

Who Murdered The Oslo Accords?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

While Israeli tanks and bulldozers were rolling into, and Israeli planes were bombarding Palestinian towns and cities, including refugee camps, President George W. Bush proclaimed that the situation in which Palestinian Authority (P.A.) President Yasser Arafat found himself—imprisoned in a room of his Ramallah headquarters—was “largely of his own making.” Bush claimed that Arafat had “broken every promise made at Oslo,” and that that had led to the crisis.

The argument retailed by Israeli spokesmen elaborates on the theme: Arafat had a chance for peace, but he opted for terrorism instead. Such propagandists assert, Arafat was made the offer of a lifetime in July 2000, at Camp David, by President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, an offer for a sovereign Palestinian state, but he wanted more. After rejecting the peace plan, he returned to Ramallah and unleashed the Intifada, which escalated to the point that Israel had no choice but to reoccupy the Palestinian territories and “eliminate the terrorist infrastructure.”

The point is often made that, in war, the first casualty is the truth. In this case, it has been the systematic suppression of the truth and distortion of facts, which has paved the way for the current war. It is time the truth were reasserted.

The truth is, the Oslo peace accord of September 1993 failed, because powerful Israeli interests and their U.S.-based allies caused it to fail. In an interview that September, U.S. Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche forecast prophetically, that, unless immediate progress were made on the economic aspects of the peace agreements, “enemies of progress and enemies of the human race, such as Henry Kissinger and his friends, will be successful, through people like Ariel Sharon’s buddies, in intervening to drown this agreement in chaos and blood.”

That is, in short, what happened. By handing control over

economic development programs appended to the Oslo treaty to the World Bank, Kissinger’s friends ensured that no large-scale infrastructure would be built. Instead of enjoying a peace dividend in terms of better living conditions, the Palestinians would experience a deterioration of their already disastrous conditions. This would generate demoralization, and rage—the primary ingredients for radicalization—particularly among youth, rendering them vulnerable to recruitment into extremist organizations, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are opposed to peace.

The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Nov. 4, 1995, by right-wing Israeli extremist networks, was the political inflection point, intersecting the economic crisis. Rabin’s Foreign Minister, a terrified Shimon Peres then threw the 1996 elections to Likudnik Benjamin Netanyahu, who reversed whatever implementation of Oslo there had been, and embarked on a confrontation course, by expanding illegal Israeli settlements and launching provocations. His successor, Barak, continued to dismantle Oslo, which culminated in the “offer” at Camp David, that Israel should maintain sovereignty over Jerusalem, including the sites sacred to Islam—an offer that no Arab leader, no Muslim, could accept. Following the fruitless Camp David talks, the religious passions associated with Jerusalem were consciously ignited by Sharon on Sept. 28, 2000, who demonstratively took a stroll, escorted by 1,000 Israeli police, by the holiest Islamic shrine in Jerusalem, the al-Haram al-Sharif. That act, which showed just how sensitive the Jerusalem issue is (and should have clarified why Arafat could not have accepted the Camp David offer), triggered the Intifada. This act by Sharon, is omitted from any U.S. or Israeli chronologies. Sharon’s provocation was also the opening salvo to his election campaign. Once elected prime minister, by an electorate panicked by the vio-



The most important aspect of the Oslo Accords, dealt with economic policy. It was explicitly recognized that no peace could endure, unless there were cooperation among the former adversaries around economic development, for mutual benefit. Various Palestinian institutions were foreseen, to regulate water, energy, transportation, finances, etc. Two annexes to the accords were drawn up, protocols on joint cooperation for economic and regional development, which specifically identified a number of great projects: the Gaza Sea Port, the “Mediterranean-Dead Sea canal,” “regional desalination and other water development projects,” agriculture, energy, and industrial development.

lence that his provocation had produced, Sharon proceeded post-haste to finish off the peace process.

What Oslo Said

The Oslo Accord signed on Sept. 13, 1993, was a political and economic program for peace. It called for establishment of a Palestinian interim self-governing authority, for the West Bank and Gaza, for a five-year period, leading to a final settlement, based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338. These call for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied” in the 1967 war, secure and recognized borders, and a “just settlement of the refugee problem” regarding those Palestinians driven off their land in the wars since 1948, estimated to add up to 5 million today. The final status talks, which were to begin “not later than the third year” of the interim period, would deal with “Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations, and cooperation among neighbors, etc.” The P.A. was designated to establish a “strong police force,” while Israel would guarantee security against external threats. The civil administration would be withdrawn, the Israeli troops would withdraw from Jericho and Gaza, while “redeploying” in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, outside populated areas.

In 1994, the Israeli-Palestinian interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza, dubbed Oslo II, stipulated the second phase of self-rule, including provisions of elections of the Palestinian National Authority, a gradual withdrawal of Israeli military and handing over power to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, and the “prohibition of any change in the status of the West Bank and Gaza pending the outcome of final status negotiations.” The West Bank was to be divided up into Areas A, B, and C, under P.A. control, joint control, and Israeli control, respectively.

How Oslo Was Wrecked

The most effective means by which the Oslo Accords were sabotaged, was through economic policy. No sooner had the ink dried, than the World Bank issued a report on “development,” whose parameters were simple: High priority would go to labor-intensive projects, and the lowest priority for basic infrastructure, like the canals, ports, energy, and transportation mentioned in the annexes. The World Bank report was an operative doctrine, which governed the way in which funds from donor nations were allocated. Thus, a gambling casino was considered a good investment, as was “repair of existing infrastructure” in Gaza—a cruel joke, since no infrastructure existed. It was only through European Union efforts, that any major infrastructure projects were built: the Gaza airport and sea port, for example, as well as water treatment plants and the Palestinian radio and television center. All these major projects were defined as military targets and systematically destroyed by Sharon’s rampage in 2002.

The World Bank’s ban on great projects was complemented by the closure policy introduced by Netanyahu, whereby, following any episodes of Palestinian violence, entire cities would be blockaded. Palestinians who travelled daily into Israel for work, were prevented from doing so, and the economic consequences were devastating. In 1993 and 1994, due to closures, unemployment went up to 10% and 15%; by the end of 1995 and early 1996, it reached 20%, and in March and April during closures, it hit 50%. In 1999, only 600 Palestinians were allowed to enter and exit the West Bank and Gaza, while the remaining 2 million were confined. Following Sharon’s provocation at al-Haram al-Sharif in September 2000, violence broke out, and the Israeli regime responded with further closures. According to a UN report, in the weeks thereafter, P.A. GDP was cut in half. The number

of Palestinian workers allowed into Israel for their jobs, was reduced by 53%. The effects on living standards were catastrophic, as 1998 reports on poverty in the P.A.—the first of their kind—documented. Palestinians were living in crowded quarters, school facilities were lacking water, electricity, and toilets, and food supplies were inadequate. In the rapidly growing Palestinian population—2.89 million in 1997—47% were under the age of 15. In Jenin, the site of the most intransigent Palestinian resistance, the water shortage was rendered severe due to the Israeli siege.

Nor was the suffering only economic in nature. Parallel to the closure policy, the Israelis, beginning with the Netanyahu government in 1996, accelerated their violations of the political clauses of the Oslo Accords.

Most important were the Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory. It was explicitly stated in those accords, that they prohibit “any change in the status of the West Bank, etc.” Instead, every Israeli government since Oslo has continued the policy of expanding settlements. Since Barak took office in July 1999, tenders for the construction of at least 3,499 settlement housing units were issued in the occupied territories, and construction began on 2,270 units. Twenty-seven new settlement outposts (habitations not contiguous with settlements) were built since the signing of the Wye Plantation agreements in 1996—11 after March 1999. Fifteen new settlement outposts were approved for construction following the inauguration of Sharon in March 2001.

The settlements are connected one to the other, and to Israel, by bypass roads, which have created a new phenomenon in transportation geography, whereby all Israeli settlements are linked up, but Palestinian villages and cities are isolated, like so many apartheid-era bantustans. The Palestinians are not allowed to use these roads. The road connections between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, promised in the Oslo Accords, have not been built. Crazy schemes for an elevated highway to connect the two, without touching “Israeli land,” have been floated. All this is in blatant violation of the Oslo Accords, which promised links between the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, considered an inseparable unit!

The Israeli military withdrawal and redeployment (even before Sharon’s reoccupation began), has also been a farce. Area A, where the P.A. is supposed to have complete control over security and civil administration, accounts for 18% of the total area of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Area B accounts for 24%, and Area C, where Israel has total control, is 59%. Israel controls all borders to the Palestinian territories, and therefore the passage of persons and goods. Israel controls all roads in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, except for those in Area A. Israel controls 80% of the water resources, and all of Gaza’s territorial waters.

Thus, if one wants to talk about violation of the Oslo Accords, one has to recognize, they have been made on the Israeli side, under a succession of governments: economic cooperation denied, infrastructure development blocked,

transport communications sabotaged, economic life stifled, and political autonomy denied.

The Anti-Terrorism Fraud

Especially since Sept. 11, Israeli authorities have justified their increasing aggressions against the P.A., as part of the “war against terrorism.” Their mantra has been, that Arafat “violated” the Oslo Accords, in that he did not use his extraordinary powers to annihilate terrorist organizations. The argument championed by Bush, that Arafat has “not done enough” to rein in terrorism, etc., is also a fallacy of composition.

The Oslo Accords mandated the P.A. to build a police force to maintain law and order, which it did. The acts of violence that erupted, especially under the Netanyahu regime, were organized by the militant Palestinian organization Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Both have been, since their founding, sworn enemies of Arafat’s P.A. Hamas was in fact created and nurtured by Israeli intelligence networks—officially—as a counterweight to Arafat’s Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1980s (see Dean Andromidas, “Israeli Roots of Hamas Are Being Exposed,” *EIR*, Jan. 18, 2002). Sharon personally was involved in promoting Hamas in its early activities.

When the recent crisis escalated, with suicide bombings claimed by Hamas or Islamic Jihad, Sharon’s response was not to pursue these elements, but rather, to launch all-out warfare against the P.A., emphatically targetting the P.A.’s police force—that institution which had been shaped, according to Oslo, as the force to establish law and order, and root out terrorism. By killing large numbers of P.A. police and security, the Israelis have made it impossible for them to act effectively against terror. The entire offensive launched by Sharon recently has targetted the P.A., the P.A. police, P.A. security, and Arafat’s personal security. It has not at all targetted Hamas or Islamic Jihad. As noted by Russian strategic analyst Pavel Felgengauer, it is as if Sharon and the Hamas are working together. In fact, although Sharon invaded every major Palestinian village and city in the West Bank, he strangely left Gaza, the stronghold of Hamas, untouched. He has been systematically killing P.A. police and security, but not the terrorists themselves.

Bush would surely brush all these facts aside, and repeat, “It’s the terrorism—Arafat won’t bring the suicide bombers and other terrorists under control. That’s the problem.” At this point, one should ask Bush to review the history as it unfolded: Who was, in fact, the first suicide bomber to ignite violence in the region? Was it some Hamas activist? Or was it not one Baruch Goldstein, a fanatical Israeli settler of the Kach movement, who opened fire on a group of praying Muslims, killing 50, in a Hebron mosque, on Feb. 25, 1994? Was not this what triggered the beginning of the Palestinian suicide bombings, two months later? And who was it, who assassinated Rabin, the Israeli military professional who had opted for peace? Was it a Palestinian terrorist, or was it a right-wing Israeli extremist, acting in complicity with elements of Israeli security?