

THE TWO-STATE DELUSION

In the 85 years since the evocation of the two-state solution (i.e., a Jewish state and a Palestinian Arab state living side by side in peace and security), not a single Palestinian Arab leader has ever evinced any true liking for the idea or acted in a way signifying an unqualified embrace of it. Allowing their anti-Jewish hatred and obsession with violence to get the better of them, Palestinian leaders have repeatedly dragged their hapless constituents into disastrous conflicts that culminated in their collective undoing and continued statelessness. So long as Palestinian society does not undergo a comprehensive transformation that will sweep the corrupt and oppressive PLO and Hamas regimes from power; eliminate endemic violence from political and social life, and teach the virtues of coexistence with Israel, the two-state solution will remain a pipe dream.

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“An agreement with the Palestinians, based on two states for two peoples, is the right thing for Israel’s security, for Israel’s economy, and for the future of our children,” Israel’s interim prime minister, Yair Lapid, told the UN General Assembly’s 77th Session on 22 September 2022. “We have only one condition: A future Palestinian state will be peaceful. That it will not become another terror base from which to threaten the well-being, and the very existence of Israel.”¹

Endorsed by the Zionist movement as early as 1937 when it was first proposed by a British commission of inquiry headed by Lord Peel, this “two-state solution”—a Jewish state and a Palestinian Arab state living side by side in peace and security—has become over time the standard solution to the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Holy Land. There has been, however, one insurmountable obstacle: the century-long Palestinian rejection of the idea of Jewish statehood—from the Jerusalem mufti Hajj Amin Husseini who led the Palestinian Arabs from the early 1920s to the late 1940s; to Yasser Arafat, who dominated Palestinian politics from the mid-1960s to his death in November 2004, and his successor Mahmoud Abbas; to the Islamic Resistance Movement (or Hamas as its Arabic acronyms know it).

The Long Trail of Palestinian Rejectionism

The story begins in April 1920, when the newly-formed League of Nations—the post-WWI organization and the United Nation’s predecessor—appointed Britain as mandatory for Palestine with the specific task of putting into effect the 1917 Balfour Declaration “in favor of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”² This mandate was ratified in July 1922 by the League’s Council, which stressed “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine” as “the grounds for reconstituting their national home in the country.”³

As it were, the British government failed to comply with this international obligation, repeatedly cowering to Arab violence aimed at averting that purpose. As early as March 1921, it effectively severed the vast and sparsely populated territory east of the Jordan River (“Transjordan”) from the prospective Jewish national home (though not from the Palestine Mandate) and made Abdullah, the emir of Mecca, its effective ruler. In 1922 and 1930, two British White Papers further compromised the prospective Jewish national home by imposing harsh restrictions on Jewish immigration and land sales to Jews.

¹ “Full text of Lapid’s 2022 speech to the UN General Assembly,” *The Times of Israel*, 22 September 2022.

² “British Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the Supreme Council, held at the Villa Devachan, San Remo, on Saturday, 24 April 1920, at 4 p.m.,” in E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (London: HMSO, 1960), ser. 1, vol. 8, pp. 176-7.

³ Avalon Project, “The Palestine Mandate,” 24 July 1922, Preamble.

But Arab violence mounted, and in July 1937, it reaped its greatest reward when the Peel commission recommended repudiating the terms of the mandate altogether in favor of a two-state solution: the partitioning of mandatory Palestine into an Arab state, united with Transjordan, which would occupy some 85 percent of the mandate territory west of the Jordan river, and a Jewish state in the remainder. “Half a loaf is better than no bread,” the commission wrote in its report, hoping that “on reflection, both parties will come to realize that its advantages outweigh the drawbacks of partition.”⁴

“At the time, though, nobody envisaged a return to the two-state solution. Quite the contrary: Palestinian nationhood was rejected by the entire international community, including the western democracies, the Soviet Union (then the foremost supporter of radical Arabism), and the Arab world itself (as late as 1974, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad openly referred to Palestine as “a basic part of southern Syria”).”

But partition did not happen. While the Zionist leadership gave the plan its halfhearted support, the Palestinian Arab leadership and the Arab regimes (except Abdullah, who viewed partition as a stepping stone to the vast Arab empire he was striving to create) dismissed it out of hand. They reverted to mass violence to subvert the commission’s recommendations.

The same thing happened in November 1947 when, in the face of the imminent expiration of the British mandate, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine. Rejecting the plan altogether, the Arab states and the Palestinian Arab leadership attempted to destroy the state of Israel at birth. This time, however, Arab violence backfired in grand style. In the ensuing war, not only did Israel confirm its sovereign independence and assert control over somewhat wider territories than those assigned to it by the UN, but the Palestinian Arab community was profoundly shattered, with some 600,000 of its members fleeing to other parts of Palestine and the neighboring Arab states.⁵

Nor did the magnitude of the defeat (*al-Nakba*, The Catastrophe, as it came to be dubbed) win the Arabs over to the merits of the two-state solution. Neither Egypt nor

⁴ Palestine Royal Commission, *Report. Presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Parliament by Command of his Majesty, July 1937* (London: HMSO; rep. 1946), p. 296.

⁵ Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 264-7.

Jordan permitted Palestinian self-determination in the parts of mandatory Palestine they had occupied during the 1948 war. Transjordan annexed the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria in April 1950, to be hitherto known as the West Bank (of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), while Egypt kept the Gaza Strip under oppressive military rule. “The Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are,” Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser stated in 1956. “We will always see that they do not become too powerful. Can you imagine yet another nation on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean?”⁶ Only after Israel’s conquest of these territories during the June 1967 war would their political future gradually become a question of the first order.

At the time, though, nobody envisaged a return to the two-state solution. Quite the contrary: Palestinian nationhood was rejected by the entire international community, including the western democracies, the Soviet Union (then the foremost supporter of radical Arabism), and the Arab world itself (as late as 1974, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad openly referred to Palestine as “a basic part of southern Syria”). Instead, according to Security Council Resolution 242 (22 November 1967), it was assumed that any territories vacated by Israel would be returned to their pre-1967 Arab occupiers: Gaza to Egypt and the West Bank to Jordan. The resolution did not even mention the Palestinians by name, affirming instead the necessity “for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem”—a clause that also applied to the hundreds of thousands of Jews expelled from Arab states following the 1948 war.⁷ Small wonder that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), established in 1964 at Nasser’s initiative, derided the resolution as designed “to accord [with] the Zionist racist colonial illegal occupation in Palestine.”⁸

It was only after the PLO’s steady ascendance led to Jordan’s renunciation of its claim to the West Bank (in 1988) that Resolution 242 came to be *misinterpreted* as implying a two-state solution: Israel and a PLO-governed Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Conveniently ignored was one glaring fact: the PLO *rejected* any such resolution and continued to adhere to its 1974 “phased strategy,” which stipulated the seizure of whatever territory Israel was prepared or compelled to cede and its use as a springboard for further territorial gains until the “complete liberation of Palestine.”⁹ It is true that in November 1988, more than two decades after the passage of 242, the PLO made a pretense of accepting the resolution, but this was little more than a ploy to open a dialogue with Washington. Shortly after that move, Salah Khalaf, the PLO’s

⁶ John Laffin, *The PLO Connections* (London: Corgi Books, 1983), p. 127.

⁷ Avalon Project, “United Nations Security Council Resolution 242,” 22 November 1967.

⁸ The Palestine Arab Delegation, New York, “Justice Will Triumph,” 5 June 1968. *Irish National Archives*, NA 200143/100.

⁹ “Political Program for the Present Stage Drawn up by the 12th PNC, Cairo, June 9, 1974,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Summer 1974), p. 224-5.

second-in-command (better known by his nom de guerre of Abu Iyad), declared: “The establishment of a Palestinian state on any part of Palestine is but a step toward the whole of Palestine.”¹⁰ Two years later, following Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait (which the PLO endorsed), he reiterated the point at a public rally in Amman, pledging “to liberate Palestine inch by inch from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river.”¹¹

“As a result, terrorism in the territories spiraled to its highest level since its capture by Israel in the 1967 war. In the two-and-a-half years between the signing of the DOP and the fall of the Labor government in May 1996, 210 Israelis were murdered—nearly three times the average annual death toll of the previous 26 years.”

The Oslo Disaster

Despite the PLO’s unwavering commitment to Israel’s destruction, Yitzhak Rabin’s government decided to enter into peace negotiations with the organization. On 13 September 1993, the two parties signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangement (DOP), or the Oslo Accord as it was commonly known after the Norwegian capital, where it had been negotiated. The agreement provided for Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for a transitional period not to exceed five years. During that time, Israel and the Palestinians would negotiate a permanent settlement.¹² And while the DOP (as well as the follow-up May 1994 and September 1995 accords) were not explicitly based on a two-state solution, with Rabin envisaging to his dying day “an independent Palestinian entity short of a state,”¹³ they were widely understood to signal an implicit Israeli readiness to acquiesce in the establishment of a Palestinian state.

But then, the PLO leadership has never viewed the Oslo accords as a pathway to a two-state solution, but, in the words of prominent PLO leader Faisal Husseini, as a

¹⁰ *Al-Anba* (Kuwait), 5 and 13 December 1988. For similar statements by senior PLO officials see, for example, Khaled Hassan’s interview with *al-Musawar* (Cairo), 20 January 1989; Salim Zaanun’s interview with *al-Anba* (Kuwait), 21 November 1988; Rafiq Natsha’s interview with *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 9 December 1988 & with *al-Jazeera* (Saudi Arabia), 1 January 1989.

¹¹ *Baghdad Voice of the PLO*, 8 January 1991; *ar-Ra’i* (Amman), 2 January 1991.

¹² United Nations Peacemaker, “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangement (‘Oslo Accords’),” October 1993.

¹³ Yitzhak Rabin’s address at the 376th session of the 13th Knesset, 5 October 1995.

“Trojan Horse designed to promote the organization’s strategic goal of ‘Palestine from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea’”—that is, a Palestine in place of Israel.¹⁴ PLO Chairman Arafat admitted as much five days before signing the DOP when he told an Israeli journalist, “In the future, Israel and Palestine will be one unified state in which Israelis and Palestinians will live together”—that is, Israel would cease to exist.¹⁵ And even as he shook Rabin’s hand on the White House lawn, Arafat was assuring the Palestinians in a pre-recorded Arabic-language message that the agreement was merely an implementation of the PLO’s phased strategy.¹⁶

The following eleven years till Arafat’s death (on 11 November 2004) offered a recapitulation, over and over again, of the same story. In addressing Israeli or Western audiences, Arafat (and his erstwhile henchmen) would laud the “peace” signed with “my partner Yitzhak Rabin.” To their Palestinian constituents, they depicted the Oslo accords as transient arrangements required by the moment’s needs. Arafat made constant allusions to the “phased strategy” and the Treaty of Hudaibiya, signed by Muhammad with the people of Mecca in 628, only to be disputed a couple of years later when the situation shifted in the prophet’s favor. He also insisted on the “right of return”—the Palestinian/Arab euphemism for Israel’s destruction through demographic subversion. As Arafat told a skeptical associate shortly before moving to Gaza in the summer of 1994 to take control of the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA): “I know that you are opposed to the Oslo Accords, but you must always remember what I’m going to tell you. The day will come when you will see thousands of Jews fleeing Palestine. I will not live to see this, but you will definitely see it in your lifetime. The Oslo Accords will help bring this about.”¹⁷

And that was the least of it. Further discrediting the two-state solution, the PLO failed to abolish the numerous clauses in its hallowed Palestinian National Covenant calling for Israel’s destruction, as Arafat had promised Rabin in what cleared the road to the DOP.¹⁸ Worse: the PLO/PA launched a sustained campaign of racial hatred and political incitement against Israelis and Jews, unparalleled in scope and intensity since Nazi Germany. Palestinians were not only indoctrinated in the illegitimacy of the state of Israel and the lack of any Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. Still, they were also told of the most outlandish Israeli plots to corrupt and ruin them, wholly congruent with the medieval myth of Jews as secret destroyers and poisoners of wells—from the alleged killing of Palestinian children, to injecting Palestinian children with the AIDS

¹⁴ Faisal Husseini’s interview with *al-Arabi* (Cairo), 24 June 2000.

¹⁵ *Ha’olam Ha’ze* (Tel Aviv), 8 September 1993, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ *Jordan TV*, 13 September 1993.

¹⁷ YouTube, “Al-Quds al-Arabi editor-in-chief Abd al-Bari Atwan: Arafat planned that Oslo accords would chase away Israelis,” 3 September 2015.

¹⁸ United Nations—The Question of Palestine, “Letter from Yasser Arafat to Prime Minister Rabin,” 9 September 1993.

virus, to distributing chocolate infected with “mad cow disease” in the West Bank and Gaza, and so on and so forth.¹⁹

Arafat also utilized the immense inflammatory potential of Islam to discredit his Israeli peace partners, if not the idea of peace itself. Week after week, preachers used their pulpits to deride the peace process and to instill hatred for Israelis and Jews. Worshippers have been taught that Jews are the “descendants of apes and pigs” and warned of Zionist machinations to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam’s third holiest shrine, as well as to divide the Palestinian people and spawn internecine strife. After Arafat launched his war of terror in September 2000 (euphemized as the “al-Aqsa Intifada”), the Friday preachers embarked on a collective anti-Jewish invective and outright calls for the mass murder of Israelis and Jews wherever they were found.

Nor did the PLO content itself with disparaging the Oslo Accords and its Israeli peace partner. Embracing violence as the defining characteristic of his rule, Arafat built an extensive terrorist infrastructure in the territories under his control. He refused to disarm Hamas and Islamic Jihad as required by the Oslo accords and tacitly approved the murder of hundreds of Israelis by these terrorist groups. He created a far larger Palestinian army (the so-called police force) than was permitted by the accords, and reconstructed the PLO’s old terrorist apparatus, mainly under the auspices of the Tanzim—the military arm of Fatah (the PLO’s largest constituent organization and Arafat’s alma mater). He frantically acquired large quantities of prohibited weapons, and, eventually, resorted to outright mass violence, first in September 1996 to discredit the newly elected Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then in September 2000, shortly after being offered Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Netanyahu’s successor, Ehud Barak, with the launch of his terror war—the bloodiest and most destructive confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians since 1948.

As a result, terrorism in the territories spiraled to its highest level since its capture by Israel in the 1967 war. In the two-and-a-half years between the signing of the DOP and the fall of the Labor government in May 1996, 210 Israelis were murdered—nearly three times the average annual death toll of the previous 26 years. Moreover, almost two-thirds of the 1994-96 victims were murdered in Israeli territory inside the pre-1967 “Green Line”—over 60 percent of the average toll in Israel in the preceding six violent years of the Palestinian uprising (intifada). By Arafat’s death, his terror war had exacted 1,028 Israeli lives in some 5,760 attacks: nine times the average death toll of the pre-Oslo era. About 450 people (or 43.8 percent of victims) were killed in suicide bombings, which were a practically unheard-of tactics in the Palestinian-Israeli

¹⁹ Efraim Karsh, *Arafat’s War* (New York: Grove, 2003), Chapters 3-6.

context prior to Oslo. All in all, over 1,700 Israelis were murdered and another 10,000 wounded from the signing of the DOP to date—nearly four times the average death toll of the preceding 26 years.²⁰

More of the Same

This revolting practice was sustained by Mahmoud Abbas, who, in stark contrast to his international image as a “man of peace,” is cut from the same cloth as his predecessor: a rejectionist PLO veteran who has never eschewed his commitment to Israel’s destruction and who views the “peace process” as the continuation of his lifelong war by other means. An unreconstructed Holocaust denier (in his doctoral dissertation, written at a Soviet university and subsequently published in book form, he argued inter alia that fewer than one million Jews had been killed in the Holocaust, and that the Zionist movement colluded in their slaughter),²¹ Abbas has had no qualms about reiterating the vilest anti-Semitic calumnies (in June 2016, for example, he told the European Parliament that Israeli rabbis urged the poisoning of Palestinian water)²² and has repeatedly stressed his rejection of Jewish statehood.

As early as May 2005, four months after assuming the PA presidency, Abbas described the establishment of Israel as an unprecedented historical injustice and vowed never to accept it. Two-and-a-half years later, at a U.S.-sponsored peace conference in Annapolis, he rejected Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s proposal of a Palestinian Arab state in 97 percent of the West Bank (with the remaining 3 percent added by means of a land swap) and the entire Gaza Strip, dismissing the request to recognize Israel as a Jewish state alongside the would-be Palestinian state and insisting on full implementation of the “right of return” (i.e., Israel’s destruction).²³ In June 2009 Netanyahu broke with Likud’s longstanding precept by publicly accepting the two-state solution and agreeing to the establishment of a Palestinian state (reiterating this stance two years later in an address of a joint session of the U.S. congress),²⁴ he was contemptuously rebuffed by the Palestinian leadership. Abbas’s spokesman Nabil Abu Rudaina accused the Israeli PM of “sabotaging” the “peace process.” At the same time, Abbas’s security advisor Tawfiq Tirawi stated, “it is impossible for Jerusalem to be restored restored to us without thousands of martyrs.” The PLO’s chief negotiator Saeb Erekat prophesied that Netanyahu “will have to wait 1,000 years before he finds

²⁰ Efraim Karsh, “The Oslo Disaster” (Bar-Ilan University: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2016), *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 123, p. 18-19.

²¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *al-Wajh al-Akhar: al-Alaqa al-Sirriya bayna al-Naziya wa-l-Sihyuniya* (Amman: Dar Ibn Rushd, 1984).

²² *Haaretz*, 23 June 2016.

²³ Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Apr. 16, 2009, 15 July 2009, 21 July 2009; PMW, 29 September 2021.

²⁴ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2009; *Washington Post*, 24 May 2011.

one Palestinian who will go along with him.”²⁵

As Fatah’s general congress responded to Netanyahu’s acceptance of the two-state solution by reaffirming its commitment to “the armed struggle [i.e., terrorism]... until the Zionist entity is eliminated and Palestine is liberated,” Abbas vowed to continue Arafat’s “long and exhausting struggle [that was] fraught with blood, sweat, and tears.”²⁶ Rallying the Arab League behind his “absolute and decisive rejection to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state,”²⁷ he repeatedly derided Israel’s establishment in his annual UN General Assembly addresses as “a disgrace to humanity,” “a heinous crime,” and “a historic injustice,” to name just a few pejoratives.²⁸ As late as July 2022, at a press conference with President Biden in Ramallah, Abbas called for the end of Israel’s 74-years-long “occupation of Palestine.”²⁹ In other words, nearly three decades after the onset of the Oslo process, Israel’s “peace partner” will not even accept its right to exist and considers its very creation an “occupation” of “Palestinian lands.”

Conclusion

The Palestinian leadership’s serial rejection of the numerous opportunities for statehood since the Peel Commission’s report of 1937 casts a serious doubt on its interest in the creation of an independent state. Had Hajj Amin Husseini chosen to endorse the idea, the Palestinians would have had their independent state over a substantial part of mandate Palestine by 1948, if not a decade earlier, and would have been spared the traumatic experience of dispersal and exile. Had Arafat set the PLO on the path to peace and reconciliation instead of turning it into one of the most murderous and corrupt terrorist organizations in modern times, a Palestinian state could have been established in the late 1960s or the early 1970s; in 1979 as a corollary to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty;³⁰ by May 1999 as part of the Oslo process; or at the very latest, with the Camp David summit of July 2000. Had Abbas abandoned his predecessors’ rejectionist path, a Palestinian state could have been established after the Annapolis summit of November 2007, or during the Obama presidency after Netanyahu’s endorsement of the two-state solution.

But then, not a single Palestinian leader has ever evinced any genuine liking for the two-

²⁵ MEMRI, 23 July 2009; DW (Berlin), “Palestinian Statehood.”

²⁶ MEMRI, 20 August 2009, 31 August 2009, 30 November 2009.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 March 2014.

²⁸ Wafa (PLO/PA official news agency), 23 September 2022, 30 September 2015.

²⁹ Official PA TV, 15 July 2022.

³⁰ When American Arab academic Edward Said brought Arafat the Carter’s administration’s offer to join the Egyptian-Israeli peace process he was told: “This is a lousy deal. We want Palestine. We’re not interested in bits of Palestine. We don’t want to negotiate with the Israelis. We’re going to fight.” Edward Said, *The Pen and the Sword: Conversations with David Barsamian* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994), p. 137.

state solution or acted in a way signifying an unqualified embrace of it. Allowing their anti-Jewish hatred and obsession with violence to get the better of them, Palestinian Arab leaders have dragged their hapless constituents into repeated disastrous conflicts that culminated in their collective undoing and continued statelessness.

This in turn, means that just as the creation of free and democratic societies in Germany and Japan after World War II necessitated a comprehensive sociopolitical and educational transformation, so Palestinian society deserves a real “spring” that will sweep the corrupt and oppressive PLO and Hamas regimes from power, eliminate endemic violence from political and social life, and teach the virtues of coexistence with Israeli neighbors. Until this happens, the two-state solution will remain a pipe dream.