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# TERRORISM AND THE PLO: SEPTEMBER 13 PLUS SEVEN MONTHS

By Bernard Smith

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## I

On September 9, 1993, the prime minister of Israel recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the "representative of the Palestinian people" and agreed to "commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process."(1) This act, considered unthinkable by previous governments, was based on, among other things, PLO willingness to renounce violence as a means of achieving political aims.(2) Seven months later, it is necessary to review what was repudiated, by whom, and whether commitments have been fulfilled. Was the Rabin government justified in legitimizing the PLO?

In his September 9, 1993 letter to Prime Minister Rabin, the chairman of the PLO stated

The PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators.

...[T]he PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the PLO undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant.

These words, written to the Israeli people, are unambiguous. Arafat committed himself and the leadership to end all violence by the PLO. Such acts may not be carried out against anyone: Israelis or Arabs in Israel or in the administered territories or foreign nationals in any part of the world. By using the initials PLO, Arafat binds *all* segments of the organization and assumes responsibility for *all* factions and individuals within the PLO. He states that the leadership will act to interdict acts of violence and punish offenders.

From the beginning, it was understood that the initial declaration of cessation of PLO terror was not sufficient. Therefore, Arafat made renunciation a repetitive process. In a letter to Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst, dated September 9, 1993, Arafat stated

... I will include the following positions in my public statements:

...[T]he PLO encourages and calls upon the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to take part in the steps leading to the normalization of life, rejecting violence and terrorism, contributing to peace and stability...

Arafat, as the leader of the organization recognized by the Rabin government to be the "representative of the Palestinian people," is to continually demand of his constituents that they put down the gun, rock, knife, and petrol bomb. They are to end the *intifada*. Arafat's words can be interpreted in no other way.(3)

Oct 29	PLO (Fatah)	Haim Mizrachi stabbed to death and body burned. Terrorists are members of police force to be established by PLO	near Beit El
Nov 1	Hamas member Islamic Jihad involvement	Israeli businessman stabbed in back and hand	Erez industry zone, Gaza
Nov 6	PLO (Fatah)	roadside bombs defused, no injuries	Gush Katif, Gaza
Nov 7	Hamas	Ephraim Ayubi shot to death	near Hebron
Nov 9	not known	Al Hawashla Suliman, Israeli Arab killed	Gaza
Nov 13	not known	IDF soldier stabbed in back	Jerusalem
Nov 13	not known	Israeli stabbed	Gaza
Nov 17	Islamic Jihad	IDF sergeant Haim Drina stabbed to death	Gaza
Nov 24	not known	terrorist blown up by his own roadside bomb	Hebron
Nov 27	Hamas	police officer stabbed in neck and hand	Erez industry zone, Gaza
Nov 27	Hamas	Israeli civilian stabbed in chest and hands	Erez industry zone, Gaza
Nov 27	PLO (PFLP)	2 terrorists strike Israeli civilian in head with axes - surgery needed	Hebron
Nov 28	PLO (Fatah)	explosives used to injure 3 border policemen	Khan Yunis, Gaza
Dec 1	Hamas	Shalva Ozana shot to death from passing car	near Ramallah
Dec 2	Hamas	Yitzhak Weinstock dies of near wounds received on previous day	Ramallah
Dec 5	Islamic Jihad	Reservist David Misrati killed by terrorist on bus	Holon junction
Dec 6	Hamas	father and son Mordechai and Shalom Lapid shot to death in their car	Hebron district
Dec 9	PLO (PFLP)	Israeli shot in stomach and intestines - undergoes 4-hour operation	Bethlehem
Dec 10	PLO (Fatah)	Zvi Fixler of Gan Or in Gaza stabbed and moderately wounded	-
Dec 10	not known	18-year old Israeli woman stabbed	Gush Katif, Gaza
Dec 11	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	fire shots at IDF patrol	Gaza
Dec 13	not known	Israeli shot and seriously wounded	near Hebron
Dec 14	Islamic Jihad	Suicide bomber injures 3 IDF reservists	Gaza

Feb 3	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	fire at IDF post	Khan Yunis
Feb 5	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	automatic rifles fired at Israeli police station	Gaza
Feb 13	Hamas	Noam Cohen, Shabak (General Security Services) agent, shot from ambush and killed	north of Jerusalem
Feb 16	not known	man's skull fractured by ax	-
Feb 16	PLO (Fatah)	terrorist armed with knives who wanted to stab Jews arrested	Hadera
Feb 17	PLO (Fatah)	Yuval Golan, stabbed on Dec 29, dies of his wounds	Hebron dist.
Feb 19	Hamas	Tsipora Sasson, 5 months pregnant, shot to death	road to Ariel
Feb 21	not known	man suffers abdominal wounds in stabbing	moshav near Ramle
Feb 23	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	attempt to run down a border policeman	Gaza
Feb 24	possibly PLO (DFLP)	DFLP claimed responsibility for 4 attacks on soldiers	Gaza Strip
Feb 25	not known	woman injured in head (temple) by rock while driving	near Ramallah
Mar 7	PLO (DFLP)	attack on 2 Israelis	Gaza
Mar 7	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	murder suspected Arab informer	Gaza
Mar 22	not known	3 wounded in shooting attack on bus - woman hit in back and lung	between Ariel and Ramallah
Mar 25	PLO (DFLP)	infiltration attempt from Lebanon foiled when IDF captures terrorist in security zone - aim was to take hostages	Lebanon
Mar 30	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	Isaac Rotenberg axed to death by 2 Gazans at work site - murder committed to enable 2 terrorists to join Fatah Hawks	Petah Tikva
Apr 1	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	fired on soldiers	Gaza
Apr 1	not known	Israeli civilian strangled and stabbed to death	near Gedera
Apr 1	not known	border policeman injured in rock throwing	north of Jerusalem
Apr 1	not known	2 tourists, mother and daughter, injured by rocks - mother is unconscious and in serious condition in neurological intensive care	Kalkilya
Apr 3	PLO (Fatah Hawks)	bomber blown up when bomb explodes prematurely	Khan Yunis refugee camp
Apr 3	probably PLO (Fatah Hawks)	murder suspected Arab collaborator	Jabalya refugee camp

attacks against Israelis. At the same time, IDF coordinator of activities in the territories, Major-General Danny Rothschild noted that violence had lessened.(7) A month later, IDF Brigadier-General Shmuel Arad presented statistics showing a drop in attacks and demonstrations on both sides of the Green Line.(8)

Three weeks after Arad's report, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres produced statistics showing how significantly terror had fallen off since the Washington signing. "We know that Fatah was responsible for 50% of the terror attacks against us," Peres declared. "But since the signing, it has stopped all attacks and terror has declined by 50 percent...."(9)

However, within a few days of Peres' disclosure, General Arad reversed himself, stating, according to an *International Jerusalem Post* editorial, that violence in Judea, Samaria and Gaza was about the same as before September 13. The *Post* editorial provided the figures showing 120 terrorist attacks in Judea-Samaria during the past seven weeks compared with 114 in the seven weeks preceding the agreement. For Gaza, the figures were 91 before and 79 after, a drop of 13%. "Lesser disturbances" numbered 1,864 "incidents of disorder" in Judea-Samaria following the agreement and 1,766 in a comparable preceding period. In Gaza, the figures were 179 after and 249 before,(10) a difference of 28%

More recently, the head of IDF forces in Judea-Samaria, Major-General Shaul Mofaz, testified before the Shamgar Commission that dating from September 13, 1993, terrorist activity showed a sharp increase. He stated, "There has been an increase in the threat [to Jews], and particularly the threat of terror, since the signing of the Declaration of Principles."(11)

According to the November 8 *Post* editorial mentioned above, Prime Minister Rabin stated that the PLO was responsible for no terrorist incident since September 13. Taken together with Foreign Minister Peres' statement about Fatah, there is no doubt that the government was not telling the public the truth. Both officials had to have known that the PLO was already involved in five incidents of terror, including the Ramat Rachel mining, the Wadi Kelt murders and the attempted PFLP infiltration by sea, all highly publicized. Of the five actions, Fatah was already known to have carried out two. (The Fatah connection to the murder of Haim Mizrahi came to light after the Peres and Rabin statements. However, the other actions by Fatah members were public knowledge before Peres claimed Fatah was no longer involved in terror.)

The Peres statement signaled a turn in government thinking, or more precisely, government disinformation. There was no doubt that many factions of the PLO were still engaging in acts of terrorism. A way had to be found to disassociate Arafat, the head of the PLO, a reformed organization ready to coexist with Israel, from the violence being perpetrated by that very organization. The government's simplistic solution was to label as an enemy of peace all those who committed acts of violence. Since Arafat and the PLO leadership were working for peace, these elements were Arafat's opponents as well, and he ceased being responsible for them. Prime Minister Rabin told the American television program "Good Morning America"

We don't hold Arafat responsible for the Palestinians who oppose the agreement

However, despite his pledge to Holst to "include [calls to 'the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to reject violence and terrorism'] in my public statements," Arafat has done no such thing. Nor has any such encouragement come from other PLO leaders.

Contrary to its obligation, the leadership does not condemn acts of violence with but one notable exception. The Fatah murder of Haim Mizrahi became such a public embarrassment for Mr. Rabin that both he and United States President Bill Clinton demanded that Arafat issue a condemnation. Rabin went so far as to warn the PLO chairman that "there is no taste for coming to additional agreements [with someone who] doesn't stand by [his commitments]." (18)

Only under intense pressure and after senior aides to the prime minister spoke throughout the night with PLO officials did Arafat condemn this one killing, adding, "This individual operation was carried out without the knowledge of the leadership." (19) So weak was this denunciation, issued by fax through a news agency, that Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur admonished the PLO leader. "Mr. Arafat has to speak himself, with his own words and tell his people directly to stop any terrorist activity," Gur declared. "It's time for him as a leader to speak clearly and loudly and explicitly." Gur told Israel Radio, "Arafat committed himself as head of Fatah (sic) to end terrorism. It was the number one condition for the agreement, and for now, he is not fulfilling this condition." (20) Gur's words had no effect.

Arafat is determined not to censure terror against Israelis. On April 6, 1944, a car bomber detonated explosives at a bus stop in an Israeli town, killing and burning adults and schoolchildren. The PLO, not directly but again through a news agency, expressed "its regrets for the incident" and offered "condolences to the families of the civilian victims." To date, no condemnation of this savage act was issued, even after the United States and Israel expressed dissatisfaction with the message and called for Arafat to condemn the killings. (21)

When a Fatah leader condemned the murder of an Israeli following the Washington signing, the organization was quick to deny that any such statement was made and branded the announcement of it a slander. (22)

Nor does Arafat seek to punish terrorists. At least publicly, there is no knowledge of a pattern of punishment - be it as mild as a censure or a stronger reaction such as a trial - to which PLO terrorists are subjected. (23)

In accordance with his letter to Prime Minister Rabin, the PLO chairman was to bring before the Palestinian National Council for its approval the cancellation of articles in the "Palestinian National Covenant" which call for violence. His continued failure to fulfill this obligation can only encourage terrorism.

Chairman Arafat and the PLO leadership have certainly not discouraged terrorism. On the contrary, there are numerous statements which ensure its perpetuation.

maimed and injured by groups within the PLO using assault rifles, handguns, car bombs, Molotov cocktails, hand grenades, land mines, knives, axes, concrete blocks and rocks. Fatah alone is responsible for 110 rock-throwing incidents from September 13 to mid-December.(31) These incidents result in death and severe injury. Terrorism takes place on both sides of the Green Line against civilians and security forces.

Arafat and the PLO leadership and representatives have done almost nothing to inhibit or punish terror. Arafat has failed to continuously order or even encourage cessation as he obligated himself to do. If anything, he has encouraged the continuation of the *intifada*. Other PLO leaders have also given impetus to violence.

The Israeli government, which must hold power or fall on the basis of peace treaties with the Arabs, looks the other way. In an effort to divert the attention of the Israeli public from any PLO guilt for its subjection to terror, the government does everything possible to blame "forces opposed to peace" instead of the PLO. It has lifted Arafat's self-proclaimed responsibility for "all PLO elements and personnel" - even among his own Fatah faction - as soon as they are found to be involved in terror. It has not insisted that Arafat carry out his pledges. It does not even demand that he condemn acts of violence committed by those he really cannot control, such as Hamas.

Following the April 6, 1994 massacre committed by a Hamas suicide bomber in the town of Afula, Foreign Minister Peres was asked if Israel will call on Arafat to condemn the act. Peres hesitated and then responded that it wouldn't make any difference. In his statement, Peres repeated the Hamas linking of the Afula bombing with the Hebron massacre, indicating that Israel will continue to pay the price for the Hebron murders.(32) It will come as no surprise if following another mass killing by an Arab terrorist, the government ties Arab terror to Hebron as if such terror started with the Hebron incident.

Unless forced to do so under the pressure of a nation enraged by terrorist acts, the Israeli government will under no circumstances call Yasser Arafat to account. It simply is not politically expedient.

Evidence proving that the PLO has not given up terror continues to mount. Nor is it willing to condemn any Arab violence against Israelis. The question of whether Yasser Arafat is directing its use, is unable to control constituent groups or merely makes use of the terrorism of PLO elements and Islamic groups is, in a practical way, irrelevant. Rabin's recognition of the PLO and negotiations with it were based on cessation of violence - in Arafat's words, control over and responsibility for his people. At this date, it is apparent the government made a bad choice.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Letter from Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to Yasser Arafat, September 9, 1993.
2. See, for example, statement by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, *Jerusalem*

18. *The New York Times*, November 13 and 14, 1993.

19. *Ibid.* PW states that it "learned from sources within the Fatah leadership in the West Bank that various members of Fatah chain of command in the West Bank, including the head of Fatah's undercover military operations in the Ramallah district, who holds a rank equivalent to that of a colonel in the Fatah military hierarchy, were informed beforehand that the attack was going to take place, but took no action to stop the murderers or inform the local authorities." (PW, p. 24).

20. *The New York Times*, November 15, 1993; *International Jerusalem Post*, November 27, 1993. Here, Gur makes a telling mistake. Arafat as chairman of the PLO, not as head of Fatah, committed himself to end terror.

21. JP, April 7, 1994. Even the European Union found it necessary to urge Arafat to condemn the Afula car bombing. (JP, April 10, 1994.)

22. Zeev Begin, "Arafat still wears a gun on his hip," *International Jerusalem Post*, November 20, 1993.

23. PW, p. 40-43.

24. *Ma'ariv*, November 24, 1993 cited in PW, p. 37.

25. JP, February 16, 1994.

26. JP, March 16, 1994.

27. PW, p. 42.

28. JP, March 21, 1994.

29. Cited in PW, p. 57.

30. Wafa, January 8, 1994 cited in PW, p. 57.

31. IDF statistics cited by PW, p. 31.

32. Kol Yisrael, in English, April 6, 1994, 1800 hours.