a powerful mandate) at the head of a new Labour-led coalition. Barak embarked aggressively upon a quest for peace. He ordered a unilateral withdrawal from the buffer zone in Lebanon. The Lebanese terrorist group Hizbollah, which had previously specialised in suicide bombings against Israeli forces in the buffer

zone, now concentrated on terrorism across the Israeli border.

Israeli and Syrian ministers met under US auspices to 'talk about talks'. Syria demanded a promise of unconditional withdrawal from the Golan Heights as a precondition for negotiations. No progress was made.

Barak, together with US President Clinton, constructed a peace plan under which all Jewish settlements except those contiguous with Israel would be forcibly evacuated. The whole of Gaza and some 96% of the West Bank (including some border adjustments in which West Bank land would be swapped for equal areas of Israeli land), plus East Jerusalem including the Jewish holy sites, would form a new State of Palestine.

In reply, the Palestinian negotiators demanded that every person of Palestinian descent be allowed the 'right of return' to Israel. The negotiations broke up.

The PLO initiated a 'second Intifada', this time based on terrorism and suicide bombings. The Barak government continued to press for peace. Under a previously negotiated agreement, the IDF transferred control of Jacob's Tomb (an ancient Jewish shrine) to the Palestinian police force. Immediately, the tomb was desecrated and then destroyed stone by stone by an Arab mob which included the Palestinian policemen guarding it. Two Israeli reservists who lost their way near Ramallah were captured by the PLO. An Arab mob entered the building where they were being held and tore them apart. Their murderers appeared on the balcony waving their bloodied hands to the cheers of the crowd and then threw the bodies to the crowd for further desecration. A Palestinian policeman murdered his Israeli counterpart on one of the joint patrols that had been agreed. Gunmen entered a joint security meeting and murdered the Israeli policemen taking part. Widespread violence continued.

With elections imminent in which Barak faced defeat, last-ditch peace talks were held at Egyptian town of Taba. Arafat gave a vitriolic speech accusing Israel of being "fascist". The talks broke up and terrorist murders of Israelis increased further, with Arafat now taking a leading role. All Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners in PLO custody were released.

On February 6, 2001, Ariel Sharon became Prime Minister of Israel. He appointed Natan Sharansky as one of his Deputy Prime Ministers. He declared that Israel would make 'painful concessions' in return for peace, but only in return for peace.

On September 11, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., murdering thousands of Americans. Palestinians took to the streets to celebrate.

The world changed.

Thu, 07/10/2003 - 08:32 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Loretta

Excellent. Much of this I had forgotten, and some of it I did not even know. A good read, well done and concise.

Since 9/11 and the Iraq conflict, the UN has shown itself to be a useless, impotent, and obsolete institution, and certainly western appreciation of Israel (now in hindsight) has been vastly changed.

Better late than never.

by a reader on Sun, 07/13/2003 - 23:36 | [reply](#)

continuous murder of men women and children

your murdering people on land stolen from them how can you deny that.

the appreciation of israel is vastly changed who are you trying to persuade ? for those of us who have spent time in palestine attempting to improve the health of children know better we were taken into a home and shown pools of urine from you soldiers on the roof you know its true.

so what do my comments make me ? an anti-semite i despise most of the human race without favor

by dan lyn on Fri, 07/29/2005 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

Anti-Human

If you prefer anti-human to anti-semite, I'm fine with calling you that.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 08/02/2005 - 22:22 | [reply](#)

Let the truth ring!

I am so glad that there is something out there to dispell the Arab propaganda and the biased Western media against Israel. There has NEVER been a "Palestinian" nation, society, or country. The word Palestine itself is a made up word by the Romans when they took the Jews' land away. The Arab invasions which deposited the Arabs in the Jewish kingdom DOES NOT make it Arab. I really though Bush had the guts to stand up to the Jew-hating Arabs and deny a terrorist state next to innocent Israelis, but I guess not. I fear America is losing her nerve folks...

by Christopher on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 16:23 | [reply](#)

Arafat

More questions prompted by reading Gilbert, whose account of Rabin and Arafat's negotiations is very positive (gushing, almost).

Was Rabin wrong to negotiate with Arafat at all?

Should he have taken a step-by-step line in which the PLO would be held responsible for stopping terrorism against Israelis before they were given various kinds of economic and political autonomy within the occupied territories?

by [emma](#) on Thu, 08/23/2007 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

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