

EIRFeature

Revive Ben-Gurion's Legacy To Defeat Saboteurs of Peace

by Harley Schlanger

Within weeks after the handshake in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 13, 1993, which sealed the Oslo peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Lyndon LaRouche wrote that, for peace to be realized, the economic annexes of the accord must be implemented immediately. The key to peace, he said, is to “get the earth moving at once,” digging the canals, building the Port at Gaza, constructing the water, energy, and industrial projects, etc., specified by the agreement.

LaRouche, who had been involved in organizing for infrastructural development as the basis for a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East, with his “Oasis Plan,” for more than two decades, warned of the consequences of failure to proceed with this approach: “For years, our proposals for economic development have been repeatedly brushed aside, with the advice that the political settlement must come first, and then economic cooperation for general development in the region might become possible. We have repeatedly said, and rightly so, that that line of argument is wrong, and even dangerously absurd. The simple reason is, that without a policy of economic development, the Arabs and Israelis have no common basis for political agreement. . . . Unless you start with an economic development package, based on infrastructural development of the Middle East, any attempt at a political solution of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis, particularly between Palestinians and Israelis, will fail.”

The sabotage of this perspective—a program for mutual development which is explicitly written into the Oslo Accord—is directly responsible for the explosion of violence in the region in recent weeks, and completely confirms LaRouche’s warning. It is accurate to say that Clinton “blew it” at Camp David, with his rejection of LaRouche’s advice, and by insisting that the religious issue of control over Jerusalem take precedence over forging ahead with the stalled development perspective.

What was clear to LaRouche in September 1993, was that the strategic thinking



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (right) shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, at the Sept. 13, 1993 signing of the agreement on Palestinian autonomy in the Occupied Territories, one of the Oslo Accords. Rabin hailed “those with the courage to change axioms.” Today, with the breakdown of the peace process, such courage is needed more than ever, in the tradition of the late David Ben-Gurion.

embodied in the Oslo Accord represented a profound break with the outlook that had dominated Israel’s policy following its stunning victory in the 1967 war. In that war, Israel conquered the West Bank, Gaza, and the parts of Jerusalem that had been previously under Jordanian sovereignty.

It is control over this territory which has been at the heart of the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians since 1967. Successive governments of Israel allowed the construction of Jewish settlements on this land, settlements increasingly populated by fanatic believers in “Greater Israel,” a blood-and-soil cult which claimed every grain of sand as a “holy birthright” of the Jewish people.

When the Intifada broke out in 1987, as a revolt against continued Israeli occupation, the reaction of the government was to suppress it, through application of brute force, using tanks and automatic weapons to crush youths armed with stones. The man chosen to break the back of the revolt was Gen. Yitzhak Rabin.

It was this experience, using the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) against unarmed youth, which caused Rabin to question the accepted view, that Israel must retain control over this territory for “security reasons.” His wife, Leah Rabin, wrote in her touching memoir, *Rabin: Our Life, His Legacy*, that the brutality employed against the Intifada “made it wholly clear to Yitzhak that Israel could not govern another people.” He feared that violent suppression of the rebellion would permanently embitter the Palestinians, while turning

Israeli youths into stormtroopers, ending any hope for future peace. By 1989, she reports, he “was gradually moving toward advocating Palestinian autonomy and self-determination.”

Oslo: A Change of Axioms

When presenting his Cabinet to the Knesset (parliament) on July 3, 1992, Rabin was explicit that he had decided upon a different direction for Israel. “We shall change the national order of priorities,” he said. “Israel is no longer necessarily an isolated nation, nor is it correct that the entire world is against us. We must rid ourselves of the isolation that has gripped us almost for half a century.”

It was this change in direction, to break out of a self-imposed ghetto, which led to the secret talks in Oslo, which resulted in the peace agreement. And it was this change that was the subject of Rabin’s toast in the White House, following the formal ceremony signing the Accords, when he said, “We lift our glasses to honor those with the courage to change axioms.”

As the ground-breaking reports on the following pages demonstrate, this course adopted by Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, breaking with the post-1967 policy of occupation of the West Bank, etc., put Israel back on the course envisioned by its most important Founding Father, David Ben-Gurion, and opened the door to a dialogue with Yasser Arafat.

For Ben-Gurion, Israel was to be a model of anti-colonial development, a nation which could achieve peace with its neighbors based on the principles of ecumenical dialogue that were advanced in the writings of the great Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), and his close collaborator, Gotthold Lessing (1729-81).

Mendelssohn and Lessing realized that an ecumenical “peace among the faiths” would come, not from debate on religious principles, but from establishing a community of principle among sovereign nation-states, which promotes mutual economic development. This principle of statecraft was the lesson they learned from studying the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the devastation of 30 years of religious wars in Europe.

It was this collaboration which opened the door for the Emanicipation of the Jews of Germany, both from the anti-Semitic laws of the time, and from the self-isolation imposed by fearful and superstitious leaders in the Jewish ghettos.

Economic Protocols of Oslo

The treaty negotiated by representatives of the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Oslo was based on this principle of statecraft, centered on economic development. The primary author, from the Israeli side, was Shimon Peres, a protégé of Ben-Gurion. Though Peres and Rabin had been bitter, longtime rivals for leadership of the Labor Party, the two recognized that the best hope for ending the Intifada and achieving peace depended on their collaboration.

In *The New Middle East*, a book written by Peres shortly after the Oslo Accords, he reports that his conclusion that peace depended on mutual economic cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors was inspired, in part, by an encounter in the early 1950s with Jean Monnet, the architect of the European Common Market. “The Middle East needs a Jean Monnet approach today,” he wrote.¹

In this book, Peres sets forth a three-stage approach to overcome the obstacles to peace. First, there must be “bi-national or multinational projects, such as a joint research institute for desert management or cooperative desalination plants.”

Second, he proposed the establishment of international consortiums to carry out projects requiring large capital investments, such as “a Red Sea-Dead Sea canal . . . a joint Israeli-Jordanian-Saudi Arabian port; development of hydro-electric power for electricity and desalination; well-planned, rapid development of Dead Sea industries. When these projects are completed, they will fulfill Ben-Gurion’s dream of developing the Negev [Desert], opening new horizons for countries of the region and creating real interest in preserving the peace.”

1. For Monnet’s policy, see Jacques Cheminade, “FDR and Jean Monnet: The Battle vs. British Imperial Methods Can Be Won,” *EIR*, June 16, 2000.

The third area would then be what he called “regional community policy.”

This outline, which was largely adopted in the Economic Protocols of Oslo, directly reflects, as he notes, the conceptions of David Ben-Gurion. A focus on “water, biotechnology and the war against the desert” must be adopted, he wrote, one which “aims to paint the desert green, to supply abundant food for its many inhabitants.” By adopting this course, Peres stated that it were possible to “take the salt from the sea, the sand from the desert, and the hatred from the heart.”

The Israelis discovered, at Oslo, that Arafat’s representatives shared this outlook. Uri Savir, who was appointed by Peres to serve as chief negotiator for Israel at Oslo, reports in his book, *The Process: 1100 Days that Changed the Middle East*, that Abu Ala, Arafat’s chief negotiator, emphasized that “Palestinian-Israeli cooperation, mainly in the economic field,” should be at the center of their talks.

In their first meeting, Abu Ala spoke of “encouraging the creation of a Marshall Plan for the Middle East; developing our economies, so that we [Palestinians] can open the doors to the Arab world to you and to freedom to ourselves.” Savir writes, “I was surprised by the degree of Palestinian interest in economic ties with Israel. They saw such cooperation not just as beneficial to their economy but as a bridge to regional development.”

Immediately following the handshake at the White House in September 1993, Peres met with Abu Mazen, a top aide to Arafat, and they agreed “to focus on the key issue of economic development in the territories.” The government of Norway had agreed to set up a mechanism to fund this development, which led to the convening in Washington, on Oct. 1, of a “Donors’ Conference,” at which \$2.5 billion in grants and loans was pledged.

The money was never delivered, due to sabotage by a combination of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which was never challenged—at least publicly—by President Clinton. Without the development aid, the earth was not moved, the projects remained on the books, and the frustration of the Palestinians grew, as their already-poor economic conditions worsened.

As Savir laments in his book, “Unfortunately, economic cooperation, which had been so prominent in our thinking at the start of the talks, would be overshadowed by security concerns and political considerations for the Palestinians and for us.”

The hopes raised by Oslo were not realized, the promises were never met, and momentum switched from those committed to building two nations to spur the establishment of a Middle Eastern Common Market, to fanatics prepared to kill for what they believed was “their” religion. Once again, the Grand Design envisioned by a David Ben-Gurion whose thinking was shaped by the ideas of Moses Mendelssohn, is on the verge of being washed away in a sea of blood.