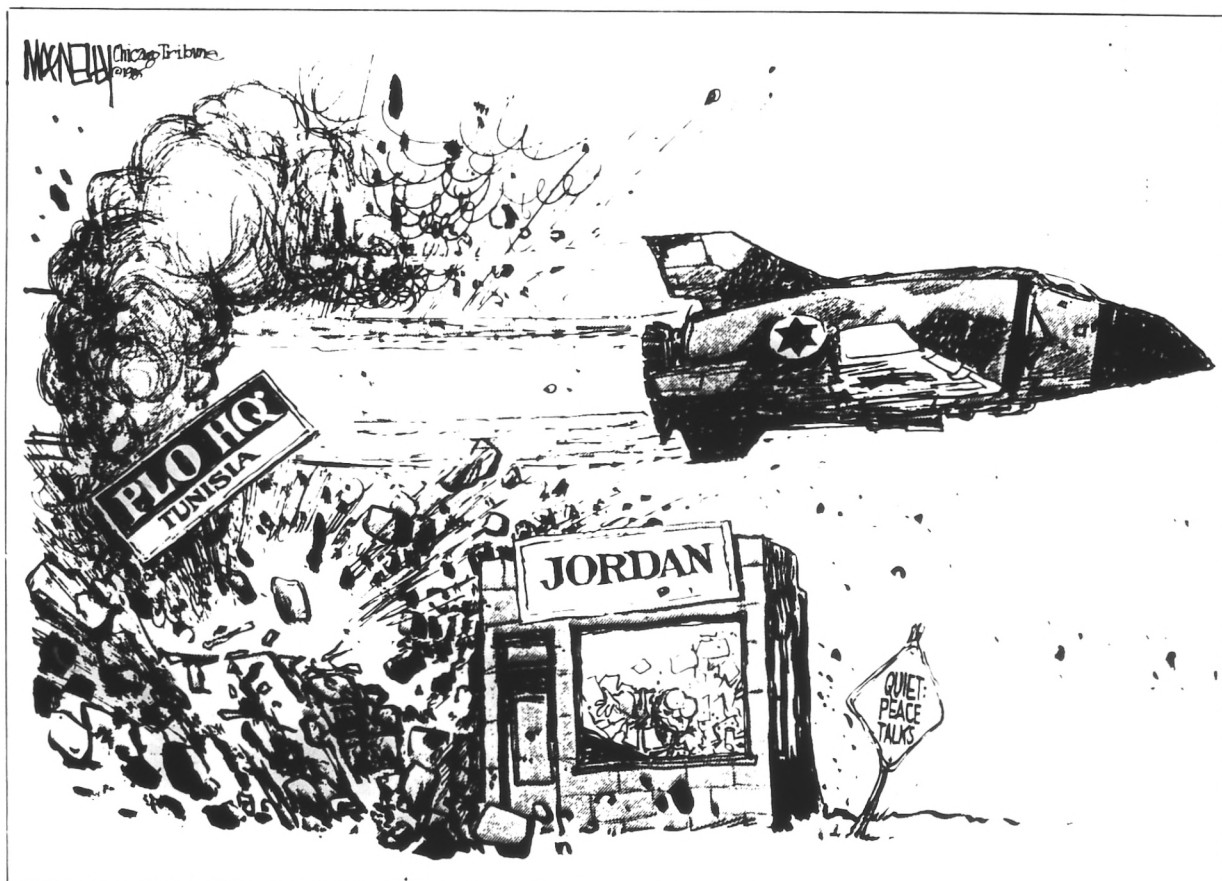


free palestine

October/November 1985



Washington's licence to kill Tunis raid: Peace process was Israel's target

EIGHT American-made jet fighters of the Israeli air force swept in over Tunis on 1 October, and launched a bombing raid on the PLO Headquarters in the Tunisian capital, leaving 75 dead and 120 wounded. Washington's immediate response was to portray the Israeli attack as 'legitimate', although other countries, including Britain, condemned the raid.

A PLO spokesman later confirmed that amongst those killed were two members of the General Staff of the Palestine Revolution Force, Lt-Col Shahiri and Lt-Col Nur, as well as Bassam Shahur, Director of the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, and Ali al-Zi'baq

from the Command of the Special Forces.

The raid came as Arab leaders were in the midst of further efforts to give momentum to the peace initiative based on the Jordanian-Palestinian proposals. King Hussein had earlier addressed the UN General Assembly to urge an international peace conference to secure a settlement with Israel, and had visited Washington to seek President Reagan's support. In London, the Foreign Secretary was preparing to receive an October visit by two members of the PLO Executive who had been invited by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for talks at the Foreign Office.

Israel linked the attack to the murder

of three Israelis in Larnaca in late September. It had earlier accused Force 17, a Fatah security group known to be responsible for PLO leader Yasser Arafat's personal security, with planning and executing the Larnaca operation.

The Tunis raid has raised a number of questions concerning the Larnaca incident and American and NATO involvement in the Tunis operation.

The PLO has denied that Force 17 was responsible for the Larnaca operation as Israel claimed, but subsequently argued that the three Israelis killed were Israeli Secret Service (Mossad) agents operating in the Cypriot port to maintain surveillance on Palestinian guerillas be-

Arafat was target for Israeli attack

PLO LEADER Yasser Arafat has directly accused Israel of planning his assassination under the cover of a revenge attack on the PLO headquarters in Tunis for the assassination of three Mossad agents in Larnaca in late September. Speaking of the 1 October attack, Arafat said the incident had two aims: Israel's was the assassination of the PLO leader, while America's objective was 'the liquidation of the region's peace process, particularly in the light of the PLO initiative presented in the joint Jordanian-Palestinian agreement'.

Although Israel subsequently denied any plan to kill Yasser Arafat, Yossi Melman, Israeli correspondent of *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported on 12 October, 'Maj-Gen Moshe Levy, the Israeli Chief of Staff, indicated that Yasser Arafat was the target. He said Israel knew that he was expected at the time of the attack.' Defending the Palestinians' right to wage a liberation war against the Zionists, Mr Arafat recalled: 'At the UN in 1974, I said I was holding an olive branch in one hand and a rifle in the other. In 1982, our national council approved the Fez peace plan. In 1985, we were sincere when we said: Territory in return for peace. We do not fight for the sake of war but for the right of our people to live freely in an independent



Yasser Arafat inspects Tunis damage

land.'

The PLO leader insisted that the Israeli attack had involved American assistance. Concerning the military aspect of the raid, he said: 'These planes could not fly directly from their bases to the target without assistance or refuelling. I say there was co-ordination between the US Sixth Fleet and the Israeli air force. According to our information, Israel has only two Hercules planes that could help in the refuelling, and only one Boeing 707 or DC-10 plane. It is technically difficult

for Hercules planes to refuel the F-16. Therefore, only high-speed planes, which must be a Boeing 707, DC-10 or DC-9, can refuel F-16 planes.' Arafat added, 'We have information that there was co-ordination between the Israeli air force and the US fleet. Did the fleet think this was a tourist flight?'

'Sixteen planes flew over the US Sixth Fleet. Either this fleet did not know — and this this impossible — or it knew but remained silent because there was co-ordination between it and the planes,' he declared.

In a separate comment in the Larnaca and Tunis incidents, Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), of the Fatah Central Committee, strongly denied PLO involvement in the assassination of the three Israeli agents in Larnaca. He said on 4 October: 'We in the PLO have sufficient courage to announce our responsibility whenever we execute an operation against the Zionist enemy. But the PLO officially is not responsible for this operation. I would like to say that all Palestinians who are associated with the PLO, and in fact all Palestinians in the world, are assumed to be members of the PLO. Thus, one can say that the PLO was involved in the operation. As for the claim that Yasser Arafat planned this operation, this is incorrect.'

▷ lieved to be using the harbour as a base for naval raids on Israel. In London, PLO Representative Faisal Aweida said, 'We are quite certain the three were Mossad agents working in Cyprus for the Israeli Government.'

The PLO claim has been strengthened as a result of Israel's raid on Tunis. The *Daily Telegraph* on 4 October in a report from Nicosia noted that the Tunis raid 'suggests to many Western observers that the dead Israelis were something more than the innocent holiday makers Israel has so far insisted they were'.

Israel, of course, denies that the three Israelis were intelligence agents. This would give some legitimacy to their deaths while on active service — Mossad is widely acknowledged as responsible for a series of murders of PLO officials throughout the world, and PLO leaders in Beirut. If, as the Israelis claim, Palestinian guerrilla naval raids were being launched from Larnaca, it would be surprising if Mossad agents had not been despatched to the Cypriot port.

Nevertheless, the PLO insists that its forces were not involved in the Larnaca killings. As *The Economist* observed on 5 October, 'Many attacks by men described as belonging to the PLO have had nothing to do with Mr Arafat. The shooting of the Israeli ambassador to London in 1982, which gave Israel the pretext to invade Lebanon, was done by the Abu Nidal group, which is no longer

part of the PLO group, though it confusingly uses many of the same names for its units as Fatah does.'

The Times on 26 September has raised the same point. Robert Fisk reporting from Larnaca wrote: 'There was evidence last night that the gunmen belonged to a Palestinian group almost as hostile to the PLO as it is to Israel. Cypriot officials privately voiced the suspicion that the gunmen — who at one point refused to negotiate with Arafat's own PLO representative in Cyprus and ordered him to leave the harbour — may be members of Abu Nidal's Palestinian assassination squad which tried to murder the Israeli ambassador in London in 1982, and which only on Monday threatened in Damascus to kill the two PLO men invited to Britain by Mrs Thatcher.'

The Economist noted that if the Israelis were right about Force 17 being involved, then the unit was 'operating beyond its usual sphere, for Unit 17 has generally been thought to be responsible for internal security, in particular for guarding the person of Mr Arafat... it has not been known to hit Israeli targets.' Robert Fisk in *The Times* commented that if it had been Force 17 guerrillas, 'it would be difficult to imagine an act more calculated to destroy Mr Arafat's chances of opening a dialogue with the Reagan administration,

and ultimately with the Israelis themselves'.

US betrays Arab allies

Initial anger towards the United States centred on President Reagan's reaction that the raid on Tunis has been 'a legitimate response' to PLO 'terrorism'. But it later became clear that the Israeli attack on Tunis could not have taken place without the United States having some knowledge, if not direct involvement, in the operation.

As the Libyan Foreign Secretary, Dr Ali Treiki, told the UN Security Council, 'In the last few days, the Americans said one Libyan plane passed the Tunisian frontier, but they didn't see six Israeli planes.'

Yasser Arafat put the point more bluntly, saying he had 'precise information' on coordination between the US Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the Israeli F-15s. He added that the planes had refuelled at a US NATO base.

A statement issued by the US Embassy in Tunis denied the charges, but the Associated Press despatch noted, 'The statement implicitly acknowledged that the Israeli planes were detected by US military radar stations while on their 1,500 mile flight to their target.'

It appears that the Israeli aircraft refuelled twice on the outward journey, south-east of Crete and south of Malta when about 300 miles from Tunis. The post-strike refuelling was also staged on

the return flight about 400 miles out from Tunis, and possibly at a second point. As Moscow radio commented, 'Was it not possible for American radar installations densely spread along the Mediterranean coast and aboard the ships of the Sixth Fleet and the AWACS planes to notice them? They must have seen them and yet pretended not to see them. To be closer to reality, they must have assisted the Israeli aircraft and directed them to the target.'

The PLO argues that US complicity was more than simply keeping quiet, and not informing the Tunisian authorities of the impending attack. In view of the background to the incident, and the tension created by the Larnaca killings, the PLO HQ must have been an obvious target for the Israeli planes as they refuelled on the route across the Mediterranean. Or were the Americans more involved?

Mr Arafat contends that according to information on Israeli defence published by the London-based Institute of Strategic Studies, Israel does not have enough tanker aircraft to have conducted the raid without 'strategic and operational coordination' with the US. Abu Iyad has claimed that the Israeli aircraft refuelled at a NATO base in southern Europe; the Soviet Union has suggested the planes actually might have taken off from a US base or aircraft carrier.

Political factors

Both the Larnaca and Tunis incidents were designed to serve a single purpose: to shift the direction of, if not thwart the drift towards, the current Arab peace initiative.

Assuming the PLO was not behind the Larnaca operation, those responsible clearly hoped it would scuttle the current political initiatives, embarrassing Britain and perhaps provoking Mrs Thatcher to withdraw her invitation to two Palestinian leaders to visit London, and to emphasise the Israeli claim that the PLO is a terrorist organisation, rather than the political voice of the 4 million Palestinians, with no interest in a peace settlement.

It was also designed to embarrass the PLO leadership at a time when Arafat's dominant faction is seeking to convince the Palestinians of the worth of seeking a political settlement to the Palestinian conflict which will provide less than the total liberation of Palestine, and even less than an independent Palestinian state on part of Palestinian territory.

Larnaca could almost certainly have been planned and executed by Israel or its agents, since it certainly served Israeli rather than Palestinian interests.

The Tunis raid was no doubt intended to serve a number of Israeli interests, not least of which was to kill Arafat himself. Whether he was out jogging on the beach or had made last minute changes in his plans and gone to visit another part of the city minutes before the raid, it is clear that it was a freak of fortune that he survived the bombing raid. Had he

been killed, Israel would have benefited on two levels:

* Firstly, Mr Arafat is the undisputed leader of the Palestinians, who like any other nation embrace differing and conflicting views on how the Palestinians can face the Zionist challenge. No other Palestinian has the charisma and power to hold the factions together. It would have enhanced Israel's claim that the PLO does not represent the Palestinian people, and might temporarily, at least, have removed the PLO from the political equation.

* Secondly, if Arafat had been killed, it would almost certainly have provoked a massive retaliation from the Palestinians, from attacks on Israeli and Zionist personnel around the world, to an upsurge in Palestinian resistance inside the occupied territories. Any peace process would have been impossible to pursue.

The events have also highlighted, once again, American policy in the region and its contradictions, especially towards its Arab allies — foremost of which are Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Not all Israelis were impressed or sympathetic to the Tunis raid, and within the US not all Americans were in accord with President Reagan's hawkish response — with Secretary of State

George Shultz perhaps the most embarrassed.

As *Washington Post* columnist Philip Geyelin observed, 'The lesson writ large in the Tunisian bombing says less about the lawlessness of the way Israel looks to its national security than it says about the mindlessness of the way the United States tends to its own interests in the Middle East.' Israel was looking to the White House 'for renewal of its licence to practise "self-defence" outside the bounds of international law,' he wrote, and with Reagan's comments granting 'legitimacy' to the Israeli violation of Tunisian sovereignty, 'you could almost hear them smile'.

Noting that King Hussein had just completed a visit to Washington to urge US support for the Palestinian-Jordanian formula, Geyelin observed, 'Meanwhile, Israel had already set out to assassinate Yasser Arafat.'

He warned, 'The best-intentioned efforts to promote a Middle East peace process are of no account for as long as the United States allows itself to be jerked around by its closest Middle East ally. This is not new with the Reagan administration. What may be new is that the administration may not be conscious of the crippling contradictions of its approach.'

CONFLICT STUDIES

Jordan seen as next target

THE PROSPECT of increased international support for King Hussein's peace initiative, and wider international support for PLO involvement in the process, is causing considerable alarm in Israel. The raid on the PLO HQ in Tunis shows Israel has chosen the military option in a desperate attempt to scuttle the initiative. The US response to the Tunis attack has strengthened calls for a 'pre-emptive attack' on Jordan.

TO SAY that Israel is 'concerned' about the prospect of the PLO becoming recognised as a party to the Middle East peace process would be an understatement. The invitation for two PLO Executive members to visit London stunned the Zionists, and even though the meeting was cancelled at the last minute, under extreme pressure from Washington and the Zionist lobby, it brought the realisation that the PLO remains a major force in Middle East politics. Within Israel itself, an increasing — albeit small — number of Israelis now speak openly of the need to talk with the PLO, and a larger number accept this is inevitable if any form of peace settlement is to emerge.

These developments are causing concern for the Zionist establishment, especially the hawks in the military.

On the political level, responses have included an amendment to Israel's basic law, approved in late July, which bars from Knesset (parliamentary) elections any party which denies, explicitly or implicitly, the existence of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. It would effectively disqualify any political force seeking a dialogue with the PLO from contesting national elections.

Having dealt with the internal drift towards the inevitable, Israel also faces the movement on the international scene towards accepting a Palestinian dimension to any settlement. Not for the first time, the military option is seen by the Zionists as the most effective and dramatic recourse to scuttling the current peace process in which Jordan and King Hussein are centre stage, as the raid on Tunisia has served to emphasise.

Moves towards presenting Jordan as a military threat to Israel's occupation of Arab territory (or as Zionist propaganda presents it, a threat to the existence of the Jewish state) had already begun before the Tunis attack.

A 'senior defence source' was cited on Israel radio on 2 August for a report that Jordan was allowing 'the terrorists to regroup within its borders', and which said PLO forces from the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon had been moved to new bases

□ Continued on page 5

Security Council votes on Tunis attack

THE UN Security Council on 6 October condemned 'vigorously the act of armed aggression perpetrated by Israel against Tunisian territory in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and norms of conduct'.

Four permanent members of the Security Council, Britain, China, France and the USSR, voted for the resolution, along with Australia, Burkina Faso (Upper Volta), Denmark, Egypt, India, Madagascar, Peru, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Ukraine.

The United States angered Israel by abstaining; the Zionists had expected Washington to veto the resolution. However, President Reagan faced strong criticism following his initial justification of the Israeli raid, in which 72 people died, as a 'legitimate response' to Palestinian 'terrorism'. It was feared that the pro-US Tunisian regime might be overthrown as angry Tunisians took to the streets to condemn the United States for its role in the attack and the President's response.

According to *The New York Times*, the US 'moved privately' to explain its position to the Israelis. 'Secretary of State George Shultz telephoned Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir to assure him that the United States remained committed to strong action against terrorists. He also told Mr Shamir the United States agreed that the Israeli attack on the PLO headquarters was a legitimate act of self-defence against a series of PLO-ordered terrorist attacks, Israeli and US officials said. Mr Shultz authorised the Israelis to make his comments public.'

PLO talks: Britain backs down

BRITAIN ABANDONED its short-lived peace initiative on 14 October, when it was announced that the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe had decided not to meet two members of the PLO Executive, Mohamed Milhem and Bishop Ilya Khouri. Although the Foreign Office blamed the break-down of the talks on Mohamed Milhem's refusal sign a statement recognising Israel's right to exist, this was seen as a pretext for the UK to fall into line with Washington. The White House was reported

to have put extreme pressure on Britain to cancel the talks, and Liberal leader David Steel accused Prime Minister Thatcher of 'dancing to President Reagan's tune'.

In the wake of Israel's attempt to assassinate Yasser Arafat, in the 1 October air raid on the PLO's headquarters in Tunis, and Washington's endorsement of the attack coupled with the subsequent US hijacking of an Egyptian airliner, the PLO is reported to be reviewing its strategy.

Publisher shot after Syrian coup report

A PALESTINIAN publisher, Michel Numari, was assassinated in Athens on 18 September, as his radical Arabic-language journal published details of a alleged coup attempt against the Syrian leader Hafez al Assad. The report said 21 Syrian Air Force officers had been executed and 300 Palestinians arrested in the wake of the abortive coup. Mr Numari has been described as a close friend of the PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

The incident is seen as a continuation of the bitter rivalry between the Syrian regime and Palestinians loyal to the PLO leader Yasser Arafat, which in recent months has involved Syrian-back forces in Lebanon launching renewed bloodshed against the Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps in Beirut, and a Syrian-backed offensive against the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. The arrest of two Arab gunmen in London in early October has raised speculation that they were part of a hit-squad sent to attack Palestinian targets in protest at the British government's invitation to two Palestinian personalities - Mohamed Milhem and Bishop Ilya Khouri - for talks in London.

The Athens incident bears the hallmark of Abu Nidal, the Fatah renegade often linked with the Syrian regime, although most recently Abu Nidal has been in Libya, where he held talks with Colonel Qadhafi. It was Nidal's men who shot the Israeli ambassador in London in an attempted assassination, and provided the pretext for Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

Having moved, over the years, from Baghdad to Damascus, Abu Nidal, alias Sabri al-Banna, is now believed to have established his HQ in the Libyan capital. As well as Arafat, he bitterly opposes most Palestinian leaders of any consequence. In a 21 September interview with a

Kuwaiti newspaper, he condemned Salah Khalaf, alias Abu Iyad, a Fatah leader close to Arafat, and accused PFLP leader George Habash of deviating from his normal line, while DPFLP leader Naif Hawatmeh was described as being 'an American train carrying a red flag'. He admitted he was responsible for many major incidents in Brussels, Madrid and Athens. He is also believed to have been responsible for the murder of the PLO's London Representative, Said Hammami.

However, PLO sources state that Nidal is still working for the Syrians in their attempts to undermine the PLO led by Arafat, having failed to establish the break-away Palestinian factions led by Abu Musa as the mainline PLO. The Damascus-based factions have been embarrassed by Syria's attempts, such as the Tripoli seige and the attacks on Sabra and Shatilla earlier this year, to crush Arafat loyalists within the Palestinian community.

The PLO has accused the Syrian government of 'hiding behind the mask of the so-called Abu Nidal' and of planning the assassination of Milhem and Khouri. It described mass executions and individual assassination as 'a basic foundation' of Syrian policy.

In early September, Abu Iyad accused the Syrians of conducting 'a large-scale arrest campaign' in Damascus, adding, 'Now our detainees are being tortured in Syrian jails, a torture the likes of which was not known in the Middle Ages. We are not begging for the release of our detainees from Syrian prisons because as strugglers they expected such a fate.'

'Syria believes in subservience, not in equality,' Abu Iyad declared. 'We are in favour of any relationship with Syria on an equal footing. We will remain against subservience.'

Apartheid on the beaches

ZIONIST RACIAL discrimination against Palestinian Arabs is now reported on the beaches of Palestine where, the *Jewish Chronicle* on 9 August said, 'a de facto apartheid system is being implemented against the country's large Arab minority' (sic). It reported 'Israeli Arabs' being driven off the beaches by public facilities administrators 'simply because they were Arabs'. Incidents had been reported at Tel Aviv, Netanya and the Maayan Harod pool and picnic site in the Jezreel Valley. When asked why they were being ordered to leave, they were told: 'Because you are Arabs.'

Israeli relations with Poland

ISRAEL AND Poland have agreed to exchange envoys who will represent their countries' interests until a firm decision is taken on establishing formal diplomatic ties, Israel radio reported on 5 October. The move follows a meeting at the UN between Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir and his Polish counterpart, Olaszowski, and has been linked with reports that the Soviet Union has opened a dialogue with the Israelis with a view to the possibility of restoring diplomatic relations which were broken following the June 1967 war.

Other developments on the diplomatic front include the visit to Israel on 11 October by the Costa Rican President, and reports that Honduras is to open an embassy in Tel Aviv in January 1986. Israel is reported to be training anti-Sandinista terrorist groups based in Honduras.

Israelis give military training in Philippines

DESPITE A claim by the Israeli Embassy in Manila saying that it knew nothing about reports that Israelis are training 'a private army' in the Philippines, the London-based *Jewish Chronicle* on 20 September said its enquiries 'point to the report being true'. A contingent of Israelis, headed by a retired general, is training a private army for a wealthy provincial industrialist, the paper said. According to the Manila journal *Bulletin Today*, 400 trainees are undergoing a three-month course under Israeli instruction on the remote island of Palawan, in the South China Sea. The Israelis had been seen on leave in the provincial capital of Tuguegarao.

Nuclear trigger smuggler in Israel

AN ARREST warrant has been issued for Richard Smyth, who according to an American court indictment illegally exported to Israel 15 shipments of krytons, tiny electronic devices used to trigger the mechanism of nuclear warheads. Smyth did not appear in court on 9 August, and is believed to have fled to Israel.

Israel's Tehran connection

A UNITED STATES registered DC8, number N421AJ, flew out of Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport on 18 September, and was later recorded over Nairobi before flying west towards the Ivory Coast. Details about the plane were shrouded in secrecy by the Israeli authorities, who took 48 hours to announce that the plane had emergency landing for repairs to its navigational equipment. Earlier, a spokesman for the Israel Airport Authority had refused to comment on the instructions of the Israel Defence Forces.

The plane had landed secretly in Israel on 15 September after a mysterious flight from Tabriz in northwest Iran, during which it was reported 'missing' in Turkish air space. Its designated flight path was to Malaga in Spain.

Even the ownership of the plane has caused confusion. It is registered as belonging to the US company International Airways, which in turn claimed the plane had been bought on 5 August by the Brussels-based company International Air Tours of Nigeria.

The incident has once again focused attention on reported arms links between Israel and Iran. In Kuwait, the newspaper *Al-Rai al-Alam* said the plane revealed 'an undeclared four-power alliance involving Iran, the United States, Turkey and Israel', while two of Israel's leading newspapers, *Ma'ariv* and

Yediot Aharonot, linked the affair to possible arms supplies to Iran.

In 1981, an Argentine aircraft believed to be involved in the arms flow from Israel to Iran was on a flight from Tehran to Cyprus, when it reportedly 'collided' with a Soviet interceptor over Soviet Armenia. However, it was widely believed that aircraft carrying Israeli arms to Iran had been using the route by exploiting a loop-hole in the Soviets' radar system. In 1984, the United States embarked on a move to improve relations with Iraq, and asked the Israelis to stop the arms flow to Iran, which had begun during the Shah's rule. Revolutionary Iran has consistently denied that it receives arms from Israel, but there is little doubt that an air-bridge exists between the two countries.

Reports of the latest incident were reported in the British press only by *The Times* (16 and 19 September) and *The Economist* (21 September).

UNESCO study on Jerusalem University

UNESCO is to spend \$34,500 on a feasibility study to establish the Jerusalem University for Palestine Refugees. In addition, \$120,000 will be spent on educational and cultural institutions in the 1967 occupied territories, with a further \$265,000 allocated to continue and improve

the education programme for Palestinian refugees in co-operation with UNRWA, the UN agency caring for Palestinian refugees.

Meanwhile, Olof Rydbeck has retired as Commissioner-General of UNRWA, and is succeeded this month by the Italian diplomat Giorgio Giacomelli.

UNRWA faces a year more difficult than most. Its inadequate resources have been stretched by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and inter-communal fighting in Lebanon, which has resulted in much of the services - from housing to schools - provided for the Palestinian refugee being destroyed. More than 25,000 Palestinians are reported to be in urgent need of help in Beirut alone. The current annual budget for UNRWA is \$200 million, but income is not expected to be more than \$140 million.

Israel reports three Palestinians

THREE PALESTINIANS were deported from the West Bank on 2 October on the orders of the Commander of the Central Command of the IDF. The move came after the three had exhausted all legal procedures to prevent their expulsion. It was alleged that Amin Maqbul, Bahkat Jiyusi and Walid Nazil had continued to oppose Israel's illegal occupation after having been released from Israeli jails earlier in the year.

New settlement on Golan

ISREAL RADIO reported on 3 October that a new settlement, Qadmat Zevi, had been established in the central area of Syrian occupied territory on the Golan Heights.

Army brutality censored

A PLAY about Israeli troop brutality on the West Bank has been banned by the Israeli censors, who told the management of the Haifa municipal theatre that parts of the play could damage the army, and incite violence. The censors said comparisons between Israel's West Bank occupation and Nazi rule in occupied Europe would 'outrage the Jewish public'.

IDF strengthens Golan forces

THE ISRAEL Defence Force is investing in infrastructure to be established on Syrian territory on the Golan Heights, occupied in the 1967 War. The aim is to establish an impenetrable line, according to Brig Gen Yehuda Kohen, head of the IDF Engineer Corps.

Continued from page 3

in Jordan. The claim has been denied by both Jordanian and PLO officials. Earlier on 31 July, Defence Minister Rabin warned of 'a real move of terrorist leaders' from Lebanon to Jordan, and 'a top security source' was quoted as saying that Abu Jihad, 'whose headquarters co-ordinate PLO attacks against Israel' had been transferred to Jordan. On 12 September, the Israel Defence Force's radio station reported 'attempts to smuggle arms from Jordan into the (occupied) territories', quoting 'senior security sources'.

Moreover, Jordan itself is being presented as a military threat to Israel. Current US-Jordanian arms negotiations, and Britain's September announcement of an arms deal with Jordan, are being exploited to emphasise this image.

Jordan is seeking F-16 or F-20 fighters from the United States in a package valued at \$1.5 billion, which Reuven Padhatzor, military correspondent of the influential Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* claims 'will reduce and virtually wipe out the IDF's own military options'.



Hussein with Reagan in Washington

'The introduction of advanced fighter planes and mobile ground-to-air missile batteries into Hussein's army might force Israel to respond by a preventive strike against the latter', he has warned.

Reviewing the prospect of Jordan acquiring another three squadrons of advanced fighter planes and mobile missiles, Padhatzor stated in his 4 July article,

'This means that even in the case of a war breaking out in which Jordan does not take part, we shall have no choice but to activate the IDF and especially our airforce, and strike a preventive blow against Hussein's army in order to neutralise its offensive capacity.'

The justification for such a strike would centre on the claim that PLO bases in Jordan pose a threat to Israel (ignoring, of course, the fact that if Israel were not occupying Arab territory there would be no conflict). Such a pretext is envisaged by Israeli journalist Amos Kenan. Writing in *Yediot Aharonot* on 6 September, he saw the PLO moving towards a Pax Americana based on a plan for 'territorial compromise', with Israel vetoing the name of any Palestinian put forward by Jordan, and eventually sabotaging the whole process with 'Israel's invasion of Jordan and the aerial bombardment of Amman'.

'The invasion will, of course, be described as the destruction of PLO command posts and of the Palestinian military bases on the other side of our border,' he warns, drawing a parallel with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.



1967 OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Repression and resistance

TERROR AND intimidation has become the main weapon of the Zionists in their bid to force the Palestinian population, in the territories which fell under Israeli military occupation in 1967, to leave their homeland. Openly supported by some members of the Israeli government, the Zionist militants have moved onto the offensive to counter-balance any peace moves which might – however slight the prospect – bring the military occupation to an end.

Hebron – described by the Zionists as 'a Jewish City with an Arab majority' – has been a focal point in the conflict. By early September, *The Economist* reviewed the situation and reported, 'In the past six weeks five Israelis have been killed and at least 25 injured by landmines, rifle-fire, grenades, stone or knives. In return, the Israeli government has put nearly 70 Arabs into "administrative detention", which means they can be held without trial for six months; six suspects' houses have been demolished; the Israeli government has begun to order the deportation of alleged activists of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.'

The current round of Zionist repression was fuelled by what has become known as the Afula incident in late July, portrayed in the press as the unprovoked murder of two innocent Jewish school teachers by two young Palestinians. It has been exploited by Zionist militants to terrorise Palestinian communities, and by the Israeli government to inflict an even harsher military regime in the occupied territories.

However, according to *The Times* on 3 August, 'a senior (Israeli) defence source was quoted yesterday as saying that three West Bank Arabs suspected of murdering two Israeli teachers last week had not initially planned to ambush and

□ **ILLEGAL ZIONIST settlements on the West Bank have brought Jewish militants and Palestinians face-to-face, provoking tension and unrest, violence and repression. As the Palestinians attempt to resist the seizure of their land, Zionist repression has escalated on official and vigilante levels.**

kill the couple for nationalist reasons.'

In fact, the first aggression had come from the 'teachers'. The report continued, 'The unidentified source, quoted in the Israeli press, said two of the three suspects had quite fortuitously come across the teachers, Mr Yosef Eliahu, aged 35, and Miss Les Elmakais, aged 19, on the slopes of Mt Gilboa on Sunday last week. Mr Eliahu then drew his pistol and chased them away.'

The two youths ran back to their homes in the village of Arabounah, and then returned with a third companion and a rifle, according to the senior defence source, and killed the two Israelis.

Roots of violence

The Afula incident occurred against a background of increasing intimidation and racist threats to the Palestinian community.

One notable recent incident was the move during July to sack 12 Palestinian workers employed by the Zionist-settler council at the Kiryat Arava settlement on the outskirts of Hebron. The *Jewish Chronicle* on 26 July reported the 12 workers 'are to be dismissed immediately', and added, 'Local Jewish business-

men and factory owners are to be encouraged (by the Council) to dismiss scores of Arab employees.'

The move to discriminate against the Palestinians was the latest by the openly racist Kach Party, headed by Knesset member Meir Kahane.

In addition, as in the case of Yosef Eliahu, the settlers are well-armed, often reservists in the Israeli armed forces, whose intimidation and violence against the unarmed Palestinians has long been a concern to human rights activists.

The despair amongst the West Bank Palestinians, as they face increasing repression by the Israeli military authorities, has also led to an upsurge in armed resistance, fuelled in part by the rivalry between the pro- and anti-Arafat factions of the resistance movement. Moreover, for the West Bank Palestinians, the routing of the Israelis in Lebanon by militant resistance has provided inspiration to escalate such activities in the West Bank. By mid-September, 15 Israelis had been killed this year on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian sources report six military resistance operations in the occupied territories on 8 and 9 September alone.

By actively encouraging Zionist paramilitary thugs in the guise of Jewish settlers to establish homes on the West Bank during the past 18 years of military occupation, the Israeli government has set the stage for the current confrontation. This has been further fuelled by Israel's open defiance of its obligations under international law to withdraw, or accept such obligations even as part of a peace settlement with the Arabs, which leaves the Palestinians with no clear option other than to retaliate and organise resistance.

Moreover, the return of the 'Iron Fist' strategy on the West Bank is being used by the Israeli government to deflect criticism for its withdrawal from Lebanon, and claims that the evacuation was the result of its military defeat in the face of Lebanese resistance, and for its decision to strike a deal with Palestinian resistance groups for the release earlier this year of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Military regime

As the Palestinians attempt to resist the increasing threats to their security posed by the militant Zionist settlers, the Israeli government has finally abandoned all pretence of civilian rule in the occupied territories. The harsh measures of previous years have been firmly reimposed, although the immediate effect is to strengthen Palestinian resistance despite the deprivations and punishments imposed.

On 31 July, *The Guardian* reported that the main West Bank town of Nablus had been placed under curfew by the occupation regime, following the killing of an Israeli 'working for the army'.

On 1 August, the Israeli Army used emergency laws to justify the detention of Ziad Abu Ein, who had been freed in

May when 1,150 Palestinians were released in exchange for 3 Israeli soldiers taken prisoner in Lebanon. He was accused of planning a resistance operation, and incitement against Israel's illegal military occupation.

By 5 August, the Israeli government had announced the reintroduction of deportation, and detention without trial, of Palestinians accused of 'terrorism', although it was not immediately evident that such measures had ever been suspended. On the same day, a curfew was imposed on Ein Beit Ilme, a refugee camp on the outskirts of Nablus, populated by 3,500 Palestinians, after a fire-bomb had been hurled at an Israeli police command car. At Jalzoun refugee camp, near Ramallah, stones were thrown at a bus carrying Zionist settlers to Immanuel.

By late August, expulsion orders had been served on three Palestinians accused of political agitation, and detention orders served on a further 29. The choice of the three for deportation coincides with their place of residence and the fact that in each of the three towns, Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarm, Zionist settlers had been shot in the preceding days. Had there been any firm evidence that the three men had been associated with the incidents the Israelis would certainly

have arrested them. Hence, it is only possible to conclude that the deportations were intended as crude forms of intimidation against the local population.

Early September saw an increased Israeli military presence with paratroopers drafted into the West Bank to join border police and army reservists in patrolling the West Bank. Palestinians were threatened with arrest if found without identity passes. By 9 September, Israeli soldiers had shot and wounded four Palestinian youths, including a 12-year-old boy, in Hebron.

The month ended with tension running high in Halhoul, where hundreds of settlers took to the streets chanting anti-Arab slogans. Windows of Arab homes were smashed by the mob in at least a dozen homes during an hour-long rampage, and the *Washington Post* noted that the mosque showed 'signs of heavy damage with dozens of windows smashed and the carpeted prayer area inside littered with rocks'. The incident was the latest in a sequence of events: a young Palestinian had been arrested and his home bulldozed to the ground following the stabbing of two soldiers, one fatally, earlier in the month, which provoked the ambush of a bus in which 5 Jews and two Arabs were wounded.

evidence from more than 200 Palestinians, a Citizens' Rights Movement Knesset Member Yossi Sarid and the party's secretary David Zucker, have revealed a vast system of operations which victimised Palestinian landowners, with middlemen enjoying the help and protection of top Likud aides.

According to *Newsweek* on 16 September, 'To obtain the land, the Israelis reputedly hired Arab straw men to buy property from West Bank Arabs, who are banned by Jordanian law from selling land to Jews. The Israelis then resold the plots to developers or the government, at 5 to 10 times the original price.'

'According to Sarid and Zucker, Israeli lawyers used forged powers of attorney to sell the assets of absentee Arab landowners. Hired thugs forced other Arabs to sign at gunpoint. Paid-off Israeli officials reportedly processed phony deeds in less than a week. (Genuine transactions often take up to 18 months to complete.)'

'Frequently the scam was so efficient that the cheated Arab only learned his land was gone when the developers' bulldozers started levelling it,' Nablus lawyer Nidal Taha told *Newsweek*. One of his clients who tried to stop such construction was killed by an Israeli soldier, the magazine reported.

The report added, 'Some West Bank land deals reached monumental proportions. Less than two years ago, for instance, an Israeli-owned West Bank developing firm called Jumbo marketed hundreds of lots for a new settlement, in spite of 109 complaints by Arab villagers that they had never sold their property.'

Sarid estimates at least 12 of the 114 Zionist settlements on the West Bank have been planned or actually built on fraudulently obtained property. 'Most of the land deals in the (occupied) areas are rooted in forgery, deceit, pressures and threats,' he said.

Arson cover-up

The Nablus Courthouse fire has been described by Nidal Taha as 'the crime of crimes'. The building housed irreplaceable documents dating from the British mandate, through the Jordanian administration to the present day. Taha has been deeply involved – with some success – in establishing valid title to the land and the methods of fraud used by Israeli land companies.

With the records, he has been able to show the precise area of a family's land holdings, using the original registration and a detailed map, recorded either by the Mandate or Jordanian authorities. He has been able to prove that the Israeli land companies had, for example, altered the sale document of an adjoining acreage to read '400 dunams' instead of the actual '40 dunams'. Fingerprints were used to show that the alleged landowner, in one case, had been dead for 30 years.

Without the documents, the Palestinians have no standing in court to dispute land ownership claimed by the Zionists. Taha and others fear that the



Zionist settlements on Arab land obtained through fraud

The Great Land Robbery

IRREPLACEABLE LAND titles showing the ownership of West Bank land were destroyed when a major fire occurred in the Nablus Courthouse on 20 December last year. With evidence now emerging of a major scandal involving the illegal acquisition of Arab land on the West Bank by the Zionists, the Nablus fire is now believed to be part of a massive cover-up of an equally serious fraud.

Involvement in the land theft by the former Likud government has also been alleged. A classified 1983 report to the Likud government by the State Comptroller found 'irregularities' in the ac-

☐ AS MUCH as 71 per cent of Arab land acquired by the Zionists on the West Bank is now believed to have been obtained illegally. Arson at the Nablus Courthouse, in which land records were destroyed, indicates government complicity and adds a further dimension to the scandal.

quisition of 71 per cent of the West Bank land bought by the government. With

original documents may not have been destroyed in the fire, but may have been taken by the occupation authorities immediately prior to the fire, which initial investigations indicate was deliberately started.

A number of coincidences reinforce the belief that the authorities were implicated in the arson incident: despite strict military control of everyone's movements on the West Bank, no one has been charged with the crime; the fire brigade took several hours to arrive at the scene of the blaze, and three months after the incident Israeli troops maintained checkpoints around the Courthouse.

Similar suspicious fires have been started at the Ramallah and Bethlehem Courthouses.

JERUSALEM

Arab hospital's dramatic closure

PATIENTS – including women with day-old babies – and staff were forcibly removed from Arab Jerusalem's Austrian Hospice Hospital, after Israeli troops sealed off the Via Dolorosa at 6.00am on 29 July. Patients were awakened by Israeli health officials and a representative of the Archdiocese of Vienna which owns the building. With half the patients diagnosed as sufficiently healthy to put onto the streets, the remainder were moved by ambulance to destinations not immediately disclosed.

The dramatic shut-down of the hospital, Israeli Health Ministry officials later confirmed, was intended to thwart planned demonstrations against its closure called by local Christian and Muslim leaders for 31 July.

Israel has responded to international concern by claiming that 'PLO agitators' were behind the planned protests, while in *The Guardian* on 23 August, the Chairman of the British Chapter of the Israel Medical Association claimed the building was 'totally unfit for use as a hospital', and that 'alternative facilities' were available elsewhere 'in both east and west Jerusalem'. The fact that patients had been forcibly removed from their beds in the early hours of the morning with the hospital under military siege did not appear to be a factor of concern to IMA's London spokesman, Dr Harry Levitt, who conveniently failed to acknowledge that the state of facilities at the hospital was a direct result of the Israelis' refusal in 1973 to approve plans by the Jerusalem Arab Chamber of Commerce for the construction of a new hospital.

According to ecclesiastical sources, private Catholic organisations had raised sufficient funds to renovate and operate the hospital for one year, and the Israeli authorities were aware of the situation. The Israeli authorities have claimed the closure was necessary to reduce government expenses.

In fact, contrary to Zionist propaganda, the Hospice Hospital provided a special service to a Palestinian community of 150,000. Seventy per cent of Palestinians in the Jerusalem district have no medical insurance, and relied on the Hospice for low-cost medical care, while even those with insurance preferred treatment at the Arab hospital.

In 1983, hospital emergency room and outpatient cases totalled 6,000, with a further 1,350 operations and 1,559 deliveries also recorded.

A report in *The Guardian* on 12 July pointed out, 'Health facilities in particular on the West Bank illustrate the state of the infrastructure. Creeping paralysis over the past 18 years, as a result of constant underfunding and neglect, have resulted in services hardly worth the name. The total budget of the 140 Israeli administered clinics and 9 hospitals stands this year at only \$8 millions – 15 per cent of the budget for one Tel Aviv hospital.'

Since 1967, the Israeli health ministry has had control over the Hospice's budget, during which time bed capacity has been halved to 50, and severe equipment and supply shortages have been experienced. Arab hospitals in general remain chronically understaffed, *The Guardian* acknowledged, while some 200 qualified Palestinian doctors are forbidden to practise without permission from the military authorities.

Palestinian press under threat

THE PALESTINIAN press continues to provide a main target for Israeli repression in the occupied territories, where Mr Qadura Mussa of the daily Al Fajr was amongst 54 West Bank Palestinians detained without trial during August. In early September, Ramallah journalist Kamel Jebail and another unidentified journalist were reported by The Times to have also been served with detention orders.

In Jerusalem, the Arab Journalists Association is launching a public campaign in Israel and abroad to protest against the closure of the Al-Minar news agency in East Jerusalem six months ago on the orders of the military commander. The agency, accused of being a front for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, provided information to the Arab newspapers in Arab Jerusalem and to foreign newspaper correspondents.

ESSAY

Will Moscow make a move

□ RECENT REPORTS of the Paris meeting between the Soviet and Israeli ambassadors has prompted speculation that Moscow may soon re-establish diplomatic relations with the Zionist state. A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT examines Soviet attitudes towards Israel and the Palestine issue.

THE SOVIET Union is not unlike other global powers. Its foreign policy contains contradictions, and nowhere are these more obvious than in its stance towards the Middle East. While it advocates a moderate policy recognising Israel's right to exist, and courts those conservative Arab states most likely to approve some accommodation with Israel, the Soviet Union simultaneously gives backing to Arab governments most implacably opposed to any form of Arab-Israeli rapprochement, while voicing its opposition to the current Jordanian-Palestinian peace initiative.

In July, the Soviet ambassador to France held a lengthy meeting with his Israeli counterpart at the Paris home of Daniel Barenboim. Details of the meeting were quickly leaked to the press, a move seen as a deliberate attempt by sources within Israel's government to scuttle any moves towards closer relations between Israel and the Soviet Union.

Subsequent Soviet comments merely served to emphasise the apparent confusions of Moscow's Middle East policy. Interviewed in Kuwait a few weeks ago, Leonid Zamyatin, Head of the International Press Department of the Soviet Communist Party, insisted that Soviet policy was in harmony with the resolutions of the Fez Arab Summit, and in the next sentence said, 'Soviet and Syrian stands are identical on world issues', which ignores the fact that Syria boycotted the Fez summit.

Until the 1967 War, in which Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights from the Arabs, Moscow maintained diplomatic relations with Israel. Twenty years earlier it had voted for the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the Zionist state. The following year it was amongst the first to recognise the State of Israel on Palestinian territory, and in the years that followed helped to arm the new Zionist state with supplies provided through Czechoslovakia.

If the Soviet leadership in the post-World War II years had hoped that Israel would provide an anti-imperialist base in

the region, the Soviet analysts of the time had clearly misread Zionism's intrinsic connection with Western interests, and its rejection of the Soviet ideal.

The 1967 War provoked Moscow to break its ties with Israel. It condemned the Zionists' act of aggression, and realigned itself with the new anti-imperialist order of the Arab world which had emerged more vocal and forceful than was the case in 1947. Yet throughout Israel's history, Moscow has never denied the right of Israel to exist. Conversely, it never identified with radical Arab demands for the total liberation of Palestine from Zionist control and the establishment of a secular, united and democratic state in Palestine.

The central factor determining Soviet policy in the region is clearly its own security interests. With the Middle East in what US leaders would call 'its own backyard', this is obviously a legitimate and pertinent Soviet concern. Conversely, it is in America's interests (and those of the West in general) to maintain a conflict situation in the area, and to exploit this to secure military facilities along the southern flank of the USSR.

Commenting on Soviet Middle East policy in an Arabic language broadcast by Moscow Radio in July, Arabist scholar Igor Belyayev stressed 'the vital interest' of the Soviet Union that the region should become 'a zone of peace', pointing out that wars in the area 'affect the security interests of the Soviet Union and its friends and allies'.

'The Soviet Union,' he continued, 'does not want the Near East to become a battlefield', nor for the countries in the area to be 'dragged into an arms race and become a field for the deployment of, for instance, medium-range missiles.' He warned that the United States was putting pressure on 'some countries' to permit the deployment of Pershing or cruise missiles.

Eretz Israel

A few days earlier, in Moscow Radio's Hebrew service, a commentary on Soviet-Israeli relations emphasised that the USSR had never adopted an 'anti-Israeli stance', adding that on the contrary, 'We firmly support the existence of Israel and a sovereign and independent country which lives in peace and security in the Middle East, and which develops good relations with neighbouring countries.'

Using the Zionist phrase 'Eretz Israel', the broadcaster recalled, 'When the matter of Eretz Israel arose on the agenda of the international community at the time (i.e. 1947), the Soviet Union voted for the establishment of a Jewish state and a Palestinian Arab state, one alongside the other.'

'We do not share the view of radical circles in the Arab world who claim that the state of Israel should be annihilated. This is an unjust and unrealistic position,' he added.

The Soviet position, he explained, was



Gorbachev: Will position change?

to stand 'on the side of the Arab peoples in their struggle to regain the territories occupied since 1967 and to materialise the right of the Palestinians to establish a state of their own'.

Peace Plan

The Soviet approach to a settlement of the Palestine conflict could be described as conservative, recognising Israel's right to exist and rejecting radical Arab demands for total liberation of Palestine. Yet like others who have adopted such a position, Moscow's commitment to Palestinian self-determination in an independent state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been bitterly condemned by the Zionists.

Soviet proposals centre on an international conference on the Middle East, to which all parties to the conflict, including Israel and the PLO, would be invited to attend. The proposal was backed by the 1983 UN conference on Palestine held in Geneva, and it remains the backbone of Moscow's Palestine policy. As Leonid Zamyatin pointed out in his Kuwait interview, 'The Soviet proposals are rather similar to the Fez programme for a Middle East settlement.'

Commenting on what he called 'new' proposals – those put forward by Jor-

dan's King Hussein and Egypt's President Mubarak – Zamyatin argues that they 'ignore the two main provisions linked with the Palestinian problem – the core of the Middle East crisis: equal PLO participation in a comprehensive Middle East settlement and creation of an independent Palestinian state.'

'These provisions cannot be ignored by any means,' he added.

Israel's 'peace plans' such as proposals from Prime Minister Peres, have as their 'main idea' the replacement of the PLO 'with Palestinian Quislings', he points out. Nevertheless, Moscow believes that 'serious political and anti-war forces have emerged in Israel', although at present 'broader Israeli circles lack the personality capable of shouldering all the responsibility of a truly equitable solution to the Israeli-Arab problems, particularly the Palestinian problem, and establishing a firm and lasting peace in the Middle East'.

US and Israeli peace plans are seen by Zamyatin as attempts 'to continue the Camp David process by organising separate direct talks between a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and Israel', which would see the issue of the 1967 territories occupied by Israel ignored.

The Israeli-US proposals mean 'all the resolutions adopted on Palestine by the UN would be negated', argues Zamyatin, 'including even the UN General Assembly resolution of 29 November 1947 calling for the partition of the mandate state of Palestine into two states, an Arab and a Jewish one. The UN resolutions recognising the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to set up their independent state, which called for PLO participation in the Near East settlement process, would also be negated.'

The Soviet position, Zamyatin explains, is to work towards guarantees for 'the national rights of the Palestinian people, and not merely for the human rights about which they talk in Washington'.

'The PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Arab people of Palestine,' he continues, 'and this means that an independent Palestinian state must be established; and to this end the West Bank and Gaza Strip should be rid of Israeli occupation. After the establishment of the Palestinian state it should then decide for itself the nature of its relations with its neighbours, including the possibility of a federal union. Soviet proposals do not define with whom or when it would be possible to reach agreement concerning the establishment of the confederation. This is a matter for the Palestinians themselves.'

Other aspects of Soviet policy on the Palestine question, Zamyatin explained, included the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes or receive adequate compensation, and recognition that East Jerusalem should be returned to the Arabs and become an indivisible part of the Palestinian state, 'with absolute freedom of access to holy places of

The Soviet Peace Proposals for the Middle East

□ IN JUNE 1984, the Soviet Union outlined proposals for a Middle East settlement based on convening an international conference. These extracts were published in Soviet News, on 1 August 1984.

Principles for Middle East Settlement

(1) The principle of inadmissibility of the capture of foreign lands through aggression should be strictly observed. Accordingly, all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 – the Golan Heights, the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza sector, and the Lebanese lands – should be returned to the Arabs. The settlements established by Israel in the Arab territories after 1967 should be dismantled. The borders between Israel and its Arab neighbours should be declared inviolable.

(2) Implementation in practice should be ensured of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people, whose sole legitimate representative is the Palestine Liberation Organisation, to self-determination, to creating its own independent state on Palestinian lands which will be freed from Israeli occupation – on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza sector. As is envisaged by the decision of the general Arab meeting at summit level in Fez and with the consent of the Palestinians themselves, the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza sector can be turned over by

Israel under the control of the United Nations organisation for a short transition period of not more than several months...

(3) The eastern part of Jerusalem which was occupied by Israel in 1967, and which is the site of one of the main Muslim shrines, should be returned to the Arabs and become an inalienable part of the Palestinian state...

(4) The right of all states in that area to secure an independent existence and development should be fully ensured, certainly, with the observance of full reciprocity...

(5) An end should be put to the state of war, and peace be established between the Arab states and Israel...

(6) International settlement guarantees should be drawn up and adopted, the role of the guarantor could be assumed, for example, by the permanent members of the UN Security Council or the Security Council as a whole. The Soviet Union is ready to participate in such guarantees.

Ways towards Reaching Settlement

Experience has most convincingly demonstrated the futility and at the same time the danger of the attempts at resolving the Middle East problem through forcing on the Arabs all sorts of separate deals with Israel.

The sole right and effective way towards ensuring a radical solution to the Middle East problem is that of collective efforts by all sides concerned, in other words, talks within the framework of an international conference on the Middle East specially convened with that aim.

In the opinion of the Soviet Union, in convening such a conference it is necessary to be guided by the following provisions:

Aims of the conference:

The objective of the conference should be to find solutions to all aspects of a Middle East settlement in complex.

The conference should end in the signing of a treaty or treaties embracing the following organically interconnected components of settlement: withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Arab territories occupied since 1967; implementation of the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including its right to the creation of its own state; establishing a state of peace and ensuring security and independent development of all the states-sides to the conflict. Simultaneously, international guarantees for the observance of the terms of such a settlement should be drawn up and adopted. All the agreements reached at the conference should make an integral whole approved by all its participants.

Composition of participants. All the Arab states having a common border with Israel, that is Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Israel itself should have the right to participate in the conference.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation should be an equal participant in the conference as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This is a question of principled significance, as a Middle East settlement is unattainable without the resolution of the Palestinian problem, and it cannot be resolved without the participation of the PLO.

The USSR and the USA should also be participants in the conference as they play, by force of circumstances, an important role in the Middle East affairs and were co-chairmen of the preceding conference on the Middle East.

Some other states of the Middle East and of the areas adjoining it, capable of making a positive contribution to the settlement of the Middle East problem, could be included in the number of participants in the conference with general consent.

Like the preceding one, a new conference on the Middle East should be held under the aegis of the United Nations Organisation.

▷ Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

The way forward

According to Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf) of the Fatah Central Committee, Soviet officials have confirmed the existence of contacts with Israel. However, he adds, Israel's acceptance of an international conference on the Middle East would not be sufficient to justify restoring diplomatic relations between Moscow and Tel Aviv. Moscow would require Israel to recognise the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Yet, it is clear that Moscow has other interests which could play a vital role in determining how its Middle East policy develops vis-a-vis relations with Israel. There are other reasons, not necessarily the same, why both Moscow and Tel Aviv have an interest in improving relations.

Israel faces an ever-growing exodus of Jews leaving Palestine for more secure – economically and politically – countries in the West, and it keen to see an increase in the number of exit permits given by the Moscow authorities for Soviet Jewry to emigrate. Moreover, the Zionists recognise that it would be a severe blow for Moscow's allies in the Arab world if the Soviet Union restored

diplomatic relations with Israel. However, many Arabs may recognise the benefits of such diplomatic relations.

A further factor is the recognition by some Zionists of Israel's isolation, compounded by its image as a satellite of the United States and an American proxy in the Third World. The restoration of relations with Moscow would enhance Israel's image in the Third World, and, some Zionists believe, undermine Third World support for the Arab cause.

Apart from its commitment to Palestinian and Arab rights, other factors will influence Moscow's moves in the coming months. Not least it is keen to see an end to anti-Soviet broadcasts from Israel, and anti-Soviet propaganda orchestrated in the West by the Zionists in the media and politics. The CIA-financed 'Voice of America' radio network plans to start transmitting from Israel very soon, and this has already strained relations between Israel and the USSR. Improved relations between the two countries could be expected to have an influence in this sphere.

In addition, the new Gorbachev government is aware that its priority is to overcome the Soviet Union's economic problems, and to set the economy on a better footing. This, in part, requires less

spending on the military, and by extension a reduction in international tension and conflicts.

However, if the Middle East conflict is to be resolved through an international conference involving the USSR, then restored relations between Israel and the Soviet Union would remove one of the obstacles most frequently voiced by the Zionists and the United States. Some Arabs may feel that if the way to an international conference could be cleared by a thaw in relations between Israel and the Soviet Union, then this would be a small price to pay.

Although the Soviet Union fears the Jordanian-Palestinian scenario, now backed by Britain's Thatcher government, could undermine its own peace formula, Moscow has been alarmed by recent developments within the Palestinian camp, namely the Syrian-sponsored fragmentation of the Palestinian movement. Moscow has frequently expressed 'the importance of preserving PLO unity and of overcoming differences among Palestinians'. A move towards restoring relations with Israel, Moscow may believe, would be a salutary signal to the Damascus-based Palestinian rebels, and a warning to Syria's President Hafez al Assad.

□ Continued from page 12

would be isolated by their rejection of UN resolutions concerning Palestinian national rights. Already the Israelis are renewing their calls for 'face-to-face' talks with Jordan, and this will no doubt be echoed from the White House. The objective of direct talks with Jordan, as with Egypt before, is to divide the Arabs and to exclude the PLO, thereby depriving the Palestinians of an effective voice to demand and protect their rights. And if Israel secures a peace agreement with Jordan, then Syria alone stands little chance of regaining control of its territory on the Golan Heights. That would suit Israel well.

The US-Israeli approach would not produce a just or lasting peace, but this appears to be of no consequence to Israel's short-sighted leadership which has always been able to count on Washington's total acquiescence.

In short, Israel and the United States have shown themselves to be the rejectionists, and recent events show them to be the men of violence, also. The peace process could have been given the 'kiss of life' by Mrs Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe. However, at the last minute Mrs Thatcher clearly lost her courage and capitulated to President Reagan and the Zionist lobby. There was little doubt in the British papers that the London meeting was cancelled less for what the Palestinians would not say than for what the White House had said 'privately and in the strongest terms' in expressing its anger in the hours preceding the planned London meeting.

The Zionists launched a major offensive to protest Mrs Thatcher's audacity in agreeing to talks with the PLO members. A major rally organised in London

on the day of the meeting turned from protest to celebration, or rather a display of unashamed hypocrisy, with the Chief Rabbi in the lead, lamenting how pleased he would have been if the meeting had taken place and the PLO had committed itself to the peace process.

Indeed, it is precisely because the PLO had opened the door to a political settlement that Israel has been so alarmed. On the battlefield, as in the occupied territories, the Zionists have military superiority. Washington would not have it otherwise. But at any peace talks, the Palestinians and the Arabs have the strong hand, and most, if not all, of the aces.

Next step

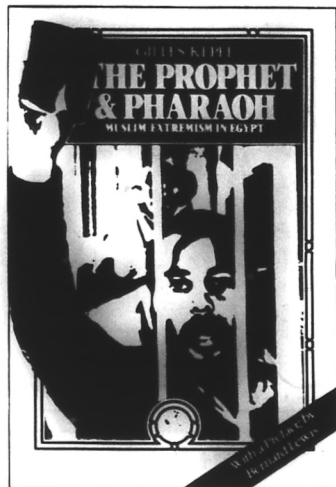
The current peace initiative might survive, but the prospects are not good. In the view of *The Economist* (5 October), the Israelis 'do not want even a reformed PLO at the conference table. They want to ensure that the PLO-connected Palestinians are blotted out of the peace process. The Israeli ideal is to get rid of the PLO both as a military and political force'.

The attempted assassination of the PLO leader Yasser Arafat, which was the purpose of the US-backed Israeli attack on Tunis on 1 October, indicates that Israeli strategists have determined to make new attempts secure the objectives they failed to achieve in Lebanon.

The PLO leadership is reported to be engaged in a fundamental review of its strategy, and US and Israeli actions do not encourage compromise and political initiatives. On the other hand, the past forty years of anti-Palestinian intrigue and the failure of the Arab states to wholeheartedly support the Palestinian struggle do not appear to leave the PLO with many options.

However, recent months have seen an increase in armed and civil resistance by Palestinians in the occupied territories. In part this has been due to rivalry between pro and anti Arafat groups, but the greater impetus behind the new wave of resistance has been the evidence of Israel's military weakness on the battlefields of Lebanon. Resistance on the model of the Yemenis versus the British or the Algerians against the French can be highly effective once the mass of the population are wholly behind it. That solidarity has not always been in evidence amongst the Palestinians, but the signs are that things are changing. Israel and the United States may yet be proven to be celebrating the collapse of the London talks too soon. Mr Arafat knows that if he puts political processes on the back-burner, he still has a very strong card in the form of armed resistance. Israel's response is predictable — more arrests, deportations, neighbourhood punishments and blitzkrieg attacks on Arab capitals. Israel's international standing will be further eroded by its excessive reactions, and by the time new peace proposals emerge Mr Arafat and the PLO could well be in a stronger position.

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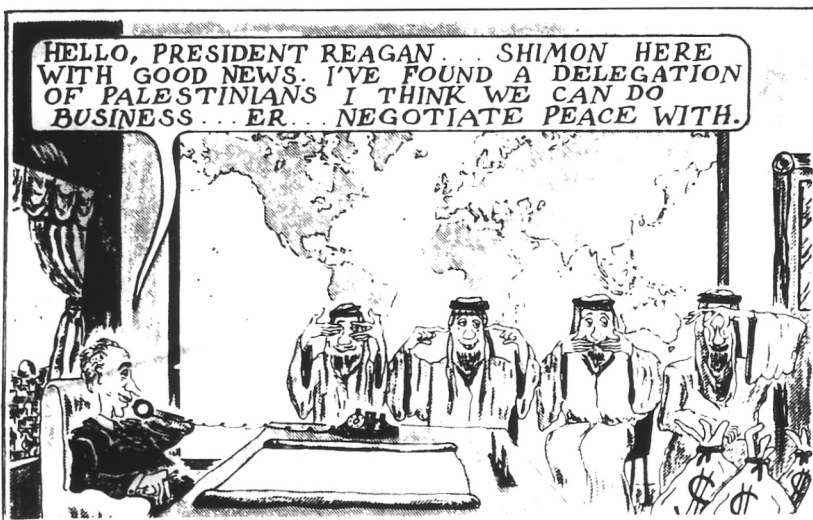
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Washington's commitment to the peace process. The joint Palestinian-Jordanian initiative planned by Yasser Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein sought to break the impasse created by Washington's refusal to agree to PLO participation in the peace process. It provided for the PLO not to be directly involved, but for Palestinian representatives, nominated by the PLO, to act within the joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. Opponents of the Hussein plan have been angered by what they see as a move to reduce the status of the PLO from its role as sole representative of the Palestinian people.

The proposal itself called for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Arab Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and for Palestinian self-determination to be provided within a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation. This it was hoped would overcome US objections to the creation of an independent sovereign Palestinian state. It was a retreat from the PLO's objective in securing an independent Palestinian state, as Arafat's critics protested loudly.

That Washington should have allowed itself to be so manipulated by Israel into opposing the plan has served to underline the fact that the United States remains implacably opposed to any recognition of Palestinian rights. That Washington should ignore its own interests in the Arab world and openly and enthusiastically endorse the Israeli attack on Tunis as a legitimate act, and then indulge in a little act of air piracy of its own in hijacking an Egyptian airliner, could only compound Arab despair. Washington could not have indicated more forcefully to the Arabs and Palestinians that the door to a political solution is firmly closed.

The Arafat-Hussein proposals have been sabotaged by the United States on almost every single point, to such an extent that if its criticisms are to be taken at face value it is difficult to know on what criteria King Hussein is feted by Washington as a moderate and peace-loving Arab leader.

The United States, echoing Israel's intransigence, rejects involvement by the PLO and by extension has disenfranchised all but the most outright collaborators amongst the Palestinian people from any role in the peace process.

Moreover, Washington is opposed to the international peace conference formula because it wishes to exclude the Soviet Union from any role, and more importantly because Israel and the US

□ Continued on page 11

COMMENTARY

London fiasco: Thatcher backs down on PLO talks

ISRAEL AND the United States have succeeded in sabotaging Britain's bold initiative to give support to the joint Palestinian-Jordanian peace proposals, and in the process have left Mrs Thatcher and her Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, opened to justified ridicule.

As Mohamed Milhem and Bishop Ilya Khouri waited in London for the historic meeting with Sir Geoffrey, it was suddenly announced that the meeting would not take place. It was claimed that Milhem, one of the two PLO Executive Members, had refused to endorse an agreement statement recognising Israel's right to exist, accepting resolutions 242 and 338, and condemning the use of violence and terrorism.

Recognition by the Palestinians and the Arab states of Israel's right to exist has always been the Zionists' prime objective to legitimise their state in Palestine. It is a coveted, if elusive, prize which wars and repression have failed to deliver. It is the PLO's trump card, and one which will not be played in preliminary discussions with Sir Geoffrey; it will be announced at the end of the peace process, the PLO argues, not during the overture.

If Britain's objective was the support the Palestinian-Jordanian plan, the PLO points out, what was the purpose of insisting on a policy statement which goes beyond the formula for the peace initiative agreed by Yasser Arafat and King Hussein?

It was a crafty ploy by the British to try and obtain such a statement in advance of talks which were intended to involve Britain, if only marginally, in the Palestinian-Jordanian initiative. It remains to be seen if future UK-Israeli talks will be preceded with a signed statement by Israel that it recognises the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

That is most unlikely, and thereby exposes Britain's intention — to provide a pretext for abandoning the talks.

Israel and the United States had, by their actions over the preceding days, ensured that such a statement would not be issued by the PLO. That was the objective of the Israeli air attack on the PLO headquarters in Tunis. One day Washington endorses Israel's assassination attempt on the life of the PLO leader, and the next insists, in effect, that the PLO proclaim Israel's right to exist.

Of course, there are opponents of Yasser Arafat's 'olive branch' approach within the Palestinian camp, who are no less militant in their rejection of any political peace process than President Reagan and the Zionist leadership. Indeed, the killing of three Israeli secret service agents in Larnaca and the Achille Lauro hijack could not have been better timed if organised by Mossad itself to undermine any PLO-sponsored political initiative. The Syrian-backed Palestinian opponents of Yasser Arafat had already announced that Mayor Milhem and Bishop Khoury would be assassinated if the London talks went ahead.

Testing Washington

In fact, what has been on trial is

**free
palestine**

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PO Box 492, London SW19 4PJ

Telephone:

Editorial: 01-727 1441

Admin: 01-947 7679

Telex: 892830 Event G

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Louis Eaks

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