

# ARAFAT

## Star-spangled banner

He (Yasser Arafat) is also the flag and the Star-Spangled Banner all wrapped into one person. I think he is the indispensable person for us to deal with.

**Warren Christopher**  
US Secretary of State  
March 1, 1994

**JUST IMAGINE!**  
First he's urgently invited to the White House — however briefly.

And just a few months later, after all these decades of Arafat-bashing and Palestinian-denouncing, now none other than Yasser Arafat himself, still titular head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, whatever that now has become, is "the flag and the Star-Spangled Banner"!

I can just picture Arafat now, next time he drops by to hug Bill Clinton and his Israeli-approved White House team, receiving a sweater adorned with the American flag — a little gift to keep him warm when and if he ever again decides to visit one of the refugee camps where his people still languish!

Need we joke about the need for bullet-proof thread?

"Chairman Arafat certainly has his detractors and opponents within the Palestinians," Christopher dutifully added while testifying on Capitol Hill before the House foreign affairs subcommittee on Europe and the Mid-east on the last day of February.

"But my own observation," he concluded, "is the is the indispensable figure...for us to deal with."

Christopher's unusually aroused and animated demeanour was itself quite telling

The Americans have become very anxious, practically desperate. Arafat's hold on the PLO is even more tenuous than Yitzhak Rabin's grasp of power in Israel. And the Americans are worried sick that the whole so-called "Mid-east Peace Process" might blow up in their faces added to Bill Clinton's other foreign policy messes in Somalia, Bosnia, and Moscow.

"The normally laconic and understated Christopher resorted almost to pyrotechnical rhetoric" in discussing Arafat and the Mid-east scene, reported John Goshko in *The Washington Post*.

What a world of new images and concepts has spun forward from last September's Arafat-Rabin performance on the White House lawn!

And if one ever needed confirmation that the still escalating calls, most recently on the cover of *The Nation* magazine by Edward Said, for Chairman Arafat to step aside are both urgent and justified, Secretary Christopher has provided it.

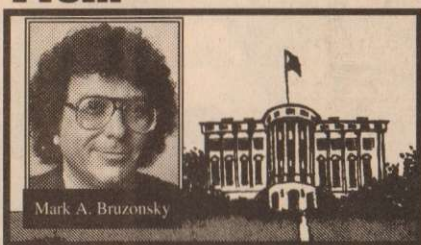
Surely something is terribly wrong when it's the American government itself that has taken over the PLO's public relations and is quietly providing security protection and living expenses for its leader.

Television commentary on all the major networks in the United States is also providing some telling insights into recent developments.

"The Israeli government tries to appease the PLO," was the lead from NBC News



From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington

**F**EAR — A SPREADING, DEEPENING, now ever-present, political fear — is clearly the predominant manifestation that has arisen like flame itself from the human conflagration that engulfed those at Ramadan prayers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs — Prophet Ibrahim and others — in Hebron just a few days ago.

Hebron, Israel? Hebron, Palestine? Hebron, Occupied Territories? After two generations of unrelenting struggle we still don't know what to call this place!

A few years ago I recall one of my own visits there to interview the founder himself, Rabbi Levinger, in his well-guarded apartment. It was in 1968, one should now remember, during the hey-day of Labour Party rule in Israel, that Levinger and his fanatic followers began moving into the heart of Hebron. Nothing but trouble has ensued. The settlers have been on the rampage many times since. Only this time it became a large massacre, and one in which at least some Israeli army personnel might have either participated or looked the other way.

At the very centre of the commonality of Muslim and Jewish heritage — the burial site of the shared forebear Abraham; in the same city that witnessed one of the largest massacres of Jews half a century ago — in 1929; from this epicentre of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation new torrents of blood and despair have surged creating a huge wave of political fear.

This fear is clearly evident in Tunis and other regional capitals where the Arab establishment has accepted American demands for accommodation with Israel — everyone hoping against hope to somehow stabilise their own fragile claims to power and legitimacy.

For the castrated Palestinian leadership — today's remnants of what once was a widely supported Palestine Liberation Organisation — there is severe anxiety that Yasser Arafat and his group of supporters cannot maintain even minimal credibility and will find themselves pushed aside one way or another.

How ironic of course that over the past few years, since the eruption of the Intifada, the Labour-led "Peace Now" Israelis have come to fear such a prospect as much as the westernised, upper-class Palestinians with their close ties to the Jordanian and Gulf regimes.

How doubly ironic that in the Israeli

# THE MASSACRE

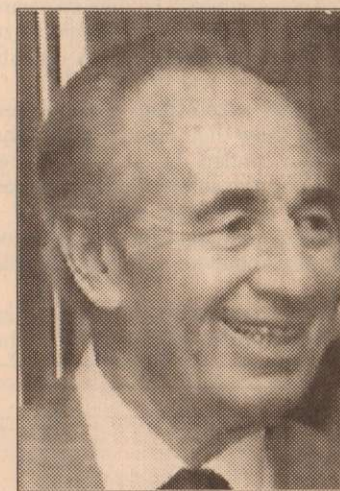
In the end all the post-massacre passions and gestures will go the same way of those from the days of Ben-Gurion of old

## and its aftermath of political fear



These two crafty Israeli politicians have learned over many decades the usefulness of occasionally clothing their expansionist and hegemonic aims in velvet rhetorical gloves. They are the masters of political deception. After

all, it was none other than Yitzhak Rabin, LEFT, and Shimon Peres, RIGHT, who learned at the very feet of David Ben-Gurion himself



capitulation. Only by accepting his role as the new Governor of Gaza under Israeli hegemony will he get what he now needs to keep his faction ascendant.

On the other hand Arafat's shrivelled band secretly welcomes further delay in actually taking charge in Gaza because they and their new Israeli-American allies have yet to establish the means of jointly policing Gaza in a way that will prevent a Palestinian civil war from erupting. New "joint" means of repression for all who stand in their way are being formulated; but Arafat is finding that he lacks credibility and authority to take charge as he

Already having signed away much of the Palestinian birthright in an attempt to assure his own survival; already having agreed with the Israelis to jointly "control" his own people in a kind of neo-Kapo fashion ironically so reminiscent of history in other places; another Arafat mask has been put on in recent days to capitalise on this latest twist of fate.

In the immediate wake of the Hebron massacre, with emotions exploding, it was the Arafat of old resorting to all kinds of posturing and sloganeering desperately

Israeli "Good Cop" with the Arabs. Yet all the while the Palestinians found themselves always facing further Israeli demands, further Israeli facts on the ground, further decimation and distortion of their own society.

Now in the 1990s there are the new Israeli "Good Cops" of Shimon Peres and his long-time aide Yossi Beilin, placating and soothing the Palestinians at every turn. Yet in reality, whatever the personal intentions of the "good guys", Israeli designs are actually to corral the natives onto "Indian Reservations" on which the Israeli army and the "Palestinian police" will ensure their compliance with Israel's definition of law and order.

For the Israelis, for the ruling Labour Party that finally managed to come back to power after some 15 years of either opposition or "unity" governments, they too tremendously fear being cast aside. The Likud remains a viable opposition. Thus the Americans, the rump PLO, and the key Arab regimes have to be kept donating politically — and under the table financially — to keep the Labour on top. And now the rump PLO is on Labour's team as well.

The recent gestures announced by Rabin attempting to smother the flames of the re-born Intifada are similar to those made many times before when the going got rough. They amount to little. They will soon fade.

A few settlers will be detained or disarmed; another commission will whitewash this latest massacre; a few prisoners who would have been released anyway in a few months will be let go; a few persons with international organisations will come and visit the oppressed as they would have anyway; the UN will pass another resolution or two of little consequence.

All the key issues, however, will remain unresolved. The basic Palestinian claim to independence and sovereignty will be denied. The imperative to cleanse Zionist history of its racist and bigoted past will be further obfuscated.

In the end all the post-massacre passions and gestures will go the same way of those from the days of Ben-Gurion of old. One set of images and words is presented to the Arabs and to the world another set of goals continues to be pursued and is further implemented on the ground

Back in Ben-Gurion's day the basic bat-



"The Israeli government tries to appease the PLO," was heard from NBC News the same evening Christopher spoke on Capitol Hill. On CBS, veteran reporter Bob Simon indicated that the "Israeli government is scrambling desperately to get the peace process back on track" and to get Arafat and his men back to the negotiating table. "But who will he represent when he gets there?" Simon concluded his insightful report.

Then on March 2, reporting from Palestinian towns, ABC's Dean Reynolds interviewed Israeli journalists all of whom insisted that "something" had to be done quickly to save "the peace process".

"That 'something'," Dean noted, "will have to shore up Palestinian confidence in Arafat as well.... Foreign Minister Peres stunned many Knesset members by praising Arafat as a man of courage, risking his life for peace. 'I want Arafat to be a partner leading his people to peace,' spoke Peres. 'We need to help this partner!' The government here is perfectly aware that Palestinian anger could consume Arafat," Reynolds concluded, "that without Arafat there is no peace process, and without a peace process the government itself may have no future."

So where are we after so much hatred, bloodshed and negotiations hype?

The sad realities about developments of the past year or so are that various Israeli governments have tried to give Gaza away for a long time. They finally found someone who was financially bankrupt and politically comatose willing to accept it in order to keep himself and his political faction alive.

And the Israelis even managed to get paid a far higher price than they had expected.

From Arafat came the historic recognition so psychologically crucial to the Zionists and imperative for Arab regimes dealing with Israel. From the Americans came even more political and military support. From the Europeans came pledges of money to pump into Palestinian slums and ghettos in an effort to trade economic trinkets for independence. From the American-sponsored regimes came promises of ending the boycott and regional cooperation. And from the world's press came an avalanche of complimentary commentary.

Yet Gaza was never really the issue.

What has really been under contest in the micro sense are the resources and the land — that is basic old-fashioned control and hegemony over Jerusalem and the territories known to some as the West Bank.

And in the macro sense what's really in contention is what role Israel will play in the region to "stabilise" the political-economic status quo, one which is so much to the advantage of the Americans — human rights and democracy be damned.

For the Palestinians living under Israel's brutal occupation, as opposed to those few Arafat appointees the Israelis meet with in fancy hotels, there has been no real progress at all. Nor are they looking forward to what's been promised — "joint" Palestinian police force and Israeli army administration.

In the occupied territories today life is worse than ever for the nearly two million or so Palestinian "inhabitants". And for the 150,000 Israeli "settlers" as well.

And it is in these places that the seeds of future massacres, each of the other, are still growing strong.

How doubly ironic that in the squalid Palestinian refugee camps that still litter the Mid-east landscape, such a prospect of Arafat's political demise now brings chants of glee!

Arafat and his largely self-appointed officials that comprise today's rump PLO have consequently seized on the Hebron massacre for more of their manipulations. They have allowed themselves to be caught in a terrible muddle.

On the one hand they want the so-called "peace process" to resume because they desperately need the money, as well as the guns, they have been promised. Only by marching forward to the joint American-Israeli music will Arafat get the fruits of his

pretending to stand up to the Israelis with demands all know he will soon conveniently forget.

Just as history has repeated itself now in Hebron, today's diplomacy as well is so reminiscent of what has gone before.

In the 1940s there was Ben-Gurion himself promising the Palestinian negotiators of his day — including Auni Abdul Hadi heading the Istiklal, the Independence, Party — that the Jews had no intention of setting up an independent Jewish state and disenfranchising the Palestinians. But behind-the-scenes that is exactly what Ben-Gurion was doing.

In the 1950s there was Moshe Sharrett, then taking his turn at playing the role of

A half century of Labour Party history makes it quite clear that neither Rabin nor Peres have any true intention of accepting the claim of Palestinian nationalism to independence and statehood anywhere West of the Jordan. They are in fact manoeuvring more to bury the Palestinian claims with Jordanian sovereignty; eventually expecting an end to Hashemite rule in Amman or optionally real civil war that decimates the Palestinians once and for all.

These two crafty Israeli politicians have learned over many decades the usefulness of occasionally clothing their expansionist and hegemonic aims in velvet rhetorical gloves. They are the masters of political deception.

He was to deceive the Arabs while the Jewish army grew stronger so that a Jewish nationality could be forced on them.

Today the slogans are about "autonomy" with illusive promises that more negotiations are to come. Yet all the while Palestinian society is crumbling, the Arab World remains impotent, and the status of Indian Reservations or Bantustans is becoming all the more apparent for those who remain in what was Palestine.

After all, it was none other than Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres who learned at the very feet of Ben-Gurion himself.

And truth be told Yasser Arafat and his cabal of largely corrupt and inept followers is surely no match for them.

## Afghan fighting and it's impact on Pakistan

**L**AST WEEK'S EVENTS IN KABUL took an ugly turn when Pakistan became a victim of Afghan ire over a bus hijacking incident in Pakistan which involved three Afghan hijackers. This incident has adversely affected relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in a manner which is unprecedented ever since the induction of the Mujahideen government in Kabul almost two years ago.

On February 21, a school bus was hijacked from Peshawar carrying 40 schoolchildren who were in the grip of three armed Afghan hijackers. They commandeered the bus from Peshawar to Islamabad crossing the 160 kilometres distance rather smoothly and landed the bus at the Afghan embassy in Islamabad. Their demand was \$5 million in cash which they said would be needed to buy grains for Afghanistan. Although Pakistan has already dispatched several dozen trucks of grain as part of humanitarian food supplies to Afghanistan, the entire hijacking drama involving schoolchildren evoked a negative reaction among Pakistanis.

On February 24, the commandos of the Pakistan army stormed the Afghan embassy and shot dead the three Afghan hijackers. While the hostage schoolchildren were rescued without any casualties, the killing of three Afghan hijackers evoked a strong reaction in Kabul where demonstrators ransacked the Pakistan embassy.

The Pakistani mission was attacked the same day when Pakistan's Foreign Minister Asef Ahmad Ali was visiting Kabul and in the aftermath of the ransacking, Pakistan also demanded compensation for the losses that had been incurred.

The embassy was closed down by the government in Islamabad on the plea that "until and unless the Kabul authorities can guarantee the security of the Pakistan embassy, the Pakistan mission would remain closed". The Afghan authorities are said to have offered to hand over the old British embassy compound in Kabul to the Pakistan embassy.

Pakistan's plea was that the hijackers'

**Mushahid Hussain**

**VIEW FROM ISLAMABAD**

past with permission to stay temporarily in Pakistan. About 10,000 Tajik refugees are already in Pakistan having fled the fighting in Tajikistan.

Under a tripartite agreement between Iran, Pakistan and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, about 100,000 Iran-based Afghan refugees will be voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan via the Pakistani city of Quetta. Their return is being organised via Pakistan since this route is logistically safer and convenient than a direct route between Iran and Afghanistan.

On the political front, a special cabinet committee in Kabul is seeking to promote some solution towards a political settlement and among these proposals are convening a meeting of a consultative council in time for the second anniversary of the establishment of the "Mujahideen government" in Kabul on April 28.

The events of the last one week have potentially three major implications. First, the cordiality and camaraderie that has marked Pakistan's relations with the Mujahideen government of Afghanistan is undermined by the bus hijacking incident and its aftermath, with the Afghan

authorities saying that the hijackers should not have been killed and Pakistan saying that the mob attack on the Pakistan embassy in Kabul should have been prevented. The last time a Pakistani mission was attacked in Kabul was during the days of former king Zahir Shah in 1960. Already Pakistan has enforced strict border controls with Afghanistan with the influx of Afghan refugees totally stopped and only Afghans with visas allowed entry into Pakistan.

The second implication which has potential in the aftermath of last week's events, pertain to the presence of approximately two million Afghan refugees on Pakistani territory and there could have simmering hostility between the refugees and the local population. Both sides are also seeking to ensure that this does not happen.

Finally, fighting in Kabul and unrest in Tajikistan which now involves Afghanistan and Pakistan by extension, has the potential to retard plans for cooperation among the Central Asian states and the other members of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) like Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey.

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