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University of Durham
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**ARAFAT'S PALESTINE NATIONAL
AUTHORITY**

by

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Dedication

In memory of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, (1929-2001) and Eqbal Ahmed (1932 -1999). They shall be missed.

1. Historical Setting

No single issue in twentieth century Middle East politics has been as volatile as the question of national status in the land of historical Palestine. The reasons are rooted in both geography and history, and in the importance of Palestine in the religious consciousness of Muslims, Christians and Jews. Besides being an important centre for all three religions, the land stands at the crossroads of the Arab world, a bridge between the *Mashriq* (Arab East) and the *Maghrib* (Arab West). Jerusalem, besides its obvious notable place in both Christian and Jewish scripture, is also the third holiest place of worship in Islam, so its role in political controversy has galvanised not only Arabs in the region – with whom the Palestinians share a historical and cultural bond – but also Muslims the world over. In ancient times, and throughout its long history, the land of Palestine has been host to many different civilisations, and the homeland of many different peoples – Amorites, Canaanites, Arameans, Israelites, Philistines, and Arabs. The earliest recorded civilisation was that of the Canaanites. The biblical Hebrew tribes, who invaded the region around 1000 BC, established a kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital, a city which was destroyed by the armies of Babylon in 586 BC and rebuilt fifty years later. In the first century AD, Jerusalem was again destroyed, this time by Roman occupiers, who exiled the Jews from Jerusalem in 135 AD, initiating the gradual dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the ancient world over the next five centuries. With the Israelites gone, or having been assimilated within Christian communities, neighbouring tribes gradually resettled the region.

By the time of the Arab conquest (636-638 AD), the population was predominantly Aramaic speaking Christians and over the next two centuries this population was thoroughly Arabised in both language and culture. With the defeat of the Crusaders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Islam became the religion of the majority of the inhabitants of Palestine. Most Palestinians were Sunni Muslims while Christian, Druse and Shiite Muslim minorities constituted the remainder. The region was overwhelmingly agrarian until the early part of the twentieth century, when a small intellectual and professional class emerged. Life was centred on the principal cities of Jerusalem, Nablus, Nazareth, Acre, Jaffa, Ramallah, Hebron, and Haifa, where Palestinians concerned themselves with the same issues that faced other Arabs of the day.

Like much of the rest of the Arab world, Palestine became a province of the Ottoman Empire in 1516. This change in status had little direct impact on the life of the average Palestinian, because throughout most of the Ottoman era, Palestine remained a relatively homogeneous, agricultural society. By the mid-1800s, the

population of Palestine was estimated at over one-half million, of which 80 percent were Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 5-7 percent Jewish.¹ However, by the turn of the century, tumultuous events were already brewing that would profoundly change the land of Palestine, and the life of every Palestinian.

In the late nineteenth century, two emerging forces, those of Arab nationalism and Zionism, would come to determine the future of Palestine. The latter was a political movement that advocated the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine and the first large-scale Jewish immigration into Palestine began in 1881. The immigrants of the first *Aliyah* were mostly Russian Jews fleeing the pogroms that had followed the assassination of Czar Alexander II. While official Ottoman policy regarding immigration of this sort was restrictive, relations between Arabs and the incoming Jews were generally positive and there was no measurable opposition to the immigration. Between 1897 and 1908, the Zionist movement established the infrastructure that would facilitate the Zionist colonisation of Palestine.

The Colonisation Commission (1895), the Palestine Land Development Company (1895), and the Jewish Colonisation Association (1891) were established to acquire land and to facilitate colonisation. Financial institutions, such as the Jewish Colonial Trust (1899), the Jewish National Fund (1901), and the Anglo-Palestine Company (1903), were then established to aid in these activities. Furthermore, the Zionist movement set about gaining allies in its mission to create a national home for the Jewish people. In 1902, Theodor Herzl met with the Ottoman Sultan, offering assistance with Turkey's public debts in exchange for Jewish settlement rights in Palestine. The Zionists, who argued that Jewish settlement in Palestine would serve to bolster European influence in the region, also approached the leaders of the Great Powers.

Thus, between 1904 and 1907, the Jewish population in Palestine swelled to between ten and twelve percent of the total,² which increased Palestinian opposition to further Jewish immigration. Anti-Zionist protests in the Ottoman parliament and the Palestinian press, were accompanied by protests at the local level. A number of organisations were formed to oppose Zionist aims. *Al-Hizb al-Watani al-'Uthmani* (the Ottoman National Party, 1911) is considered to be one of the movements earliest examples. The halting of Zionist immigration appeared increasingly to require an end to Ottoman rule and the assertion of an Arab identity, linking the issue closely with the broader cause of Arab nationalism.

The outbreak of the First World War served to shift the issue of Jewish immigration

to Palestine further into the arena of Great Power diplomacy. With the outbreak of war, Ottoman authorities expelled 28,000 to 32,000 Jewish immigrants (approximately 50 percent of Palestine's Jewish population) as enemy aliens, because they were identified as citizens of allied states, principally Russia.³ More importantly during the First World War Sharif Hussain of Mecca began secret negotiations with the British government, through the British High Commissioner in Cairo, Sir Henry McMahon, in an effort to acquire a British promise of support for future Arab independence, in exchange for Arab military action against the Ottoman authorities. On 24 October 1914, McMahon promised independence for Arab territories, including Palestine. On 15 June 1916, Sharif Hussain declared war on the Ottoman government, an event that led to the Arab Revolt.⁴

Meanwhile, in 1915-1916, Sir Mark Sykes and George Picot, negotiating on behalf of the British and French governments, reached a *modus vivendi* on the future territorial disposition of Arab lands. The Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 called for the division of most Arab territory, into either French or British spheres of influence as well as areas of direct European control. Ultimately, what proved to be the most important Allied position regarding the future of Palestine, was taken in 1917 in the form of a letter from British Foreign Minister, Arthur James Balfour, to the English Jewish leader, Lord Rothschild, in the form of the Balfour Declaration.⁵ After successfully driving the Turkish forces out of Palestine, British forces entered Jerusalem in December 1917 where they were greeted as liberators. However, news of the Balfour Declaration, and the heretofore secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, soon altered the mood. When a British Zionist Commission arrived in Palestine in March 1918, it found evidence of widespread Arab nationalist and anti-Zionist sentiment. In January-February 1919, a Palestine Arab Conference met in Jerusalem to discuss the situation in Palestine. The conference ended with a call for Palestinian unity within an independent Arab Syria.

At the Versailles Peace Conference, both the Zionist movement and Sharif Hussain were represented by delegations. The Zionist delegation vigorously called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, and in 1919, the United States established the King-Crane Commission to investigate the situation. Although their report on Palestine revealed widespread indigenous support for Arab independence and expressed grave doubts about Zionist plans, the Versailles Conference adjourned without reaching a decision on the issue. The King-Crane Commission's report itself was not included in the submissions to the conference. In April 1920, six days of rioting in Jerusalem resulted in nine deaths and in more than 250 injuries. In response, the British authorities declared martial law. At the San Remo Conference of the Allied Powers in that same month, Palestine was declared a

British mandate. The preamble of the mandate echoed the pledge of the Balfour Declaration made in 1917, promising the Zionists a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The mandate also lent official recognition to 'the Zionist organisation' (Article IV), and charged Britain with facilitating Jewish immigration and encouraging 'settlement by Jews on the land' (Article VII).

In response, the first Palestine-Arab Congress was held in Haifa in December 1920. The conference's resolutions, although staunchly anti-Zionist, were largely uncritical of the British authorities. In 1921-1922, the Arab executive of the conference sent a number of protests to the British government voicing displeasure over Britain's pro-Zionist policies. The British response, however, was to dismiss the legitimacy of such delegations, and to declare that acceptance of the Balfour Declaration was a prerequisite to any negotiation. In 1922, Britain released a White Paper on Palestine in which it stressed the British commitment to the Balfour Declaration, which stated that the crucial document with its promise of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, "was not susceptible to change."⁶ As a result, an average of 6,000-8,000 Jewish immigrants entered Palestine each year over the first ten years of the mandate, despite insufficient agricultural land and high levels of urban Arab unemployment.⁷

Meanwhile, further violent riots took place in Haifa (March 1921) and particularly, in Jaffa (May 1921) with forty-eight Palestinian Arabs and forty-seven Jews killed in Jaffa. The Fifth Palestine Arab Conference (August 1922) decided to pursue a strategy of constitutional opposition to British policy; it also called for a Palestinian boycott of the new constitution for Palestine, and for a similar boycott of elections to the new Legislative Council with the latter boycott proving highly successful. By 1922, the Jewish population in Palestine stood at approximately 84,000 (11 percent of the total population), with new immigrants continuing to arrive by the thousands, peaking at 34,000 in 1925.⁸ Zionist settlers in Palestine pursued a segregationist strategy whereby the *Histadrut* (Jewish Federation of Labour) committed Jewish settlers to a boycott of Arab produce and labour in order to foster a self-contained process of Zionist development. This process was aided by the British mandatory administration, which determined the number of Jewish immigrants to be allowed entry into Palestine, basing the quotas on the number of jobs available for Jews. So, in fact, the rate of Jewish immigration was established by the British administration, on the basis of the absorptive capacity for the labour of Zionist colonisation.⁹

By the mid-1920s, two major political factions had appeared in the Palestinian nationalist movement, which at this time represented a struggle for self-determination, corresponding to two of the regions most prominent families: the

Hussainis and the Nashashibis. Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and head of the Supreme Muslim Council, was rapidly gaining political prominence, complementing the Hussaini-dominated leadership of the Arab Executive Committee. In 1923, the competing Nashashibi faction, together with a network of national Muslim societies and peasant parties, established a National Party. In September 1928 a series of incidents became a flashpoint for major sectarian clashes between Muslims and Jews living in Palestine in August 1929. The violence lasted for nearly two weeks, and resulted in the deaths of 133 Jews and 116 Arabs. Palestinian notables and authorities were quick to distance themselves from the strife and to call for its end. In reaction to the riots, the British government dispatched Sir John Hope-Simpson to investigate their cause. The Hope-Simpson Report on Immigration, Land Settlement, and Development, was released in October 1930. On the issue of Arab unemployment, it concluded "it is necessary that the existence of Arab unemployment should be taken into consideration when determining the number of Jews to be admitted." On the land issue, it concluded that there was in Palestine "no margin of land available for agricultural settlement by new immigrants, with the exception of such undeveloped land as the various Jewish agencies hold in reserve."¹⁰ The Passfield White Paper, the response of Britain's colonial secretary, Lord Passfield, to the Hope-Simpson report, accepted most of its findings and recommendations eliciting a storm of protest from British Zionist circles forcing British Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald to capitulate to Zionist pressure.¹¹

Economic activity began to recover considerably in Palestine during 1931-1932. This activity, coupled with increasing levels of anti-Semitism in Europe, led Jewish immigration to grow at even greater rates than during the Third (1919-1923) and Fourth (1924-1931) *Aliyah*. Accordingly, the Jewish population of Palestine – which comprised 174,000 persons, or 16-17 percent of the total population in 1931 – began to increase at an annual rate of two percent compared to the non-Jewish population.¹² When in October 1933, British troops opened fire on a Palestinian demonstration against Jewish immigration in Jaffa, demonstrations broke out throughout Palestine and precipitated a general strike by Arabs. Meanwhile, the Arab nationalist movement galvanised around the Palestine issue, spawning new leadership and renewed political activity. In 1932, the Arab Independence Party (*Istiqlal*) was founded in Palestine, signalling the demise of the moribund Arab Executive Committee, which, plagued by internal conflict, effectively collapsed in 1934. Other pan-Arab political bodies arose in the 1930s, particularly among the youth, with the Arab Youth Congress the most influential example. The first half of the 1930s saw the creation of a number of clandestine armed groups that advocated guerrilla warfare against both the British and the Zionists.

In December 1935, British High Commissioner, Wauchope, released a revised proposal for a partly nominated, partly elected Legislative Council with an Arab majority. The Nashashibi's National Defence Party accepted the proposals, as did the National Bloc and the Reform Party. The Youth Congress and the Hussaini-led Palestine Arab Party both rejected the proposals as insufficient, although the latter's opposition was largely tactical. The Zionist movement reacted to the Legislative Council proposals with hostility and actively lobbied against them. Pressure in London by the Zionists and their allies proved successful, as debates in the House of Lords (February 1936) and in the House of Commons (March 1936) proved unfriendly to the proposals, and the Colonial Office, effectively, withdrew them in July 1936.

Further riots, on 15 April 1936, resulted in the deaths of three Jews and two Arabs and on 20 April 1936 a general strike was organised in Jaffa, along with the formation of a 'National Committee' in Nablus to organise similar strikes. Both demonstrations received massive public support and on 25 April 1936, the five Palestinian parties agreed to the formation of an Arab Higher Committee (AHC), which was charged with the co-ordination of strikes and the oversight of the numerous national committees. The AHC called for the general strike to continue until the British government agreed to end Jewish immigration, prohibit land transfers to Jews, and establish a national government responsible to a representative council. However, in May 1936 the situation in Palestine grew more violent, exacerbated by a British decision to grant a new schedule of 4,000 immigration certificates to the Jewish Agency. In August, a step was taken toward the improvement in the organisation and training of Arab resistance after a Syrian revolutionary (and ex-Ottoman officer) Fawzi al-Din al-Kawukji entered Palestine with some two hundred Syrian, Iraqi, and Trans-Jordanian volunteers, and declared himself 'Commander in Chief of the Revolt in Southern Syria' (Palestine). By September, Kawukji's leadership had been nominally accepted by six of the major Palestinian guerrilla leaders.

The British responded to the strikes with the offer of a Royal Commission of Enquiry, but they steadfastly refused to make any concessions on Jewish immigration. Police activity and military reinforcements were also increased, and by summer, British troop strength in Palestine had risen from 1,970 to approximately 20,000.¹³ Mass arrests, the demolition of houses, suppression of the Arabic press, and collective fines were all used in the attempt to end the disturbances. By the fall of 1936, the guerrilla units were running short of supplies, and support for the strike was slipping in many quarters. The mediation efforts of

Arab leaders were now welcomed by the Arab Higher Committee, and on 10 October 1936, King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, King Ghazi of Iraq, and Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, issued identical appeals calling for an end to the strike and rebellion. The following day the Arab Higher Committee complied. With the ending of the first phase of the revolt, the British Government duly appointed a Palestine Royal Commission (the Peel Commission) on 5 November 1936. Colonial Secretary W. Ormsby-Gore refused, however, to suspend Jewish immigration during the course of the Peel Commission's investigation, and the Arab Higher Committee's subsequent presentation to the commission was relatively ineffectual. On 7 July 1937, the Palestine Royal Commission released its report, recommending that Palestine be partitioned into an Arab state and a Jewish state, with certain areas of religious significance to be retained under British administration.

Moderate Zionists were lukewarm to the proposals and more extreme Zionists protested vehemently against what they saw as the further division of Eretz Israel. The Arab Higher Committee (less the Nashashibi faction), and later, the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, opposed partition, but Emir Abdullah supported it. The Nashashibi faction and the National Defence Party, who had seceded from the Arab Higher Committee in July, with the support of Abdullah, initially supported the partition plan, but the Party, and some Nashashibi-allied notables whose regions would become part of the Jewish state, later reversed their position. However, many Nashashibi supporters within the proposed Arab state maintained their backing of the plan with the split effectively destroying the Party. In early September, a pan-Arab Congress on Palestine was held in Bludan, Syria, at which delegates demanded an end to Jewish immigration and the mandate, and a British promise of Palestinian independence. On 1 October 1937, the British district commissioner for Galilee was assassinated and in response the British authorities arrested hundreds of Palestinians, deported a number of AHC leaders to the Seychelles and banned the Arab Higher Committee and various national committees. Despite such moves organised Arab resistance only increased, support for which was co-ordinated from a headquarters in Damascus, through the Central Committee of the Struggle (*al-Lujnah al-Markaziyya lil-Jihad*).

The British government adopted a two-pronged strategy of military action and political conciliation and Palestine was placed under martial law. The British used a number of Zionist forces in the course of their activities, and British-Zionist military cooperation reached new levels in an effort to quell Arab opposition. On the political front, in November 1938, the British government abandoned the partition plan and offered to hold a round table conference in London attended by Palestinian and Zionist delegations. An AHC delegation, headed by Jamal al-

Hussaini, arrived in London in February 1939. The British, eager to pacify the Middle East in the event of a European war, made a number of concessions, including limitations on Jewish immigration, and the establishment of Arab-dominated self-governing institutions. But no Arab consensus was reached and the conference ended in March without an agreement. In May 1939, the British decided to proceed without formal Palestinian approval and released the Palestine Statement of Policy (the MacDonal White Paper). They proposed to limit Jewish immigration over the next five years to 75,000, with Jewish immigration after that period contingent on Palestinian approval; the establishment of self-governing institutions; and the enactment of restrictions on the transfer of land. Both the Arab Higher Committee and the Zionists rejected the white paper. Indeed, by the time that the Second World War broke out, Arab resistance in Palestine was all but subdued. The British practice of exiling Palestinian leaders to the Seychelles left the movement virtually leaderless, and French authorities cracked down on Arab political activities in Damascus and along the border with Palestine.

Palestinian Nationalism, 1939-1967

The failure of the 1936-1939 Palestine revolt severely weakened the organised Palestinian protest and struggle as material resources in the Palestinian community diminished considerably. At the same time, another area of Palestinian political activity was growing the Palestinian trade union movement. Membership rose from 5,000 in 1936, to between 11,000 and 12,000 in 1942, and further to 20,000 (1945).¹⁴ The conservative Palestine Arab Workers Society (founded in 1925), and the more activist Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labour Societies (1942), dominated the organisation of Palestinian labour. Less successful was the Palestine Labour League (1927), which was controlled by the Zionist Histadrut. Another focus of Palestinian political activity during this period was the *Istiqlal* after a number of *Istiqlal* leaders were readmitted to Palestine after being exiled by the British during 1939-1941 on condition that they would avoid any political activity. The *Istiqlalists* purchased the Arab Agricultural Bank, renamed it the Arab National bank, and used it and its 14 branches in Palestine to continue nationalist activities. In 1943, the Bank and its *Istiqlalist* owners organised the Arab National Fund, which sought to keep Palestinian land out of Zionist hands. The *Istiqlal* also obtained an interest in Palestine's second largest newspaper, *Falastin*.

During the second half of the Second World War, two additional factors facilitated increased Palestinian political activity. The first was the lifting of the ban on political activity at the end of 1942 as the gradual return of political leaders to Palestine led to the formal re-emergence of a number of nationalist parties, including

the National Bloc (February 1944) and the Youth Congress (April 1945). The Palestine Arab Party was reconstituted in April 1944 under the formal leadership of Tawfiq Salih al-Hussaini. The second factor that contributed to the reassertion of organised Palestinian nationalism was the creation of the Arab League. Musa al-'Alami, a Palestinian observer who was sent to cover the Alexandria preparatory conference of the League in September-October 1944, succeeded in becoming a full-fledged delegate at the conference. At his urging, the Arab League instituted a faltering boycott of Jewish goods, created a 'Construction Scheme' to preserve Palestinian land and foster its development, and called for Palestinian statehood to which the League's charter *a priori* granted membership.

Britain's wavering support for the Zionist movement led the Zionists to set their sights upon a new – and ultimately more influential – benefactor, the United States.¹⁵ The Zionist movement exerted intensive pressure on the U.S. government. The American Zionist Organisation made clear its aims in the 'Biltmore Declaration' of 11 May 1942, which explicitly called for unlimited Jewish immigration to Palestine; the formation of a Jewish Army; and the establishment of a Jewish state in all land of Palestine. The Second World War benefited the Zionist movement in a number of ways. Primarily it served to bolster a Zionist military apparatus that had already grown rapidly during the Palestine revolt. During the war years, 27,028 Jews in Palestine received military training in the British armed forces.¹⁶ Thousands more were armed and trained by the British in Palestine as paramilitary police or auxiliaries and still others received military training in other Allied armies. The war further strengthened the powerful Zionist economic position in Palestine as by 1942 over 79 percent of industry in Palestine was Jewish-controlled. Palestine's Jewish population, which by this time accounted for approximately 30 percent of the total, received nearly 60 percent of Palestine's national income. In 1944, only 32 percent of Palestinian children, aged five to fourteen, attended school, compared with 97 percent of Jewish children. The Jewish infant mortality rate in 1942-1944 was approximately one-third of the rate found among Arab Palestinians.¹⁷ A final factor that served to strengthen the Zionist movement during the war years was – with tragic irony – the Holocaust, itself as the plight of European Jews proved highly influential in swaying public opinion in support of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Such factors, coupled with strong support by Winston Churchill, led Britain to alter its position regarding the future of Palestine once again. By 1944, the British cabinet had rejected the post-war continuation of the policy set down in the 1939 White Paper and had returned to the concept of partition advocated by the Peel Commission report. However, opposition to partition from both Arab leaders and elements within the British government, together with the death of President

Franklin Roosevelt and Churchill's electoral defeat, effectively killed the plan. In 1945, the Zionist movement had made considerable political gains at the expense of the Palestinian nationalist movement as the Jewish community in Palestine now became both well armed and well organised. The desperate predicament of hundreds of thousands of Jewish concentration camp survivors lent considerable political weight in Western countries to Zionist demands, though Western states failed to lower their own barriers to immigration for Jewish survivors. Indeed, the U.S. actually raised its barriers and Canada, after being lobbied by Zionist leaders, only supported Zionist demands after it was made clear that the creation of a Jewish state would reduce the number of Jews desiring entry into Canada. In August 1945, President Harry Truman called upon the British government to immediately grant 100,000 Palestine immigration certificates to Jewish refugees in Europe. British reliance on U.S. economic aid accentuated the pressure.

On 26 April 1946, the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry released a report calling for continued Jewish immigration if a settlement was reached, an end to the restrictions on land transfer which had been imposed by Britain in 1940, and the continuation of the mandate pending United Nations trusteeship, with the ultimate aim of a bi-national state. The committee rejected, however, both Jewish and Palestinian national aspirations on the grounds of their mutual incompatibility and Palestine's special religious significance. President Truman lent U.S. support only to the committee's recommendations regarding immigration. The concept of partition died once again, only to be resurrected by the Morrison-Grady Plan, which focused on the concept of a federation.

In November 1945, the Arab League Council had managed to impose upon the fractious Palestinian political leadership, a new twelve-seat Arab Higher Committee dominated by the Palestine Arab Party. The Arab League then immediately recognised the re-formulated Arab Higher Committee with the mandate government in Palestine following suit two months later. In February 1946, Jamal al-Hussaini returned to Palestine and immediately set about reorganising and enlarging the Arab Higher Committee, becoming its acting President. The *Istiqlal* and other nationalist groups protested this move and established a rival body, the Arab Higher Front, in June of that year. In May 1946, Hajj Amin made his way to Cairo. Both the Arab Higher Committee and the Arab Higher Front were dissolved upon League order, and a new five-member Arab Higher Executive was created under the mufti's chairmanship with five additional members added in January 1947. Since Hajj Amin was barred from entering Palestine, Jamal performed the role of acting chairman. The focus of British policy in Palestine had shifted by this time to U.S.-British negotiations in London. The Morrison-Grady plan, which resulted from

these bilateral discussions, called for a federalised Palestine under British trusteeship. The ultimate status of Palestine remained unclear within the plan, which provided for continued British control. Both Arabs and Zionists rejected the plan, though the latter accepted some form of partition in principle, with the promise of eventual Jewish statehood. The plan was never put forward.

The *Irgun* and the Stern Gang/LEHI, Jewish terrorist groups that sprang up between the Wars and became more active shortly after the Second World War, continued their attacks against British and Arab targets; the former bombed Jerusalem's King David Hotel in July 1946 killing 91 people. The *Hagannah* – under Jewish Agency direction and in formal alliance with other revisionist terrorist groups – also engaged in armed activity. In 1946, the strength of subversive Zionist military organisations in Palestine was estimated at approximately 67,000.¹⁸ Violence by these groups in that same year accounted for over two hundred deaths.¹⁹ In contrast, the Palestinian population was largely inactive militarily during this period.²⁰ However, in October 1945, an independent military organisation called the Helpers (*al-Najjadah*) was formed in Jaffa; by the end of the next year, Palestinian armed strength probably stood in the hundreds, a mere fraction of Zionist mobilisation.

In September 1946, Britain again attempted to place restrictions on the composition of the Zionist and Palestinian nationalist delegations, and both groups boycotted the London Conference in response. The Arab states, the only group (other than Britain) to attend, used the conference as an opportunity to propose the establishment of a Palestinian state within which a maximum Jewish population of 30 percent would be permitted. In the interim, the Zionist movement had hardened its position still further, with the declared support of US President Truman in October 1946. Britain proposed a revised form of the Morrison-Grady plan, which envisioned regional self-government within an eventual unitary state, however all parties rejected this. On 14 February 1947, the British government announced that it would refer the entire matter to the League of Nation's nascent successor, the United Nations. The UN responded by creating a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), composed of 11 members, which was to investigate and make recommendations regarding the question of Palestine. Arabs and Muslim supporters within the United Nations opposed the formation of UNSCOP, arguing that an independent Palestinian state represented the only possible just solution to the issue. When UNSCOP subsequently visited Palestine in July 1947, the Arab Higher Committee (Executive) successfully called for a boycott of its proceedings by Palestinian groups and also for a general strike in protest. In August 1947, UNSCOP made two sets of recommendations to the UN General Assembly. The first, the majority plan, endorsed by seven of eleven UNSCOP members, called for

Palmach (an elite strike force) unit of the *Hagannah*, attacked the unarmed village of Deir Yassin and massacred 254 men, women, and children. Survivors were taken to Jerusalem, stripped and released on the streets. The massacre instilled terror within the Palestinian population and encouraged their flight from the territory. The activities of the *Irgun* and LEHI complemented the *Hagannah's* official Plan Dalet, which was a 13-stage operation aimed at securing those areas assigned to the Jewish state by the partition resolution, as well as seizing additional territory. Radio broadcasts, loudspeakers, and word-of-mouth rumours were used to instil terror in the Palestinian civilian population. Villages and towns were attacked and their inhabitants driven out.

On 14 May 1948, the establishment of the State of Israel was formally announced. Contingents from Syria, Iraq, Trans-Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon – totalling fewer than 15,000 troops – entered Palestine in an effort to counter Jewish forces. The new state was given *de facto* recognition by the government of the United States, and *de jure* recognition by the USSR on 17 May. The nascent Israeli state not only resisted the much smaller and fragmented Arab forces, but also expanded into areas assigned to the Arab state by the 1947 UN partition resolution. The loss of Palestine, in 1948, was to prove an event of major significance in the evolution of broader Arab nationalism. It raised questions about the ability of Arab governments to meet the most fundamental challenge: that of national survival. The reappraisal that followed hastened the end of the old order in Syria (1949), Egypt (1952), and Iraq (1958). Under the impetus of the Palestine debacle, a strong current of Arab opinion concluded that the road to rectification lay through Arab unity. In the meantime, Jordan's ruler, Emir Abdullah, annexed those areas of Palestine under his control in December 1949, and renamed his country the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan while the only remaining area of Palestine that had not been incorporated into Israel, the Gaza strip, came under Egyptian administration. In September 1948, the Egyptians permitted the holding of a Palestinian Congress in Gaza. Later, a government of Palestine was formed under Ahmad Hilmi Pasha; based in Cairo it would play a small role in future Palestinian affairs.

Meanwhile, the State of Israel was rapidly moving to consolidate its position. A number of laws were passed enabling the Israeli government to seize control 'legally' of the lands and property of those who had fled during the war. Between 1948 and 1953, of the 370 new Jewish settlements constructed in the state of Israel, 350 were on confiscated Palestinian land.²³ Furthermore, Palestinians who had fled from their homes within what was now the State of Israel were refused permission to return. All Jewish immigrants, on the other hand, were promised Israeli citizenship under the 1950 Law of Return. Some 740,000 Jews immigrated to the

State of Israel during the first five years of its existence.²⁴

In 1958, these developments helped lead to the formation of a union between Syria and Egypt, the United Arab Republic under the leadership of Egypt's charismatic President, Gamal Abd al-Nasser. To the Arab world, unity now appeared as a concrete and achievable reality, and to many Palestinians, it seemed as if such unity really did hold the potential for Palestinian liberation. Indeed, in 1955, the Egyptian army set up a number of *fedayeen* (guerrilla) units in Gaza, composed of refugees and Palestinian members of the Egyptian armed forces. One year earlier, the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) was formed upon the foundations laid by earlier organisations.

In the early 1960s, the Arab Nationalist Movement grew closer, ideologically and organisationally, to Nasserism, but throughout the 1960s it continued to move to the left ideologically, and by 1964, the ANM had adopted scientific socialism as a guiding principle. Although its major significance during this period was largely political, the ANM did not reject armed struggle as a weapon against the State of Israel. In 1964, it formed a Palestine Region of the Arab Nationalist Movement (also known as the military grouping) to pursue such a strategy. By 1966, a portion of the paramilitary Palestine Region, under Ahmad al-Yamani, had formed the 'Heroes of the Return', launching their first raid into the State of Israel in October of that year. At about the same time, the left wing of the ANM participated in the formation of a military organisation, the Vengeance Youth, which carried out its first armed operation in May 1967.

The organisational nucleus of *al-Fatah* was established in Cairo in the mid-1950s by 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Ra'uf 'Arafat (Yassir Arafat), Saleh Khalef, and Khalil al-Wazir. The group subsequently expanded to Kuwait and other locations where the Palestinian Diaspora could be found. Beginning in 1963 and for a few years thereafter, *al-Fatah* received logistical and other support from the Syrian military intelligence services, and from the revolutionary government of Algeria. On the night of 31 December 1964, *al-Fatah's* military wing *al-Asifah* (the Storm) launched its first military operation against the State of Israel with an attack on an Israeli water-pumping station. Over the next 29 months, *al-Asifah* would claim responsibility for 175 military operations inside the State of Israel, making it the most militarily active of the Palestinian nationalist groups,²⁵ though its operations proved to be of little overall strategic importance.

During this period, a division grew between Arab governments, who sought to take

the lead in seeking Palestinian rights, and the Palestinians, themselves. The Palestinians were becoming more self-reliant and increasingly sceptical over the duplicity of conservative Arab regimes in dealing with the West, which, after all, strongly supported the State of Israel. The Arab solution to the Palestinian nationalist problem emerged in January 1964. The Arab League met in Cairo to discuss responses to Israel's plan to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River and called for the formation of a 'Palestinian entity' under the auspices of the Arab League. This entity subsequently took shape as the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Palestinian Nationalism, 1967-1987

Israel's defeat of the Arabs in June 1967, served to precipitate a visible split between Arab and Palestinian nationalism. The war had a major impact and in physical terms, the last vestiges of Palestine slipped from Arab control as 300,000 Palestinians fled their homes on the West Bank or in the Gaza strip to join the Palestinian Diaspora, dropping the proportion of Palestinian Arabs still resident in Palestine from 63 percent to about 50 percent.²⁶ In political terms, the inability of the Arab regimes to triumph on the battlefield had raised critical questions about the ability of the pan-Arab orthodoxy to deliver Palestinian liberation. What the Palestinian nationalists sought in the aftermath of the 1967 war was the revolutionary mobilisation of the Palestinian people, and the pursuance of a popular Palestinian armed struggle against the State of Israel. The emergent paradigm of revolutionary Palestinian nationalism maintained that the progressive Arab regimes – Egypt, Syria, and Iraq – although antagonistic to imperialism, and thus, useful as allies, could make only limited contributions to Palestinian liberation because of their incomplete domestic social transformations. The conservative Western-orientated Arab regimes – notably Jordan and Saudi Arabia – could make no such contribution, and were bound to clash with the Palestinian revolution. More and more, the PLO became prominent within Palestinian nationalism, as *Fatah* began to dominate the PLO.²⁷

As early as October 1968, the *Fatah* faction had proposed a solution to the Palestinian problem. It called for the creation of a democratic state in Palestine. Unlike the Jewish state, Israel, which limits citizenship and therefore meaningful democratic participation only to Jews, to the exclusion of others, *Fatah* insisted that all citizens in a democratic Palestine would comprise the state. In clear and categorical terms, *Fatah* called for non-discrimination based on religious and ethnic lines. Citizenship was a sufficient criterion to ensure equally democratic rights for all Palestinians in the new state. Impressed by the vision and appeal of *Fatah's* proposal, the PLO adopted it as its official position in 1969, thereby asserting even

greater *Fatah* control over Palestinian affairs.

By October 1974, the first Arab Summit in Rabat moved to recognise the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." In the same year, at the invitation of the United Nations, Chairman Arafat addressed the General Assembly. The UN subsequently gave the PLO observer status inside its general assembly and all its accredited agencies and in 1977 declared an international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people. By 1980, the European Economic Community resolved, in its Venice Declaration, that the PLO should be associated with negotiations leading to a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The EEC also accorded greater legal and human rights to the Palestinian people and emphasised the crucial importance of the PLO. Thus, by 1982, Palestinian nationalism had entered a new phase of development, coincident with the full-scale Israeli invasion of Lebanon, aimed at crushing the PLO and Palestinian resistance to occupation of their land. The PLO's base was destroyed and the organisation was removed from Lebanon and resettled in Tunisia. However, Palestinian nationalism was not as weakened as Israel had anticipated. The massacres at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps consolidated the support of the Palestinian people for the PLO and heightened international support for their cause as more than 128 countries had now recognised the PLO.

Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the leadership of Yassir Arafat was seriously challenged, both from within the PLO and from without. This struggle culminated in the dramatic siege at Tripoli when pro-Arafat PLO forces simultaneously fought off dissident PLO forces led by Abu Musa, the Syrian army, which sought to end Arafat's influence in the organisation, and finally in the ongoing battle with the Israelis who sought to destroy the PLO or at least drive it out of Lebanon. Arafat emerged from the battle still in control of the PLO, but the organisation was weakened and appeared to be in decline, its vitality dissipated by internal fragmentation and external challenge. The eventual demise of Yassir Arafat's leadership, the symbol of the PLO, and of the PLO itself, the symbol of Palestinian nationalism, appeared inevitable; and so it seemed that Palestinian nationalism had run its course. Then, in December 1987, the *Intifada* erupted in the occupied territories.

The Palestinian Intifada

The *Intifada* (literally meaning to cast off shackles) erupted on 9 December 1987, the day after an Israeli military jeep in Jubalya Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip drove into a truckload of Palestinian labourers, killing four of them. The event precipitated spontaneous demonstrations in protest against Israel's military

occupation and settlement policies, which quickly spread throughout the occupied territories. Popular committees, organised to offer community services denied to the population by the Israeli military authorities in the occupied territories (such as health, sanitation, and security), provided the organisational infrastructure and leadership for the *Intifada*. The strategy rested on a campaign of civil disobedience, focussing on strikes and the boycott of Israeli goods, combined with acts of symbolic violence – such as rock throwing and graffiti – aimed at the economic, political, and administrative disengagement of the occupied territories from Israel. The *Intifada* leadership explicitly rejected armed violence.

In an effort to suppress public protest in the territories and restore military control, the Israeli government responded to the *Intifada* with force and intimidation. By January 1990, over a thousand Palestinians had been killed in the *Intifada*, with an estimated 80,000 Palestinians wounded and over 50,000 held in administrative detention for periods up to one year. The Israeli government found the iron-fist policy it adopted in response to the *Intifada* unsuccessful and the *Intifada* virtually irrepressible. Nevertheless, it responded with even greater force, precipitating a split within the international community, and within itself, over the use of military force against an unarmed civilian population and widespread reports of human rights abuses. The *Intifada* proved to be an entirely indigenous grass-roots movement that gained new sympathy in the international community for the plight of the Palestinians. The *Intifada* leadership threw its support behind Yassir Arafat and the PLO as the symbols of Palestinian nationalism in the international community. This support revived PLO legitimacy as the sole representative of the Palestinian people and reinvigorated Yassir Arafat's flagging leadership of the organisation. Arafat responded to the mandate given him by the *Intifada* by attempting to articulate the aspirations of the people of the occupied territories for a just peace with Israel that would end Israeli military occupation and allow the territories self-determination.

As a result, at its November 1988 meeting in Algiers, the Palestine National Council (the governing body of the PLO) declared Palestine (comprising the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza) to be an independent state, and implicitly recognised the existence of the State of Israel and UN Security Council Resolution 242 as the basis for peace negotiations. Israel, however, rejected PLO approaches and continued its iron fist policy in the occupied territories. Nonetheless, the strength of peace proponents in Israel greatly increased, and in early 1990, a split over the issue of peace brought down a fragile coalition government in Israel.

The Madrid Peace Conference (1991)

In March 1990, after the termination of military operations in the Gulf area, US President George Bush addressed the US Congress and defined the basis of future US policy in the Middle East. He declared that his policy would be based on four main elements: 1) Sharing in the security arrangements of the region; 2) Controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region; 3) Finding new avenues for the establishment of peace and stability; and 4) Consolidating the process of economic development. In terms of the third point, Bush declared that comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israel should be based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of 'land for peace' whereby Israel would be offered recognition and security in return for returning lands occupied since 1948 and by recognising the political right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. While this did represent a marked decline in US support for Israel, it is worth mentioning that the US, in no context, called for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

This was the basic framework on which the Madrid Peace Conference was initiated at the end of October 1991. The conference, aiming at establishing a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, included 16 Arab countries – the five directly involved in the conflict, the six states of the GCC, and the five members of the AMU – the United States, the Soviet Union, the European Union, and the United Nations. Negotiations were to follow a bilateral track and a multilateral track. The former involved direct talks between Israel and each of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinians, with the aim of reaching peace settlements between Israel and these parties, while the latter was devoted to discussion of common regional issues: economic development, refugees, the environment, regional security, and water. The multilateral track included Jordan, Israel, Egypt, the AMU, the GCC, the EU, and Japan.

This formula allowed the Palestinians, for the first time, to participate in talks directly with the Israeli government, a very positive step in the eyes of many Arabs. This participation was very restricted at first as Israel would not accept the presence of an independent Palestinian delegation, and consequently a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation was created. Also, the Israelis would only consent to Palestinian representatives who were residents of either Gaza or the West Bank, excluding Jerusalem. For 22 months, until August 1993, the bilateral talks between Israel and the Palestinians led to no concrete results as rounds of discussions were wasted in negotiating the nature and form of the Palestinian delegation and other procedural matters. It was only in the ninth round of talks after the issue of Palestinian representation had been settled, that Israel agreed to deal with an

independent Palestinian delegation. The obstacles then became the issues of Jerusalem, the ultimate fate of Palestinian refugees, the Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories, and a timetable for complete Israeli withdrawal. The failure to achieve any progress caused great disappointment on the Palestinian side, aggravated differences within the delegation and, as a result of the confusion and conflict, led to the resignation of Abdel Hamid al-Sayeh from the presidency of the PNC. It also drove the PLO to try to undermine the role of the Palestinian representatives from the Occupied Territories, who had gained wide popular support at home during the *Intifada* and posed a challenge to the uncontested leadership of the PLO.

II. SECOND TRACK DIPLOMACY

Oslo and the Signing of the Declaration of Principles

Secret negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians began in December 1992, in a meeting in London, between Ahmed Qurai' (Abu al-'Ala') the then Deputy Foreign Minister from the PLO, and Israeli professor, Yair Hershfeld (a friend of Yossi Beilin) both of whom were in England to attend the sessions of the multi-lateral economic committee. The meeting was arranged by Terg Larsen, the director of a Norwegian research centre interested in studying the situation in the Occupied Territories and also present in London on a fund-raising mission. Although the meeting was informal and Hershfeld insisted that he represented only himself and not the Israeli government, the Palestinians knew of his relationship with Beilin, and thus were encouraged to pursue talks with him. In fact, Beilin had given Hershfeld permission to open this dialogue and afterwards joined the Israeli team in this secret exchange, soon after meeting with a Palestinian delegation in Oslo, Norway once the Knesset had lifted its ban on meeting with representatives of the PLO in January 1993. As an Israeli scholar indicated, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin approved the informal talks when "it became clear that the PLO was bankrupt, divided and on the verge of collapse, and therefore ready to settle for considerably less."²⁸ In addition, in his strategic vision, Arafat's secular PLO was considered to be a useful tool in the struggle against the Islamic groups and their terrorist activities.²⁹ Secret negotiations between both parties continued for eight months until 20 August 1993 when they agreed on a 'Declaration of Principles', formally signing the document in Washington on 13 September 1993. All these negotiations were carried out without the knowledge of the official Palestinian delegation in the bilateral peace talks, whose role predictably diminished after the conclusion of the Oslo agreement.

Actually, two agreements were signed between Israel and the Palestinians: the first

dealt with mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and was signed on 10 September 1993; the second stipulated the establishment of Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho, as a first step towards the final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This second resolution was to take place in two stages: first, the expansion of Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, had four parts and included 1) the redeployment of Israeli troops so as to force their withdrawal from densely populated Arab areas; 2) elections for a Palestinian Council and the implementation of a further redeployment of Israeli troops to specified areas in the West Bank as soon as a Council was formed; 3) transferral of certain authorities to the Palestinian Authority; and 4) the revision of active laws, regulations, and military orders. The second stage involved the commitment to begin negotiations on a final settlement to the conflict in May 1996. The agreement was neither perfect nor comprehensive as it avoided many contentious core issues, such as the status of Jerusalem and the settlement of Palestinian refugees living outside the occupied territories, there were also major omissions in issues that had been agreed upon, for example, the geographical limits of Palestinian authority in Jericho.

In accepting the plan, Palestinians agreed to defer consideration of the three demands that had been central to their struggle: the creation of a Palestinian state, return of refugees expelled by Israel in 1948 and 1967, and Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem. What they gained from the agreement was control over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank city of Jericho. Elsewhere on the West Bank, Palestinians would be allowed to take over such local functions as health care, education, and tourism, with Israel retaining all responsibility for security. Israeli forces would continue to control the borders and provide protection for the 300,000+ Jewish settlers living in the Territories. However, questions arose as to the fairness of the deal agreed to by Arafat. It rewarded the PLO for its years of exile and struggle, but failed to compensate Palestinians who had lived under occupation – many since 1948 – or Palestinians living as refugees scattered throughout the Middle East for their years of stateless itinerancy. Most plainly, the agreement was not a final settlement allowing Palestinians to return, to prosper and live in a state of their own or even to escape Israeli occupation and control. Many Palestinians identified these flaws and significant opposition to the agreement arose across the political spectrum; among Palestinians of the PLO, as well as prominent intellectuals like Edward Said, who was a member of the Palestine National Congress (PNC), and most assuredly from Islamic fundamentalists resisting Israeli occupation such as HAMAS and Islamic Jihad, who now posed a credible threat to PLO leadership among Palestinians in the territories. Politics became personal as the opposition openly questioned Arafat's acceptance of the Oslo process. He was openly accused of intending to take anything he could get in the way of a deal to return from political

obscurity following the Gulf War. The PLO was short on money, having alienated the oil-producing states of the Gulf by siding with Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War and Arafat's mainstream *al-Fatah* movement had lost its monopoly on Palestinian leadership to local leaders in the West bank and Gaza during the first *Intifadeh*. Such attacks on his person and on the PLO leadership, now returned from exile in Tunis, were responded to with both increased suppression and charges of widespread human rights abuses from international human rights monitors. All the while the multiplication and expansion of (Jewish) settlements erased the initiative created by the first *Intifada* and cast Palestinian negotiators in a responsive and reactive role to Israeli initiatives. No matter the primary cause one cannot dismiss the possibility that Arafat, approaching his 65th birthday and after having survived many brushes with death, was determined, one-way or another, to become the first President of a Palestinian state and settle by negotiation what had eluded him and *Fatah* by force. As an American scholar indicated:

for the PLO as for any other organisation, its first imperative was to survive! For the top echelon of the PLO apparatus in Tunis, the September 1993 agreement with Israel was a minor miracle which saved them from permanent obscurity or worse and brought them back to centre stage in Palestine.³⁰

It is no wonder that a prominent Israeli writer and political activist, Amos Oz called the Declaration of Principles "the second biggest victory in the history of Zionism."³¹

As an American analyst indicates, Arafat recognised both the Jewish State and its right to security, while Rabin recognised Arafat as an agent for a collection of people without a state or a similar right to security.³² The Palestinian State which had been proclaimed five years earlier and had been recognised by more than 100 countries, was completely forgotten.³³ The Declaration of Principles was followed by an economic agreement, signed in April 1994, in order to define the basis of economic relations between Israel and the self-rule areas. Actual implementation of self-rule in Gaza and Jericho, however, did not take place until the signing of the Cairo Agreement between Israel and the PLO on 4 May 1994, after long, laborious negotiations on logistical issues. The Israeli-PNA administrative and military relations and the status of the Occupied Territories were further elaborated in the Tabai Agreement signed in September 1995, which is also known as the Oslo II treaty. The treaty provided for slow expansion of PNA rule to other towns and villages, in addition to the Gaza Strip and Jericho. If and when implemented, the treaty would divide the Occupied Territories into three zones, labelled A, B and C. In zone A, covering about 3 percent of the West Bank, the PNA would get full administrative and security control, but still not sovereignty. The PNA would also

administer zone B, including a further 24 percent of the West Bank, jointly with Israel. All the rest of the territories, amounting to more than 70 percent of its land area, were to be left under Israeli control. In addition, Israel has preserved its control of all exits and entries in and out of PNA ruled areas, and its power to collect custom fees and tax locally made Palestinian products. In general, the timetable set by the Declaration, has not been adhered to, especially in regard to the withdrawal of Israeli troops, and the holding of Palestinian elections. In the view of an Israeli scholar, however, the Israelis have now acquired a convenient way of gradually evacuating "precisely those [Palestinian areas] they were keen to get rid of."³⁴

The Aftermath of the Agreement

Following the Palestinian National Authority's assumption of control over Gaza and Jericho in May 1994, and Yassir Arafat's settlement in the self-rule areas in July, the PLO still faced tremendous challenges. It has retained responsibility for establishing the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), building institutions to fulfil its domestic and foreign obligations, improving the quality of life of the Palestinian people, and expanding its authority over the rest of the West Bank. In the beginning, most of the Palestinians in Gaza enthusiastically supported their new authority and had high expectations for it, especially in regard to improving their dismal living conditions. As time passed and Arafat failed to deliver on his promises, this support turned to anger and frustration. Economic factors would play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of the agreement. Rather than seeing an improvement in its economic conditions, the populations of Gaza felt a deterioration resulting from both Israel's closure of its borders and the failure of European countries to deliver promised financial assistance. This was demonstrated in the rise of the unemployment rate in Gaza from 45 percent to around 60 percent.

At another level, diminishing Palestinian support for the agreement encouraged HAMAS to carry out suicidal attacks on Israelis in the Territories putting Yassir Arafat and the PNA in a difficult position. He was pressured by Israel to put an end to these attacks if he wished to be anything more than a mayor of Gaza. The Oslo process gave power to a political elite, which was "geographically and politically removed from the realities of post-*Intifada* Palestine."³⁵ The returning leaders and bureaucrats might have shared many emotional bonds with the local population but they did not share a truly common political experience.³⁶ In order to secure their newly acquired predominance, they had to undermine the new elite which had emerged during the *Intifada* and to achieve this they subjugated all Palestinian society to the forces of police control, corruption, and intimidation. On the other hand, Arafat could not directly confront HAMAS with violence for fear of igniting a Palestinian civil war.

President Yassir Arafat

The Palestinian National Authority's first democratic elections were held on 20 January 1996. Not surprisingly, Yassir Arafat received massive support in his bid for the Presidency, winning over 80 percent of the popular vote, and his *Fatah* candidates dominated voting for the Self-Rule Council winning 67 of the 87 seats. The elections, however, were not an encouraging start towards a democratic process for the Palestinian people. Arafat maintained direct control over the entire process, appointing the head of the central election commission, and amending the election process as it served his purposes. First, Arafat decreed the creation of five more seats – making 87 instead of the original 82 – in areas, which would support *Fatah*, and guaranteed six seats to the tiny but affluent Palestinian Christian community. He blatantly manipulated candidate nomination deadlines in order to install his own supporters if a leading non-*Fatah* candidate in a region appeared too independent. Then, he decreed that the campaign period would be reduced from 22 days to 14 days, leaving grassroots opposition parties with little time to prepare. In nominating *Fatah* candidates, Arafat installed members of his own exile clique, in place of popular local leaders, who had been active during the *Intifada*. In dealing with actual opposition, Arafat employed his Palestinian Secret Service and police forces to harass and detain media representatives and opposition candidates, especially those of HAMAS and Islamic Jihad. Two other major opposition groups, the leftist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), boycotted the election outright to avoid endorsing the Oslo peace accords, and also to protest Arafat's methods.

The team of observers from the European Union (which was funding the election), headed by a former Swedish government minister, sharply criticised Arafat's tinkering with the process right up until the day of the election, but after the polls closed, conceded the elections could reasonably be regarded as legitimate in spite of Arafat's methods. The most overt instance of interference in the polling process came from Israeli security forces that filmed those exiting from polling stations in East Jerusalem until international observers asked them to stop. In the final analysis, however, the question of the elections was not whether Arafat would become President, but just how co-operative the self-rule Council would be with him, however, this co-operation was ensured through his manipulation of the process. It places supporters of the peace process were in a difficult position, because while it was extremely difficult to endorse Arafat's actions, the process was highly dependent on his continued personal control of the Palestinian political leadership.

The PNA and Human Rights

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA), from its creation in May 1994, was given jurisdiction to administer portions of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, areas that had been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. Subsequent agreements expanded the jurisdiction of the PNA in the West Bank in the areas of public order (to include 27 percent of the West Bank, consisting of approximately 440 West Bank villages) and public order and internal security (approximately 3 percent of the area of the West Bank consisting of the main urban areas).

Lamentably, the human rights situation in areas under PNA administration did not improve over that experienced under Israeli occupation. "Political arrest and detention under the PNA," noted an Amnesty International report "has seen the stabilisation of a system of prolonged detention without charge or trial. There has been virtually no attempt by the PNA to follow local laws regulating arrest and detention with regards to political prisoners."³⁷ Reports of torture and ill treatment of prisoners have also been prevalent. Political prisoners have included members of Islamist and leftist groups suspected of armed attacks against Israel or known for their opposition to the PNA. In addition, the 1998 Amnesty International Annual Report noted, "people who have criticised the PNA, including journalists and human rights defenders, have also been detained without charge or trial."³⁸ In 1999, Human Rights Watch condemned the PNA for the detention of eight public figures for criticising President Yassir Arafat's policies. "The arrests are the latest in a series of attacks on free expression that have included the arrest and harassment of journalists, human rights activists, and political commentators."³⁹

According to a 1999 Amnesty International report, the prolonged detention of political prisoners "is closely linked to pressure from the international community, especially Israel and the United States..."⁴⁰ Compounding its *de facto* impunity to laws regarding the abuse of human rights, the PNA undermined the rule of law by defying Palestinian High Court judgements requiring the release of specific prisoners.⁴¹ The synopsis for the Palestinian Authority from Amnesty International's *Annual Report 2000* reflects the magnitude of abuse by the PNA prior to the outbreak of the *al-Aqsa Intifada*:

More than 350 people were arrested during 1999 for political reasons. At least 90 were prisoners of conscience, including critics of the Palestinian leadership, journalists and members of a legal opposition Islamist party. Most were released, but at least 70 remained in detention at the end of the year. Reports of torture and ill treatment continued to be received. More than 230 people arrested in previous years remained detained without charge or trial... The High Court of Justice ordered

the release of 52 detainees held without charge or trial, but only four were known to have been released as a result of these judgements by the end of the year [1999]. State security and military courts continued to sentence political detainees after unfair trials. One person was executed and four people were sentenced to death after trials before the state security or military courts. Two people were unlawfully killed during a demonstration. The Palestinian Authority (PA) failed to bring those responsible for human rights abuses to justice.⁴²

Amnesty International has commented on PNA detention tactics, their legitimacy and political motivations in several detailed reports since the signing of the Oslo Agreement on 13 September 1993.⁴³

The Return to Violence

On 25 February 1996, a Palestinian student, on a Jerusalem bus, became the first in a new series of HAMAS 'martyrs' as the bomb he was carrying killed him and eighteen other passengers. Over the next two weeks, three more attacks killed fifty-nine people in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Ashkelon. The Israeli response was a predictable savage crackdown in the territories of the Palestinian National Authority, the arrest of over a hundred suspected HAMAS members, the destruction of houses belonging to the families of the suicide bombers, and frantic attempts by the Peres government to salvage something of the peace process, as public opinion turned radically against it. The arrest of an Israeli citizen, accused of transporting at least one suicide bomber to his mission, also deeply shook Israeli confidence. After the second bombing in Jerusalem, Peres announced that a state of 'comprehensive war' existed between the state of Israel and HAMAS.

The bombings represented a political opportunity for Arafat and his supporters and the Palestinian Secret Service and police force immediately began rounding up and detaining or arresting any and all HAMAS supporters and activists they could find, with the full support of the Israelis. For Arafat, his position was strengthened, both by preventing further attacks in Israel and by removing HAMAS' political influence in the Palestinian territories, where their activists are often regarded with far greater respect than Arafat's men who were in Tunisia during the *Intifada*. Many of these PLO officials whom Arafat had installed in the territories, showed themselves to be corrupt and authoritarian, determined to impose their rule through a large security apparatus and violent intimidation. As Shyam Bhatia from the *Guardian Weekly* put it, "Mr. Arafat is intolerant of the slightest opposition or criticism. Those who dare to protest, quickly find themselves handcuffed and escorted to one of the president's many prisons."⁴⁴ Bhatia continued, "although he [Arafat] rules with the help of a Cabinet, none of his ministers dares make a decision without his approval. More

importantly, he has exclusive control over the Palestinian Authority's bank accounts, and he alone decides how to spend the tens of millions of dollars received from foreign donors."⁴⁵ The same source alleged that, for example,

when South Korea approved \$7 million for Palestinian economic development, Mr. Arafat shaved off \$2 million for a new Presidential headquarters and residence on the outskirts of Nablus. Palestinians learned of their President's grandiose scheme after he sent in police to confiscate thousands of acres belonging to local farmers. Some of the landowners lay down in front of the Palestinian Authority's bulldozers, and have since disappeared. They are widely believed to have been detained by one of Mr. Arafat's nine security agencies. Testimonies gathered by human rights activists show that commanders of Mr. Arafat's 45,000 strong police force are mixed in scandals ranging from kidnapping and rape to embezzlement, blackmail and theft. Earlier in 1996, a 17 year-old girl from Gaza committed suicide after she was raped by a senior police officer. In Jerusalem, a Palestinian academic who claimed she was raped by one of Mr. Arafat's close advisers, was detained by Palestinian secret service personnel.⁴⁶

It seems that Yassir Arafat-style democracy has also been reflected in the atrocious practices of his clique and, not simply its police. In Ramallah, members of Force 17, Mr. Arafat's Presidential security guards, abducted the deputy mayor, Zaki Nahas, after he refused to sell his land to a senior PNA official. In the same city, a wealthy businessman, Ahmed Abu Ghosh, was severely beaten by the head of the Palestinian secret service, Colonel Jibril Rajoub, after he refused to give up his parking space to the wife of a PNA minister.⁴⁷ A member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Hosam Khadr stated "I can tell you, there is organised torture in Arafat's prisons. I, myself, am a veteran of Israeli prisons, and I was arrested by the Israelis on 23 occasions. What is happening in our prisons now, is much worse than what we experienced in Israeli jails during the 27 years of occupation."⁴⁸ Another Palestinian, who is working as a journalist, reported, "Arafat's policemen are behaving like gangsters. The problem is we do not know under which law they operate. Each force has its own prison and acts independently."⁴⁹ To give this image more clarity, *Amnesty International* has conducted several extensive investigations of alleged PNA human rights abuses and repeatedly found that:

Torture and ill treatment were widespread. At least 300 people arrested in previous years were held without charge or trial, including people suspected of 'collaborating' with the Israeli authorities and suspected members of Islamist opposition groups. ...

State Security Courts continued to sentence political detainees after unfair trials.⁵⁰

Corruption has also become rampant in the PNA leadership. Citing David Hirst, the distinguished British journalist, from the *Guardian Weekly*,

Here, in the homeland itself, far from fighting the former Zionist foe, they head the collaboration with it. They may attract money – in the form of international aid – to this poorest of Palestinian communities, but they take at least as much away from it. They are oppressive and immeasurably corrupt. Confirming this allegation, a former *Fatah* fighter said, “We live in amazing, shameful times, but you should know that every revolution has its fighters, thinkers and profiteers. Our fighters have been killed, our thinkers assassinated, and all we have left are the profiteers. These do not think even primarily of the cause. They do not think about it at all. They know that they are just transients here, as they were in Tunis, and, as with any regime whose end is near, they think only of profiting from it while they can.”⁵¹

According to *Ha'aretz*, the most respected Israeli daily, “a part of Arafat’s secret fund is earmarked for emergency situations, such as a coup or a civil war, in which he, his family and immediate entourage would be forced to flee into exile once more, and re-establish the leadership from exile. They know, better than anyone, that the peace process, and all they get out of it, is built like the *Zahra al-Mada'in*, on nothing more solid than fine white powdery sands.” And according to David Hirst, it is no secret that “Al-Bahar enterprises are the new strictly domestic instrument of Arafat’s take-over of the Gazan economy. It complements already existing monopolies, for the import of such basic commodities as cement, petrol or flour, which he operates. For example, out of the \$74 for which a ton of cement is sold in Gaza, \$17 goes to the Authority, and \$17 into his own account in a Tel Aviv bank.”⁵²

The Rise of Extremism

The Israeli elections of May 1996 undermined not only the ‘peace process’ but also challenged the existence and stability of the PNA. Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he would never support the existence of an independent Palestinian state, while Arafat and all other Palestinian groups claimed they would settle for nothing less. Netanyahu also refused any discussion on the status of East Jerusalem, which most Palestinians envision as the capital of a future Palestinian state. In this situation, the PNA turned to other Arab states, in the hope of gaining support against a more hostile Israeli state, using the June 1996 Arab summit to focus on this issue. While moderate states, particularly Egypt and Jordan, have taken up Arafat’s cause, unity

on the peace process is strained. Both the Israeli governments of Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak have seemingly retreated from the Madrid Conference's principle of 'land for peace' (both for the Palestinians and Syria), which the Arab states insist is a precondition for continued negotiations. While the final communiqué of the June 1996 Summit called for an immediate halt to all Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories expansion continued unabated. Further, the Israelis stated that they would not accept any preconditions whatsoever – though Tel Aviv seems to have no compunctions about making them.

These developments made the prospects for the Palestinian National Authority less encouraging than at any time since its founding. The continued existence of violent opposition in the territories ensured Israeli interference, and fuelled further Palestinian resentment towards Israeli controls. Yassir Arafat adopted savagely repressive measures against HAMAS, that once more not only call into question his commitment to a tolerance of political dissent, but even his commitment to basic democracy, civil society, and the rule of law. These actions might be understandable if his actions were not so transparently calculated to eliminate his own political opponents while ensuring continued Israeli support for his regime. The police and security forces of the PNA, particularly the prevention security service and the general intelligence units, have been accused of using electric shock, torture, rape, threats against families, and other brutal methods in their interrogations and detentions, and according to the Palestinian Human Rights Group (PHRG), "the PSS and GI have 'collected' an estimated eight million shekels (\$4 million) from 1996-1998 which has yet to find its way into the Palestinian Treasury."⁵³ Indeed when an American-European panel sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations in New York released a report on the PNA it was quite damning of President Arafat's control over the state and its bureaucracy.⁵⁴

Even the Israeli media has been critical of these methods and according to an American political analyst Palestinian state building in the post-Oslo period has been characterised by "authoritarianism in decision making, the anti-institutional personalization of power, and the pervasiveness of violence in the system."⁵⁵ The dream of a secular and democratic modern state and society on Palestinian soil seems to be now much more remote than ever before. In October 1998, the stalled Middle East peace process was revived by an American initiative, which brought Netanyahu and Arafat to the US for face-to-face negotiations at the Wye River plantation. Sequestered for eight days in a rural Maryland retreat, the two leaders finally agreed to a land for peace accord with Israel agreeing to relinquish an additional 13 percent of the occupied West Bank to the PNA but only under the condition of an aggressive anti-terrorist program by the ACA, which would include

CIA monitoring and cooperation against, Islamic activism.

The Failure of Oslo and Postponement

Severe drought conditions in 1999 quickly elevated access to water supplies to the forefront amongst the issues Palestinian land claims had with Israel. That the average Israeli uses four times more water than the average Palestinian only exacerbated the situation as Palestinian resources were seemingly always under Israeli control.⁵⁶ Israel controls all water sources within its borders including the West Bank, an area occupied by the IDF in 1967, and whose aquifers it has been left to control. West Bank water aquifers now provide millions of cubic meters of fresh potable water, clearly enough to meet Palestinian demands, if Israel were not diverting 80 percent for its own domestic consumption.⁵⁷ In early PLO-Israeli peace accords water management was seen as a civilian matter to be transferred to Palestinian control along with health care, education and taxation. Water issues however, have proven to be highly divisive, intertwined with sovereignty and security issues that forced the two sides in 1995 to transfer the matter to future 'final status' talks, placing water on the same plane as the fate of Jerusalem. With the PNA's postponement of any declaration of statehood, the decision of who has access to a portion of the available resources has now been shelved to the indefinite future.⁵⁸

The postponement of a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, which had been set for Tuesday 4 May 1999, demonstrated the failures of the Oslo process while continuing to demonstrate the core conflict between Palestinians and Israelis over living arrangements. Extremism had become prevalent on both sides prior to the Israeli election of Ehud Barak. The conventional explanations for the failure of the Oslo-Wye process: Israel's stall in negotiating with neighbouring states, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and the return to power of a more conservative and recalcitrant Likud following the 1996 elections appears to have forced the PNA's hand in the declaration. Certainly these forces, most importantly Netanyahu's determination to have the Israeli government function in a distinctly pro-settler manner, did hinder the process was laid out in the previous negotiations of Oslo and Oslo II. The extremism on both sides simply escalated the effectiveness of Netanyahu's policy of undermining the PNA and the process.

However the peace negotiations, which emanated from the Madrid process' stagnation, and the secret talks in Oslo Norway, has not been able to achieve these aspirations, nor created an equality between the state of Israel and the PNA in terms of either negotiating positions or agreed concessions. Instead it has led, with the Palestinians, to a sense that they should take what they could get. This sense, that

Israel is driving the negotiation agenda, and the further entrenchment of Israeli military and economic supremacy makes Oslo as the best of all available alternatives not for its political efficacy but because it is all the Palestinians can possibly hope for. As an Israeli journalist noted: "Throughout all the years, the negotiating process reflected the nature of relations between Israel and the Palestinians ... between the ruler and the ruled, those who hold all the keys and those who are begging for just one."⁵⁹ At the same time, however, the PNA was still willing to present to its people the misleading picture of the "peace process" as a "gradual but certain progress toward genuine sovereignty and full independence," and was afraid to reveal how much it "gave up on almost every issue."⁶⁰ An open admission of that would have required a "different way of coping with reality" and "responding to the grass roots demands for government reform."⁶¹ It would have probably also "forced the Palestinian leadership and its inner circle to give up some of the material benefits granted them in the context of their good relations with the Israeli security services."⁶²

Moreover, as with other conflicts characterised by long-standing irreconcilable differences, reactive extremists on both sides look to sabotage the process when any concessions are made thereby threatening the peace process. In this sense the structural difficulties of replacing Rabin with Netanyahu, or for that matter replacing Netanyahu with Barak proved irrelevant. On the ground Palestinians have been faced with increased corruption and oppression, from both occupying Israeli forces and the PNA itself, as the process moved slowly forward. Gaza is experiencing an ever-deteriorating standard of living, which when coupled with the harsh rule of the PNA, evidences an increased willingness for armed conflict rather than the abdication of legitimate hopes at the negotiating table. The ability of the Palestinians and Israelis to live together or in proximity seemingly deteriorates daily. The existence of a Palestinian minority within Israel presents difficulties within an otherwise democratic society, while for Palestinians the continual reminders evident throughout the West Bank, such as Jewish settlers extraterritorial rights, conflict with the rights of Palestinian citizens, only magnifying Israel's continued separation and the isolation of Palestinian areas from one another. The continued presentation of the 'victimised' Israelis in the world media and consciousness, while Palestinian victimisation is forgotten or downplayed in an effort to bolster Israeli 'security' concerns, further undermines Palestinian hopes for equality within the process.

In a survey of public opinion conducted throughout the West bank and Gaza in the winter of 2000 it appeared that Palestinians had lost faith in the peace process and that disenchantment with the PNA and its leadership was running high. Two-thirds of the respondents did not believe it would be possible to reach an acceptable final

agreement with Israel. A full 70 percent viewed the PNA and its leadership as corrupt, especially those in the police and security agencies dominated by *Fatah*. Two-thirds of the respondents also felt that they could not criticise the PNA in a public forum for fear of retribution, and that corruption would only increase in the future. Only 22 percent of respondents felt that a pluralistic and democratic society, respectful of human rights and freedoms, would develop under the current PNA leadership. This last grouping, respondents who viewed the future as potentially positive, was at its lowest level since polling began in 1996. Understandably, *Fatah*'s popularity hit a new low, falling from a 50 per cent approval in 1998 to 35 per cent in 2000; and confidence in PNA leader Yassir Arafat's leadership took a similar drop from 70 percent to 39 percent.⁶³

Finally, the paradox of the role of the United States, as an independent third party arbiter, seems to be under increasing question as its longstanding position of patron to Israel has continued unabated. Thus, the process as it is presently constituted only presents Palestinians with the possibility a seemingly endless collaboration with Israel, to assure Israeli security demands rather than genuine freedom and independence. Several commentators have presented alternatives to the present process. Richard Falk of Princeton University has suggested a revision of the process, which would allow for two equal but independent states where Palestinian security is viewed as equally important to Israeli security and with those Israelis living in settlements within a Palestinian entity possessing only those rights granted them by the PNA. Others, such as, for instance, American scholar, Professor Ian S. Lustick, a Palestinian member of the Knesset, Azmi Bishara, and Swedish writer and journalist Goran Rosenberg meanwhile, have proposed a unified state, which would be confederate, secular and in which all citizens would be equal.⁶⁴ While requiring the abandonment of Zionism by Jewish settlers and a similar Palestinian commitment to secularisation and the abandonment of both parties strong commitment to ethno-religious identification. Such suggestions may seem farfetched, but they clearly demonstrate the inequality present in the current process, and the remote nature of the possibility for true and lasting peace in the region. The Oslo process was clearly flawed, and has now been transformed from that of a process pursuing Palestinian independence to that of validating a change from direct to indirect Israeli rule over the occupied territories. The Oslo process had been flawed since the very beginning and has subsequently been reduced from that of a process pursuing Palestinian independence to that validating a change from direct to indirect Israeli rule over the occupied territories. As an American political analyst has indicated, the seeds of failure of diplomatic efforts, such as the Oslo peace strategy, lay in the fact that in view of what Israel and its supporters consider as its "intractable security requirements, the West Bank can never be economically

autonomous,"⁶⁵ and "Palestine cannot be allowed to become militarily independent."⁶⁶ As an inevitable outcome of that, "the political autonomy and sovereignty for Palestine inherent in the Oslo process has been an illusion."⁶⁷ Furthermore, the need for a truly neutral third party to broker a deal is as imperative as it is difficult to imagine. The United States' attachment to the process sees the US divided between its domestic and regional concerns. The fact that the US serves as a patron to Israel, while simultaneously as an enemy of Islamic activism, in addition to US domestic concerns such as Jewish electoral support and various administrations' desires for a successful resolution to the regions problems, in order to attain a foreign policy 'victory', clouds the opportunity for a genuine peace process between independent negotiating parties.

The 2001 Israeli Election and the Al-Aqsa Intifada

The instability of the Oslo process, brinkmanship diplomacy by US President Bill Clinton at Camp David II, the Israeli and Palestinian positions on the right of return of refugees, and the sovereignty of Jerusalem, as well as the popular Palestinian rejection of continued Israeli settlements, led to increased tension throughout the Occupied Territories through the summer of 2000. Former Israeli Chief of Staff, General Ehud Barak, who after the May 1999 Israeli elections became Prime Minister of the country, did not like the gradual steps approach which was the basis of the Oslo Agreement.⁶⁸ He believed that the Israeli withdrawals from the Occupied Territories which had taken place after it, did not bring Israel anything tangible in return. He preferred instead to protect himself against a possible failure of the final agreement and not to give to the Palestinians any further concessions before their acceptance of his proposal of final accommodation. According to this strategy, Arafat, with the help of the US as well as with European support, would have been forced to accept either submission or confrontation and left without a "third way" or "reversion to the interim approach."⁶⁹ Consequently, and despite all the Palestinian pressures, he refused to implement the 1998 Wye Agreement, which was signed by his predecessor, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and delayed the start of permanent status talks by waiting to name a chief negotiator. As the former special assistant for Arab-Israeli Affairs to US President Clinton admitted: "Seen from Gaza and the West Bank, Oslo's legacy read as a litany of promises deferred or unfulfilled."⁷⁰

The Palestinians were therefore understandably reluctant to accept a high level summit which was demanded by Barak, which they rightly perceived as designed to increase the pressure on them in order to "reach a quick agreement while heightening the political and symbolic costs if they did not."⁷¹ Despite Arafat's objections, President Clinton decided to support Barak's request and held a US-

Israeli-Palestinian summit at Camp David in July 2000. He assured Arafat, nevertheless, that "he would not be blamed if the summit did not succeed."⁷² However, this and many other promises by Clinton were later completely disregarded with the stark reality proving to be only the worst of the Palestinian misgivings.

Although the Americans blamed Arafat for "failing to put forward clear proposals," the Palestinians were still willing to address many Israeli concerns, and in spite of their insistence on Israel's withdrawal from all lands occupied in 1967, they were ready to accept both the Israeli annexation of some of its West Bank settlements and a "division of East Jerusalem granting Israel sovereignty over its Jewish areas (the Jewish quarter, the Wailing Wall, and the Jewish neighbourhoods)."⁷³ Barak's proposals were hazy and changeable and during the summit he even refused to hold any substantive negotiations with Arafat "out of fear that the Palestinian leader would seek to put Israeli concessions on the record."⁷⁴ In his main points, however, his proposals, which have never been set forth on the public record, denied the Palestinian state viability and independence by dividing its territory into four separate cantons: Northern West Bank, Central West Bank, Southern West Bank and Gaza, entirely surrounded, and therefore controlled, by Israel.⁷⁵ His proposals also denied the Palestinians control over their future borders, airspace and water resources, while approving the existence and further expansion of Israeli settlements.⁷⁶ Although the Israeli and Western media widely claimed that Barak offered Arafat 96 percent of the occupied territories, left out of the equation was Arab East Jerusalem, illegally annexed by Israel after the 1967 war, the huge belt of Jewish settlement around the city and a 10-mile wide military buffer zone around the now Palestinian-controlled territories.⁷⁷ During the ensuing discussions, Barak made suggestions with regards to Israeli acceptance of Palestinian sovereignty over some of Jerusalem's neighbourhoods, but excluded *Haram al-Sharif*/Temple Mount.⁷⁸

The Americans tried to find some legal and political devices to bridge the Israeli and Palestinian positions, but overall supported the viewpoints and interests of the Israelis. According to a member of the Palestinian delegation: "The Palestinians went to Camp David expecting to find an honest broker, but none appeared. Then they lowered their expectations, content to make do with a mere broker. But even then, none could be found."⁷⁹ As an American political analyst indicated, "it became clear to Palestinians at Camp David last summer [2000] that Oslo meant these conditions [existing under Israeli occupation] would be institutionalised permanently."⁸⁰ Their frustration and anger grew and the visit of hawkish Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon to the *Haram al-Sharif*/Temple Mount on 28 September

2000 outraged Muslims the world over and instigated the outbreak of a second *Intifada*. Palestinians once again took to the streets to demand an end to the Israeli occupation in what came to be known as the Al-Aqsa *Intifada*. Attacks on Israeli settlers, the lynching of two Israeli soldiers, and daily protests were overshadowed by the immense number of deaths and casualties suffered, the overwhelming majority of whom were civilian Palestinians at the hands of Israeli soldiers, police, and vigilante settlers. The increased settler violence and the use of indiscriminate and disproportionate force by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) led to international condemnation of Israel – including UN Security Council Resolution 1322 (2000) – and the fall of Ehud Barak’s coalition government.

Seventy-two year old Ariel Sharon, heading a newly reinvigorated right wing, rode a wave of Israeli apprehension with the Oslo process to an overwhelming electoral victory, becoming Israel’s fifth prime minister in just over five years. Concluding a campaign held against a backdrop of the worst Israeli-Palestinian violence since the 1987-1990 *Intifada*, Sharon defeated prime minister Ehud Barak by a stunning 62.5 to 37.4 percent of the vote. The margin was unprecedented in Israeli electoral history, as was the low voter turnout following expressions of disaffection with the candidates and the political system. Only 62 percent of Israelis went to the polls, compared with 80 percent in 1999. A resounding majority of the Israeli-Arab community, in particular, sat out the race to express its profound alienation from the political establishment of Israel. Barak’s defeat followed just twenty-one months after he was elected by a then-record majority on a mandate to make peace with Israel’s neighbours.

Sharon’s call for “our Palestinian neighbours to cast off the path of violence and return to the path of dialogue and a solving of the conflicts between us by peaceful means,” rings hollow in view of the use of preponderant Israeli military and vigilante force during the occupation and Al-Aqsa *Intifada*, as well as his own military record in Lebanon. Sharon is remembered as the one found responsible for the massacres at the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian refugee camps in West Beirut. In 1982 Sharon, as the Israeli Defense Minister, presided over the Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon. After encircling Beirut, the IDF allowed their Christian Phalange allies to enter the refugee camps, where they murdered hundreds of defenceless women, children, and elderly Palestinian refugees. An Israeli commission of enquiry – the Kahan Commission – found that Sharon bore “personal responsibility” and recommended his removal from office. Sharon resigned, apparently ending his political career on the altar of a war crime. However, he remained on the Israeli political scene, becoming useful as a conduit between the Israeli government and the

large number of Russian émigrés' who entered the country after the fall of the Soviet Union. His ability to speak Russian, and his championing of the émigrés cause saw him serve as Minister of Construction and Housing from 1990-1992. His ability to build homes for some 70,000 émigrés a month saw him dubbed "the bulldozer" in a convenient amalgam of public policy and Zionist ideology. The homes he "found" for the Russian émigrés were predominantly inside the "green line," vastly increasing the number of both settlements and settlers in the West Bank. Sharon himself maintains a large encamped residence in Arab East Jerusalem. Chosen as the caretaker leader of Likud following the defeat of Benjamin Netanyahu, he again was thought to have committed a fatal political mistake when he made a heavily guarded visit to the plaza outside the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in 2000. After his visit, Israeli-Palestinian violence erupted and many world leaders accused Sharon of a reckless provocation at a sensitive moment. The Al-Aqsa Intifada – as the uprising came to be known – spread, and hundreds of Palestinians were killed in escalating violence, leading to a general rejection of the peace process by many Palestinians and Israelis. Thus, Sharon's call for a return to dialogue with the Palestinians following the February 2001 elections was met with great scepticism inside Israel, internationally, and particularly throughout the Arab world and weighed heavily upon Palestinian negotiators attempting to pursue a settlement.

By mid-June 2001 the Al-Aqsa *Intifada* had claimed the lives of 499 Palestinians and 117 Israeli's since the outbreak of hostilities in late September 2000.⁸¹ Palestinian stones were met with live ammunition from soldiers of the IDF and Palestinian machine-gun fire was met with Israeli helicopter gun-ships, aerial bombing from Israeli F-16's and Israeli tanks rolling into Palestinian-controlled areas in an eight-month spiral of unrelenting violence. The Palestinian uprising saw the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza rise in popular demonstrations against continued Israeli occupation. The movement is largely a reactive, disorganised resistance of a people against an occupation which has progressed to that of military siege, continued territorial expropriation and, in response to Palestinian arms, the assassination of Palestinian leaders. *Al-Nakba* – the term used to describe what Palestinians see as the catastrophe of Israel's founding on 15 May 1948 – has now endured for 53 years of Israeli statehood and 34 years of military occupation. Sharon's visit to al-Aqsa mosque on 28 September 2000 simply provided the spark to repressed Palestinian ambitions for a state of their own, which had been stifled through Israeli occupation, obstructionist negotiation tactics, and the failures of the Palestinian leadership.

The uprising, however, has come to illuminate two increasingly inescapable truths.

The first is that the Palestinians sense of a common national identity has been cemented, in spite of the obstacles to its fruition. The second is that – as such – Israeli occupation, and the *Intifada* in protest at its continuation, indicates a failure of historical events to erase Palestinian distinctiveness or the aspiration for statehood.

The Israeli position under Sharon has been one of obstruction towards peace negotiations. The Israeli government insists that all violence must end and that a six-week cooling-off period must be observed before it will take additional steps toward new peace talks.⁸² Arafat's refusal to arrest *en masse* Islamic militants the PNA had released from detention in September 2000 was held as evidence of his unwillingness to commit to peace, which failed to acknowledge that the PNA would be seen as doing Israel's bidding, if Arafat was to comply, without getting anything in return. One of the most scandalous aspects of Israeli policy has seen Palestinian militants targeted for attack, with more than forty such killings in addition to the reported deaths of more than a dozen bystanders since the uprising began September 2000.⁸³

A fact-finding committee led by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, which had been appointed by President Clinton at Sharm el-Sheik Egypt, in October 2000 was established to examine the causes of the first weeks of clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli security forces. As the violence continued and escalated, the committee expanded its purview and also concentrated on measures that might permit a renewal of negotiations; and finally completed its report on 30 April 2001, subsequently publishing it on 20 May 2001. The committee's recommendations called for a cooling-off period and for confidence-building measures by the two sides as well as a freeze on Israeli settlement activities. In spite of the lopsided death toll and the Israeli use of massive military force against the Palestinian population, the report called on the Palestinian Authority to "make clear that terrorism is unacceptable," while calling on the Israeli's to "withdraw troops to positions held before 28 September 2000, and adopt and enforce policies encouraging non-lethal responses to unarmed rioters." Most important to the Palestinians, the Committee recommended that the Israeli government "should freeze all settlement activity," including the 'natural growth' of existing settlement" and noticed that "The kind of security cooperation desired by the GOI [government of Israel] cannot for long co-exist with settlement activity." The Committee also recommended that Israel "lift closures and transfer tax to the Palestinian National Authority all tax revenues owed, and permit Palestinians who had been employed in Israel to return to their jobs, and ... ensure that security forces and settlers refrain from the destruction of homes and roads, as well as trees and other agricultural property in Palestinian areas."

The Israeli government grudgingly agreed to the report, even though it rejected the recommendation for a freeze on building Jewish settlements in Gaza and the West Bank and demanded a total cessation of all Palestinian violence and protests as an absolute precondition for any further peaceful steps. The Israeli position was supported by both US President George W. Bush who stated that “no progress could be made on the political front until the cycle of violence is crushed and broken,”⁸⁴ and by European Union envoy Javier Solana who declared that for Europe too, there must be an “immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities” prior to any resumption of “constructive negotiations leading to peace.”⁸⁵

Sharon responded by ordering IDF units to “cease all initiated pre-emptive operations against Palestinians except in cases of genuine danger to human life.”⁸⁶ The Palestinian Authority accepted the report as a basis to reconvene peace talks. Supporting the implementation of all the Committee’s recommendations – without allowing for either side to selectively apply those most convenient to its position – the PLO found the report’s most unique contribution to be a recognition of “the link between Israeli settlement activity and Israeli security.”⁸⁷

However, the Mitchell Report was hardly a “balanced” document as it failed to call for an international force to provide protection for Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Territories – a cardinal Palestinian demand – or respond to Egypt’s and Jordan’s insistence that future political negotiations be timetabled and resume from where they ended in Taba in January 2001.⁸⁸ Though the report’s recommendation that Israel “freeze all settlement construction, including the ‘natural growth’ of existing settlements,” was a public acknowledgement of the principle obstacle to negotiations, continued Israeli and international rejection of such a step undermined its impact. As Israel’s Peace Now movement points out, Israel’s claim throughout the occupation has been that it is not ‘expropriating Palestinian land’ but rather “evicting Palestinians from lands over which they have no recognised rights.”⁸⁹ The vast majority of the over 6,000 Israeli settlements – as well as the 15 new settlements established since the 2001 Israeli election – are on such land.⁹⁰ Considering the composition of Ariel Sharon’s cabinet, his personal views, and his base of support it is difficult to envisage much advance in the peace process.

It should be noted that the historical events outlined above have materialised into the virtually ineluctable position faced by the Palestinian people today. As a United Nations Commission on Human Rights report found in March 2001 the Oslo process has shifted the context of the dispute, along with the perceptions both Israelis and Palestinians hold of one another. The Israelis see the relationship as

having moved "from a relationship between an occupying power and an occupied people to one between conflicting parties in a state of belligerency or war, implying a virtual absence of legal and moral constraints, at least on the Israeli side, provided only that a self-serving argument of military necessity is set forth."⁹¹ This view is the dominant outlook portrayed by much of the Western media. In stark contrast "the Palestinian Authority and most Palestinians perceive the current phase of their relationship with Israel as brought about by a combination of the distortions associated with the implementation of the Oslo principles, the failure to implement a series of United Nations resolutions, most particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1968) and 338 (1973), and grave breaches by Israel of the Fourth Geneva Convention."⁹² This starkly makes plain the day-to-day relationship Palestinians have living beneath Israeli settlements and with the IDF forces deployed to defend settlers – a continued experience of occupation and daily hardship while settler communities prosper and expand. The impact of this experience is outlined by the UN commission's report as its second major assessment – that the redeployment of the IDF since 1994 and the implementation of the Oslo Accords, carving the West bank into designated "internal boundaries" of fluctuating Palestinian and Israeli authority – has had "the effect ... of produc[ing] a situation of extreme fragmentation, making travel very burdensome for Palestinians who went, for work or otherwise, from one part of the territories to another."⁹³ The "state of siege" felt by Palestinians – the residue of the settlers existence – stands as the largest affront to any possible peaceable resolution to the hostilities existing between Israelis and Palestinians and to the realisation of the Palestinian fundamental right to self-determination.

The cease-fire of 15 June 2001 proposed by CIA director George Tenet in order to start the preliminary steps leading toward the implementation of the Mitchell Report, was officially accepted by both parties, but in fact was never put into practice. The Israeli policy of the 'targeted killing' of alleged terrorists and Palestinian activists in the West Bank and Gaza and the suicide bombing attacks of Palestinian Islamic fundamentalists furthered mutual hatred and hostility. In spite of a call from the G8 foreign ministers on 19 July 2001 for a neutral international observer force, Israel refused to allow any such force to be deployed.⁹⁴ The ministers' call was in fact rendered meaningless by the inclusion, at the US's request, of a condition that the observers must be acceptable to both sides in the dispute.⁹⁵ When on 30 July 2001 Israeli security forces attacked a Hamas office in Nablus, killing eight Palestinians including two Hamas leaders and two children, and on 31 July 2001 when the Israeli cabinet approved plans to kill high-level Palestinian leaders, frustration and anger among Palestinians caused even Arafat's close advisor Nabil Sha'ath to declare "that the Mitchell Committee Report and the Tenet plan for a cease fire are dead."⁹⁶

However, Yasir Arafat himself, who was then visiting Rome, "reaffirmed his commitment to the peace process with Israel" and said he stood by "all previously signed peace agreements."⁹⁷ After meeting with Pope John Paul II Arafat stated: "From Rome I call for a stop to all forms of violence, including bombardment, and [for] the dispatch of international observers immediately."⁹⁸

Following an Islamic fundamentalist suicide bombing in Jerusalem on 9 August 2001, which killed 15 people in a café, Israel seized Orient House which had come to symbolise the Palestinian claim to Jerusalem. In 1991 Faisal Hussein, a prominent Palestinian politician refurbished it and turned it into an unofficial political bureau. Orient House became the headquarters of the Palestinian Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs, with Faisal Hussein as its head in 1993 following the early implementation of the Oslo Accord.⁹⁹ The leader of Meretz, the opposition centre-left wing party in the Israeli Knesset condemned, however, the decision, saying that the move against Orient House had no connection with the terrorists. He added: "no terrorist came from there" and [Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon has a tendency for inflammatory acts in Jerusalem."¹⁰⁰

Although, according to a Peace Index survey,¹⁰¹ most Israelis support the assassinations of the targeted Palestinians and even want more of them – despite the argument that it is "an immoral policy of extra-judicial executions," Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres, speaking on 13 August 2001 to the Labour Party Central Committee, admitted nevertheless at least partial Israeli responsibility for the tragic situation. As he stated: "we too and not just [the Palestinians] need to lower the level of incitement. When we say we will liquidate them, destroy them, banish them, that is incitement. They tell us: 'you have us by the throat, economically and politically. What kind of autonomy do we have when you control all the [hill] tops, all the transit points, all the employment?' How are we to answer them?"¹⁰² Peres also reiterated his view that continuous dialogue with Arafat is essential to reduce the violence and that refusal to talk to the Palestinians before total pacification is counter-productive. "There are those who say we must not negotiate while under fire, even at times of terrorism," he said.¹⁰³

Both the Israelis and the Palestinians are now going through a very difficult transition period and only the future will tell us whether there is any light at the end of the tunnel.¹⁰⁴ Although the Oslo Agreement did not bring the expected outcomes predicted when it was announced, an alternative path to peace and reconciliation still needs to be identified. In view of previous historical experience, in order to be effective and lasting, such an accommodation will need to take into account the vital interests of both parties and not reduce one of them to a level of dispossession,

misery and despair. As Minister Peres admitted: "It is inconceivable that three million people should be kept under closure for three months with unemployment growing, with distress and poverty rising steadily."¹⁰⁵ The tragic fate of the Palestinian people and peace in the region are interwoven and now as in the past pose a great challenge, not only to the leaders of the Palestinians and state of Israel, but also to all civilised nations and to all people interested in a more peaceful future.

As Edward Said points out "even a brave anti-colonial uprising cannot on its own explain itself,"¹⁰⁶ and the necessity for improved Palestinian leadership would appear preponderant given the track record of the PNA under the leadership of Chairman Arafat. Said explicitly calls on any Palestinian leadership to re-examine its tactics and reform the corruption and unwillingness to alter long-standing policies from its bankrupt repertoire. Leaning more on what he identifies as "the weapons of the weak" Said continues:

Every human rights document ever formulated entitles a people to resist military occupation, the destruction of homes and property, and the expropriation of land for the purpose of settlements. Arafat and his advisers seem not to have understood that when they blindly entered Israel's unilateral dialectic of violence and terror – verbally speaking – they had in essence given up their right of resistance. Instead of making clear that any relinquishing of resistance had to be accompanied by Israel's withdrawal and/or equal relinquishing of its occupation, the Palestinian people were made vulnerable by their leadership to charges of terror and violence. ... But once the Palestinian leadership had forsaken its principles and pretended that it was a great power capable of playing the game of *nations*, it brought on itself the fate of a weak nation, with neither the sovereignty nor the power to reinforce its gestures or its tactics. So hypnotised is Mr Arafat with his supposed standing as a president, jumping from Paris to London to Beijing to Cairo on one pointless state visit after another, that he has forgotten that the weapons the weak and the stateless cannot ever give up are its principles and its people. To occupy and unendingly defend the high moral ground; to keep telling the truth and reminding the world of the full historical picture; to hold on to the lawful right of resistance and restitution; to mobilise people everywhere rather than to appear with the likes of Chirac and Blair; to depend neither on the media nor the Israelis but on oneself to tell the truth. These are what Palestinian leaders forgot first at Oslo and then again at Camp David. When will we as a people assume responsibility for what after all is ours and stop relying on leaders who no longer have any idea what they are doing?¹⁰⁷

This imperative, outlined by Said, calls for a renewed leadership as well as a return to the enunciation of a more straightforward message to the people of the world reminding us that "... Israel is a nuclear power abusing a people without any armour or artillery, no air force (its one pathetic airfield in Gaza is controlled by Israel) or navy or army, [with] none of the institutions of a modern state."¹⁰⁸ He continues: "... the stark outlines of Israel's decades-long daily pressure on a people whose main sin is that they happened to be there, in Israel's way ..." is underlined by his own work demonstrating the importance of identity and in cultural theory. The presentation of the conflict in the Western media sees "Israel's daily Palestinian victims barely rate a mention on America's news programmes,"¹⁰⁹ dehumanising and disconnecting the international community from the reality of colonialism.

With such recognition it has become apparent, in the eyes of many observers, that the regime established under the auspices of the Oslo Agreements, and led by Yassir Arafat, must now be replaced by a more effective and popularly elected representative of the entire Palestinian people. In the words of Said:

What we need is a unified leadership of people who are on the ground, who are actually doing the resisting, who are really with and of their people, not the fat, cigar-chomping bureaucrats who want their business deals preserved and their VIP passes renewed, and who have lost all trace of decency or credibility. A united leadership that takes positions and plans mass actions designed not to return to Oslo (can you believe the folly of that idea?) but to press on with resistance and liberation, instead of confusing people with talk of negotiations and the stupid Mitchell Plan.

Arafat is finished: why don't we admit that he can neither lead, nor plan, nor do anything that makes any difference except to him and his Oslo cronies who have benefited materially from their people's misery? ... A leader must lead the resistance, reflect the realities on the ground, respond to his people's needs, plan, think, and expose himself to the same dangers and difficulties that everyone experiences.¹¹⁰

Said reminds us to not cast about to find those at fault, but rather to remember the victims, "pity not the inept Arab governments who can and will do nothing to stop Israel: pity the people who bear the wounds in their flesh and the emaciated bodies of their children, some of whom believe that martyrdom is the only way out for them,"¹¹¹ which augers for a continuation of violence in the face of intractable Israeli demands encapsulated by the memory of Ariel Sharon's visit to *Haram al-Sharif*

after which "Israel was condemned ... by a unanimous Security Council resolution."¹¹² Seeing the Al-Aqsa Intifada, and especially the Israeli response to it, Said asks of the continued occupation: "If this was supposed to fulfil Jewish aspirations, why did it require so many new victims from another people who had nothing to do with Jewish exile and persecution in the first place?"¹¹³

EPILOGUE: Sharon's Bloody Spring

The ongoing Palestinian uprising, and the ever increasing Israeli repressive measures, from August 2001 until the end of March 2002, have been one of the most bloody and tragic periods in the history of the Palestinian Arabs. The powerful Israeli military and police forces, and the well established and modern Israeli state apparatus have confronted the disorganised and largely traditional Palestinian population, which has been either completely unarmed or at the most, limited to light and/or home-made weapons. As one conservative commentator has indicated,

Israel has maintained military superiority throughout nearly a year and a half of conflict because of its own technological advantages and the limited military capabilities of the Palestinians. Since the outbreak of the Intifada, the Palestinian war-fighting tactics have consisted largely of sniper or mortar fire on Israeli settlements, suicide bombing and rock throwing.¹¹⁴

Israel has enjoyed unflinching U.S. support "for economic, security and advanced technology and military assistance."¹¹⁵ In contrast, the Palestinians have been left with nothing but rhetorical international support, and even "without external assistance from Arab governments."¹¹⁶ According to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, between 29 September 2000 and 27 February 2002, 1029 Palestinians have been killed and 17,664 have been critically wounded. In addition, as the Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported, no less than 20 percent of those killed were "completely innocent" and took no part in clashes with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), with as many as 10 percent being below 16 years of age.¹¹⁷ Material Palestinian losses have been estimated in the billions of dollars, in addition to the destruction of developmental projects funded by the European Union estimated at €17.29m (£10.5m) or in excess of \$15 million U.S. dollars.¹¹⁸ Considering the small size and structural weakness of the Palestinian economy, the damage has been devastating, forcing the majority of Palestinians deeper into a life of poverty and despair. The inhabitants of the refugee camps are now largely without employment, and are left to survive on less than \$2 U.S. per day.¹¹⁹ Israeli casualties have been much lower, 288 during the same period, and they have generally resulted in pro-Israeli sympathies and condemnations of the Palestinian actions from American and European opinion leaders. Economic disruption, resulting from the Al-Aqsa Intifada in the Israeli

economy, though undoubtedly real,¹²⁰ is nevertheless minimal in proportion to the devastation of Palestinian development. Israeli government policies have seen the assassination of Palestinian activists, frequent destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure, indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and the persistent blockade of Palestinian Arabs within the occupied territories. Such policies have proven successful in undermining the Palestinian leadership, and in dismantling the already tenuous fabric of Palestinian society.¹²¹

Since being elected Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon has been quite conscious that the effect of his policies would be the destruction of the so-called "peace process" and the prevention of the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.¹²² According to Israeli journalist Alex Fishman, Sharon has long subscribed to the rightist Israeli argument that the Oslo Accords were "the worst misfortune to ever befall Israel" and that "all steps must thus be taken to destroy them."¹²³ As a way to achieve that, Sharon has regularly goaded the Palestinians into committing terrorist acts in order to justify the heavy Israeli military repression and punitive actions, and [thereby] to isolate Arafat both at home and the court of international opinion. After the destruction of the PLO and PNA, Israel would then be free to negotiate separately with the Palestinian forces governing each isolated enclave, with Palestinian officials, security forces, information services, and even the Tanzin (the armed wing of Fatah), in order to make them an instrument of its policy.¹²⁴ Fishman asserts that "now that Sharon has caught his prey, he won't let it escape easily."¹²⁵

Israel set pre-conditions of a seven day period of absolute calm from the Palestinian side before any negotiations might be restarted, meanwhile allowing for continued "targeted killing" of the Palestinian activists, closures and other repressions by the Israelis continued. Such a policy has been widely recognised as "unrealistic" by European diplomats and many American experts, and seen as a impediment to discussions rather than a policy goal of the Israeli government. On 30 January 2002, in a meeting with top Palestinian leaders Abu Ala, Abu Mazen and Mohammed Rashid, Sharon demanded that the PNA "dismantle terrorist organisations, collect the terrorist weapons and give them to the Americans, arrest wanted terrorists, prevent terrorist attacks and end its incitement against Israel."¹²⁶ The Palestinian leaders responded that they could not make arrests without reciprocal Israeli "gestures".¹²⁷

Saudi proposals in February 2002, offering full Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for its withdrawal from all lands occupied during the 1967 War, was met with "Operation Colourful Journey"; a major assault on two West Bank refugee camps: Balata near Nablus and Jenin.¹²⁸ Two Israeli soldiers and thirty Palestinians

and were killed, and hundreds of others wounded,¹²⁹ as tensions were exacerbated throughout the region. Speaking in New York at the end of February 2002, Saudi UN ambassador Fawji bin Abdal Majeed Shakabsi made only one fleeting reference to the peace initiative, while accusing Israel of "systematic terrorism" against the Palestinians, saying that its objective "was and [still] remains to expel the Arab people from Palestine and to occupy more Palestinian territory in order to set up an exclusive state."¹³⁰ On 24 February 2002 the Israeli cabinet permitted Yasir Arafat, who had been under virtual house arrest in Ramallah at his headquarters, which had been surrounded by Israeli tanks, to leave. However, they upheld their previous ban on leaving the town's municipal borders. Israeli opposition leader Yassi Sarid noted that the Israeli government "is not really interested in calm."¹³¹ In the view of the well known Israeli journalist Uzi Benziman:

If, from a Saudi perspective, the proposal might be likened to an egg that has yet to hatch, on the Israeli side, the egg is already hard boiled. A government that threatens to come apart over a debate on lifting the travel restrictions on Arafat is not capable of dealing with a proposal for a complete withdrawal from the territories, even if it means peace with the entire Arab world.¹³²

Although Sharon has repeatedly stated he wished to return to the peace process, he has rejected any proposed alternative to end the violence short of Palestinian capitulation. As a distinguished British observer of the Middle East notes:

It was never a secret that he [Sharon] was always opposed to the Oslo accord and the historic compromise it involves a Palestinian state on 22 percent of [mandate] Palestine. From the outset this was his way to destroy any idea of Palestinian self-determination on any portion of Palestinian land, and any legitimate institution to bring it about.¹³³

Sharon's government has proved unwilling to make any territorial concessions to the Palestinians, and is unable to offer them any viable vision of a common future. In August 2001, one American analyst argued that "Israel is unlikely to consider peace talks any time soon. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is positioned to continue his strategy of targeted assassinations, while not risking the ire of the U.S. or triggering a larger regional war."¹³⁴

The Al-Aqsa Intifada that erupted in September 2000 has made visible, and much more acute, two important divisions within Palestinian politics and society. The first is a division between the old and young guard within the nationalist movement.

Indeed, this was one of the main causes of the outbreak of the uprising.¹³⁵ The second is a division between the nationalists and Islamists (such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad) and which creates a long-term challenge to Arafat's ability to remain in power.¹³⁶ However, from the present Israeli government's point of view, these differences "almost did not matter: Sharon wanted very simply to have no negotiating partner recognised at home or internationally, so that he would no longer have to negotiate."¹³⁷ Concerning any future arrangements, his Internal Security Minister Uzi Landau stated: "We'll see about peace plans later What's sure is we will never accept the existence of a Palestinian state. It would be a catastrophe."¹³⁸

From both Arafat's and the PNA's perspective, the existing turmoil and its dangers appear the middle ground between two unpalatable alternatives. Neither the institutionalisation of the occupation via negotiations, thereby rewarding thirty-five years of Israeli aggression, nor a second Nakbah forcing Palestinians to retreat before an Israeli military onslaught to neighbouring Arab states would be acceptable to any Palestinian leadership. However, a return to the bargaining table, negotiations, and the hope they provide, no matter how tenuous and unstable such arrangements may prove to be, is seen to be not only the path to a peaceful resolution, but also central to the Arafat regime's survival. When Arafat's efforts apparently did not bring the expected results, both Arafat and his lieutenants have on several occasions directly addressed the Israeli people, stressing their peaceful intentions and asking for mutual recognition and coexistence. An article written by Arafat was published in the op-end page of the *New York Times* on 3 February 2002, condemning all forms of terrorism and all attempting to assure the Israelis that the Palestinian 'right of return' would not disturb the existing demographic balance in the country.

A few days earlier on 31 January 2002, the head of the PNA's Preventive Security apparatus in the Gaza Strip, Mohammed Dahlan wrote in *Haaretz* that:

Our clear message to the Israeli people is that: We wish to live in our state, based on the borders of June 4, 1967, alongside the State of Israel, and not in its place or at its expense. We are interested in a just and reasonable solution to the problem of the refugees. We want true stability and life in an atmosphere of complete peace and security. We want you to live securely alongside the Palestinian nation, without fears or concerns. We want you to be our partners in life in this land.

A 2002 Nakbah?

The events of April 2002 and its aftermath leave the Palestinians in a grim situation. Israeli military forces swept Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps in a 'war on terrorist infrastructure' that tormented Palestinian people and society. These military actions destroyed what civil infrastructure had been developed since the implementation of the Oslo Accords. Arafat and the Palestinian position is at its weakest since the PLO was forced to evacuate Lebanon in 1982.¹³⁹ PNA institutions and infrastructure have been paralysed or destroyed, and the Palestinian people live under an Israeli siege with continuous bombardment. Equally dangerous is the sharp crisis in relations with the U.S.¹⁴⁰

President G.W. Bush, on 2 October 2001, and Secretary of State Powell, on 19 November 2001 both spoke about an American 'vision' of a "viable Palestinian state" neighbouring Israel, and called on Israel to restrain its repression and end the occupation. However, beginning in December 2001, the U.S. position shifted decisively towards an almost total acceptance of all Israeli actions while the United States continued to prosecute its own 'war on terror'.¹⁴¹ Whatever the causes might be behind the American turnabout, this represents a breakdown in PNA diplomatic efforts to secure American support, efforts which extend as far back as November 1988, when Arafat and the Palestinian National Council adopted a resolution recognising the state of Israel, and denounced terrorism.¹⁴² It is now quite possible that both the PLO and the PNA institutions and efforts at state-building are doomed to failure as a result of the Israeli military onslaught begun in March 2002. Indeed, the chances of the physical survival of their leaders and activists are dubious at best with Israeli policies of 'targeted assassination' and the general anarchy of active military occupation taking its inevitable human toll.¹⁴³ However, the PLO, Fatah and the PNA do not personify or equate with the Palestinian people *in total*. Three major factors affecting their future include:

Almost all demographers, including the leading Israeli expert, Professor Arnon Soefer indicate that in 2020 Palestinians will be in the majority within the geographical boundaries of Sharon's "Greater Israel"; and will represent 32 percent of the population within Israel's 1967 boundaries.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, as many Israeli observers, including Shimon Peres, have pointed out, the rapid creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel is a necessary pre-condition for Israel's survival and the preservation of its Zionist character.¹⁴⁵

Despite all its efforts, the Israeli government has been unable to put the uprising down and to control the Palestinian population. "As long as Israel's policy of assassination and punishment continues, the entire armies of the U.S. and Russia

could not stop the suicide attackers," one of the heads of the Palestinian security establishment recently told an Israeli visitor in Ramallah.¹⁴⁶

Further, Israeli public support of Sharon's government and its policies was beginning to wane by February 2002. An opinion poll conducted by the influential Israeli daily, *Maariv* showed that for the first time since Sharon's landslide electoral victory, a majority of the Israeli population (53 percent) were dissatisfied with his performance as leader, indicating a polarisation of the Israeli electorate between those calling for withdrawal and peace, and those calling for harsher measures and the punishment of the Palestinians.¹⁴⁷ According to *Maariv*'s commentary: "Ariel Sharon's strategy is collapsing.... At this stage, as difficult as it may be to say so openly, the Palestinians are losing the battles to a superior force, but Israel is losing the war."¹⁴⁸ The Israeli peace movement is regaining its visibility and although political change within Israeli society still seems quite remote, there are some signs of a new political mood in the country.¹⁴⁹ On 10 May 2002 a peace rally in Tel Aviv drew 50,000 demonstrators demanding peace.

As things appear now, despite all their hardships and losses the Palestinians still have a fair chance to survive as a national entity within the confines of historical Palestine, but the exact nature of their future is as yet unpredictable.¹⁵¹ The failures of Arafat, as the leader first of the PLO and then the PNA, have prevented the development of political ground on which to pursue a clear program for the self-determination of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, Arafat's use of corruption, violence and torture against political dissent and in response to Palestinian resistance against the occupation, have detrimentally affected Palestinian state building. The continuation of Israeli occupation has served as grounds for the PNA legitimisation of oppressive measures against the Palestinians themselves, the narrow political focus, and the militarisation of many Arab regimes. As a consequence, the Palestinian plight has radicalised the entire region in successive waves, beginning with the original Nakbah in 1948, and the Arab military response to this, through the 1967 Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights, the birth of the PLO, then to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the crushing exile of Arafat and the PLO in 1982 which in Lebanon led to the rise of Hizbollah.

Another event which radicalised the Middle East was the 1990 US imposition of military bases in the Arabian Peninsula to prosecute the second Gulf War and its legacy of draconian economic sanctions which have devastated the Iraqi people, paving the way for the rise of Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network al-Quaida, and finally to the horror of the spring of 2002 and Israeli military attacks on the Palestinian self-controlled areas of the West Bank in response to Sharon's self

identified 'infrastructure of terror' that left the Palestinian people again at the mercy of the Israeli military. This fifty-two year cycle of action and reaction has led to the radicalisation of Arab political actors and the marginalisation of civil society within the entire region as militarism and rejectionist positions now dominate. The Israeli government of Ariel Sharon clearly has no political program or desire to negotiate peace with the Palestinian people, regardless of who populates the Palestinian leadership. As Joseph Alpher points out, Sharon is committed to a purely military solution to the political impasse. Sharon's military campaign, and isolation of Arafat, has only enhanced Arafat's position both within the Palestinian movement, as well as internationally. His past political blunders are forgotten as Palestinians rally around the symbol of secular nationalism he has successfully projected himself as for four decades. Sympathy with his hardship at being incarcerated by Israeli forces is equated with Palestinian suffering, and his position thereby guarantees him a place at the negotiating table while Palestinian leaders less visible to the international media suffer death and imprisonment at the hands of the Israeli government.

Using as a pretext the Palestinian suicide-bomber attack at the beginning of the Jewish Passover in Netanya on March 29, Israel invaded Ramallah as well as the rest of the Palestinian controlled areas in 'Zone A' in what was called "Operation Protective Wall". Disregarding the calls by the PA leadership condemning the attacks and bid for an unconditional truce, Israeli soldiers overran and destroyed the Arafat compound in Ramallah including the Palestinian Preventive Security Forces, which had been largely co-operative with the Israeli security forces since 1994. Thousands of Palestinian prisoners were taken by advancing Israeli forces, as rules of humane treatment of combatants and civilian alike were ignored by the Israeli forces in the wanton destruction of Palestinian society. Hundreds were killed in stiff house-to-house fighting between the IDF and Palestinian guerrillas and irregular forces, especially in Ramallah, Bethlehem and the Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin. The Israeli forces declared much of the West Bank to be 'closed areas', off limits to international human rights organisations, humanitarian NGOs, media, and even high-ranking diplomatic delegations such as that of Spanish Foreign Minister Joseph Pique and Javier Salina, Secretary General & High Representative of the European Union, on 4 April 2002.

International pressure mounted, as calls came denouncing Israeli actions and pleading for an end to the hostilities, even from such staunch Israeli allies as Turkey's Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit who described the Israeli actions as "a genocide ... before the eyes of the world."¹⁵² Initially the attacks against Palestinian homes and civilian areas were approved by the Bush administration as an expression

of Israel's legitimate right to self defense; however, as the Israeli punitive aggression spread throughout the territories international calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces steadily grew to the point where even the Bush administration was pleading for restraint, withdrawal, and an end to the massacre of the Palestinians. United Nations Security Council resolution 1402 (30 March 2002) calling for complete Israeli withdrawal was ignored by the Israeli government. Efforts to investigate alleged massacres in the Jenin refugee camp were stalled by Israeli demands for 'impartiality' on the part of the United Nations, by its insistence to hold some veto over the membership of the 'fact finding' team sent by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and by its desire for assurances that information collected would not be used in attempts to criminally prosecute Israelis at the International Criminal Court that was set to begin hearing cases in July 2002. In spite of Security Council resolution 1405 (19 April 2002), which supported the Secretary General's initiative to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Jenin, the rebuff of the Israeli government forced the hand of the Secretary General and he withdrew the mission on May 3.

In lieu of the horrific events unfolding in the spring of 2002 conclusions would appear premature amid the fluid situation; however, all past studies must now be reconceptualised as well. Several observations may be postulated. First, the reality of Israel's "Operation Protective Wall" has not been the destruction of terrorism or any 'terrorist infrastructure' so much as the wanton destruction of the Palestinian security and governmental apparatus developed following the Oslo process, and more importantly the Israeli destruction of civilian infrastructure such as housing, markets, hospitals, communications, and all symbols of a Palestinian identity has removed what little legitimacy the PA had developed. Second, the Oslo Agreements and the 'peace process' itself have become irrelevant to the vast majority of the Palestinian population as the Israeli authorities cannot be trusted to withdraw, or halt settlement growth, or even live peaceably next to Palestinian society. As the Palestinian writer Muna Hamzeh reminds us, the first Palestinian Intifada was achieving considerable gains on the ground, and in global public opinion, until Arafat and his exiled leadership agreed to return and cooperate with the Israeli government in exchange for vague and unbinding promises of future settlement. The Oslo Agreement is now seen by the majority of Palestinians as a marriage of convenience between an Israeli Labour government desperate for international acceptance and unable to control the Palestinian population living under occupation, and the corrupt PLO bureaucracy which had become increasingly irrelevant in Tunis especially following the Gulf War and first Intifada. Prior to the outbreak of the second Intifada the PNA had been steadily losing support to a new generation of radical yet sophisticated leaders, who had questioned PNA cooperation with the Israeli security apparatus and the CIA. The PLO establishment, as rulers

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of the West Bank and Gaza, with Israeli and US support was more a vehicle to personal enrichment than the achievement of Palestinian national aspirations. Third, the impotence of the Arab regimes, Russia and to a large measure the European Union, in terms of affecting political outcomes in the Middle East, has now been clearly exposed. The rejection of EU peace envoys, ineffectual and ignored resolutions by the UN, and the shifting of the debate between the Israeli and US heads of state and domestic US political actors has removed any such leverage historically available to the Palestinians.

The United States support of Israel – and of Israeli interpretations, assumptions and visions - have never been greater. In May 2002 members of the US Congress asserted their solidarity with Israel. With strong support from two influential political constituencies, Jewish Democrats and Christian conservatives, both the House and the Senate passed resolutions in support of Israel. Stating that the United States and Israel were in a “common struggle against terrorism” the resolutions of solidarity for the Israeli government passed by votes of 352-21 with 29 abstentions in Congress and 94-2 in the Senate. While both resolutions were nonbinding, they put the legislative branch of the United States government on record as backing the military actions of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The Senate resolution called on the Palestinian Authority to act against terrorism, while the stronger measure in the Congress stated that the actions of Yasir Arafat, “are not those of a viable partner for peace.” While twenty-nine Congressmen voted ‘present’ as a protest that the resolution was too tilted toward Israel, the resolutions stand as barriers to US impartiality in the any future peace process. Indeed, on the eve of the vote, Congressional majority leader, Dick Armey of Texas, endorsed a position flatly at odds with the precepts of the Oslo peace process. “I’m content to have Israel grab the entire West Bank.... I happen to believe that the Palestinians should leave.” Calls by NGOs and human rights groups expressing concern with Armey’s apparent support for the forced expulsion of Palestinians from their land, acts which amounted to ethnic cleansing, Armey attempted clarify his position by stating that “Palestinians who supported terrorism should be exiled.”¹⁵³ Indeed, an end to the Israeli siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in April-May 2002 - where a group of Palestinian resisters to Israeli military incursions into their city took refuge for 39 days – was brokered by the European Union and resulted in the exile to Europe of 13 of the Palestinians holed up in the Church. This was the first time in the history of the PNA that expulsion from Palestine was accepted as a tool of mediation to pacify the threat of an Israeli military action. Although expulsion of people from their land represents a gross violation of human rights and international law, it was nevertheless brokered by the international community and in effect

represents a legitimization of expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine.

The April 2002 Israeli onslaught against the vestiges of a post-Oslo Palestinian entity clearly exposed the failure of Arafat's policies. The cronyism, corruption and human rights abuses in Arafat's PNA, along with Arafat's subordination to Israeli policy in the aftermath of its Spring 2002 onslaught against the West Bank, have left Arafat as an impotent political leader of a failed vision. Furthermore, the capitulation of Arab leaders at the Sharm al-Sheikh mini-summit of May 10, 2002 – attended by Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia - to what in essence represented an acceptance of a definition of terrorism that encompassed Palestinian resistance represents another dimension of Arafat's failed policies. The horrors endured by the Palestinian people during the Israeli repression of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in fact have given birth to a new generation of Palestinian leadership hardened in the crucible of the current uprising that has cost dearly, merely to return to a point-of-departure, not unlike that of the situation in 1948. Facing overwhelming Israeli military might and an unreliable international community and Arab states seemingly incapable of supporting the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, this generation of Palestinian leaders has evidenced a level of self reliance and determination that stands courageously in the face of Israeli aggression and violence. Suicide bombers and guerrilla tactics adopted from Hizbollah in Lebanon are now identified as liberation tactics capable of challenging a vastly superior Israeli occupation force. The anvil of Israeli occupation has left the Palestinian people with only two choices – capitulation or bloodshed. Suicide bombing in this context is an act of war in a campaign waged against occupation.

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NOTES

1. Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Demographic Transformation of Palestine," in Abu-Lughod (ed.), *The Transformation of Palestine*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 140. The Jewish population of Palestine included both indigenous Sephardic (Oriental) Jews, and Ashkenazi (European) Jews. The latter were largely made up of members of pious religious communities in Palestine supported by funds from the diaspora. See also, Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism Before World War I*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 29.
 2. Elia T. Zureik, *Palestinians in Israel*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 32.
 3. Abu-Lughod, "The Demographic Transformation of Palestine," p. 141. see also Zureik, *Palestinians in Israel*, p. 33.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 5. "The Balfour Declaration" in John Norton Moore (ed.), *The Arab-Israeli Conflict Vol. III. Documents*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 32.
 6. "A Churchill White Paper" in John Norton Moore (ed.), *The Arab-Israeli Conflict Vol. III. Documents*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 67.
 7. The Hope-Simpson Report (1930) found that Arab unemployment "not only exists but is serious and widespread." It also found that "the Arab population has increased with great rapidity and the land available for its sustenance has meanwhile decreased by about a million metri dunums which have passed into the hands of the Jews," and that as a result there was "no margin of land available for agricultural settlement." See HMSO, "Palestine: Report on Immigration, Land Settlement and Development" (Hope-Simpson Report) Cmd. 3686 (October 1930).
 8. Abu-Lughod, "The Demographic Transformation of Palestine," pp. 142-143.
 9. For a detailed discussion of this, see Dan Tschirgi, *The Politics of Indecision: Origins and Implications of American Involvement with the Palestine Problem*. (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp. 1-17.
 10. HMSO, *Palestine*, pp. 139-141.
 11. Tschirgi, *The Politics of Indecision*, pp. 10-11.
 12. Jewish immigration rapidly grew between 1931 and 1935:

1931	4,075
1932	12,553
1933	37,337
1934	45,267
1935	66,472
- See: Abu-Lughod, "The Demographic Transformation of Palestine," pp. 150-153. and Porath, *Palestinian Arab Nationalist Movement*. Vol. 11, p. 39.
13. In particular, the number of Jewish police (including supernumeraries) was increased by over 3,000. See Barbara Kalkas, "The Revolt of 1936: A Chronicle of Events," in Janet Abu-Lughod, *The Transformation of Palestine*, pp. 263-264.
 14. Nicholas Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle*. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979), p. 83.
 15. Tschirgi, *The Politics of Indecision*, chapter 2.
 16. David Ben-Gurion, "Britain's Contribution to Arming the Hagana," in Walid Khalidi (ed.), *From Haven to Conquest*. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyah, 1971), pp. 371-374.

17. Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel*, p. 56-64.
18. Hagannah: 40,000 static forces (settlers, townfolk); 16,000 field army (Jewish Settlement Police); 2,000-6,000 full-time forces (Palmach); Irgun Zvai Leumi 3,000-5,000; Stern Gang/LEHI 200-300.
19. Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle*, p. 297.
20. David Ben Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*. (Tel Aviv: Sabra Books, 1972), p. 61.
21. "Report of Sub-Committee 2 to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question." UN Doc. A/Ac 14/32 (11 November 1947).
22. Much of their equipment was supplied by Czechoslovakia. See Arnold Krammer, "Arms for Independence: When the Soviet Bloc Supported Israel," in Walid Khalidi (ed.), *From Haven to Conquest: readings in Zionism and the Palestine problem until 1948*. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dir as at al-Filas t in iyah, 1971), pp. 745-754 and pp. 861-863.
23. Hanna Sinora, "How the Palestinians Became Refugees: Denial of Basic Human Rights." *First United Nations Seminar on the Question of Palestine*. (New York: UN, 1980), p. 59.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Fuad Jabber, "The Palestinian Resistance and Inter-Arab Politics," in William B. Quandt, Fuad Jabber & Ann Mosely Lesch (eds.), *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), p. 172.
26. Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969-1994*. (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 16-17.
27. For a complete account of the clash of Palestinian nationalism with Arab conservative regimes, see Dan Tschirgi, *The American Search for Mideast Peace*. (New York: Praeger, 1989).
28. Avi Shlaim, "Prelude to the Accord," *Journal of Palestine Studies*. (Winter 1994), p. 18.
29. Meron Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemy: Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 214.
30. Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 176.
31. Amos Oz in an interview with the *BBC World Service* (September 14, 1993).
32. Thomas Baylis, *How Israel Was Won: A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), p. 266.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Meron Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemy: Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 216.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
37. Amnesty International, *Israel/Occupied Territories and the Palestinian Authority: Five Years After the Oslo Agreement – Human Rights Sacrificed for 'Security.'* MDE 02/04/98 (9 September 1998), p. 15 of 26.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 16 of 26.
39. Human Rights Watch, "Palestinian Arrests Condemned," Press Release, New York, December 2, 1999.
40. Amnesty International, *Palestinian Authority Defying the Rule of Law: Political*

Detainees. (April, 1999), p. 3 of 13; MDE 21/03/99.

41. *Ibid*, pp. 7-8 of 13.

42. Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2000: Palestinian Authority*.

43. See: "Palestinian Authority: Silencing dissent," [MDE 21/016/2000], (5 September 2000); "Palestinian Authority: Defying the Rule of Law: Political Detainees Held Without Charge or Trial," [MDE 21/003/1999], (21 April 1999); and, "Five Years After the Oslo Agreement: Human Rights Sacrificed For 'Security'," [MDE 02/004/1998], (01 September 1998).

44. *Guardian Weekly*. (London) 11 June 1996, p. 5.

45. *Ibid*.

46. *Ibid*.

47. *Ibid*.

48. *Ibid*.

49. *Ibid*.

50. Amnesty International, "Palestinian Authority," *Annual Report 2001*.

[<http://web.amnesty.org>], (London, UK: Amnesty International, 2001), covering events from January to December 2000.

51. *Guardian Weekly* (27 April 1997), p. 8.

52. *Ibid*.

53. *Guardian Weekly* (30 August 1998).

54. "Panel Criticizes Extent of Arafat's Power." *The New York Times*. (29 June 1999), p. A3.

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