

Reflections on Three Decades of the Oslo Accords

BY DAVID WURMSER



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The Oslo Accords were signed three decades ago on September 13, 1993. While the anniversary of the attempt to resolve the particular Israeli-Palestinian Arab aspect of the much larger Arab-Israeli dispute passed almost unnoticed in the United States, it garnered considerable attention in Israel. The tone of the anniversary was, however, neither a festive moment of nostalgia nor a celebration of progress. It was almost universally marked in Israel as a sort of autopsy of a catastrophe.

Israel had good reason to broach the issue with bitter reflection. The dream of peace had yielded to the nightmare of death as thousands of Israelis and even more Palestinian Arabs died in terror attacks and war. The hope for prosperity instead had transformed into the burden of increased defense spending as Israel developed and bought anti-missile systems and faced periodic national shutdowns (and material damage)

due to wars every two or three years.

The political consequences of Oslo have also been significant. The violence and constant tensions have rendered the Israeli left, which birthed the Oslo Accords, largely unelectable. Moreover, the reflections and self-critique in Israel over the deal's consequences have also ranged increasingly into analyses of the behavior of the government caused by the Oslo Accords. Parliamentary approval for Oslo II had been obtained by bribing a small party with ministerial portfolios, and the distortions of the governance and public debate it engendered has loomed larger by the year. The publicly available information about the bad faith approach the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) carried into the agreement was suppressed in both internal government structures, intelligence, and in the press, impugning the reputation of both.

There is little to add to the volumes of commentary within Israel about the deleterious impact of the agreement internally to Israel and externally to the

region. But there has been almost nothing written – either in Israel or the United States -- discussing the impact of the agreement on geopolitics and global political trends. Yet, it is perhaps that area in which the greatest damage was done by the Oslo Accords not only to Israel, but far beyond.

Overview

After the 1967 war, Israel inherited Arab refugees living in Judea and Samaria and Gaza, that had previously been living under Egyptian and Jordanian control. Israel offered to return land in exchange for a peace treaty, but at the Khartoum Arab summit, the Arab countries collectively refused and countered with the famous three “noes”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel. And to emphasize the point, Egypt and Syria soon thereafter launched the War of Attrition – a lower intensity war that lasted for three years until the ceasefire of August 1970.

While Israel and much of the rest of the world considered the basic question of 1948 – whether the Arabs (and refugees) living within or fleeing all the areas on which Israel emerged possess a superior claim to the whole land within the 1922 Mandate, thus negating any right of Jewish people to establish their resurrected nation – resolved and Israel’s right to exist in at least part of the land accepted, the Six Days War in 1967 left an acute, practical problem unresolved. As a result of the 1967 war, Israel inherited the remaining territory allocated to the 1921 Mandate to which it was entitled, it also inherited a large Arab population– in fact too large to annex and still remain demographically viable yet also a democracy of all those who lived under its control. So, while the “problem” of 1948 had become moot and Israel’s legitimacy broadly accepted, especially throughout

the West, the “problem” of 1967 was born. Namely, what to do practically about Israel’s having a large Arab population which cannot be digested in an area that cannot be safely surrendered by Israel (and to which Israel, and no other sovereign, had a right to claim).

In October 1973, Israel was surprised by an Egyptian-Syrian attack launched on Judaism’s holiest day, Yom Kippur, when Israelis were in synagogues, fasting and the reserve strength of the Israeli military had been kept to a barebone minimum. Israel not only survived, but in the end won, reaching within 12 miles of Damascus and 66 miles of Cairo with almost no Egyptian or Syrian forces between the IDF and those capitals. But the cost was immense for Israel: almost 2700 dead, many captured as prisoners of war and tortured, and many thousands more wounded. For a nation of three million, it was devastating burden that left no family untouched and no network of people unscarred. But even more costly was the damage wrought on Israel’s self-confidence. The power of the Israeli army no longer seemed sufficient to guarantee peace, the nation collectively depressed, and some wondered if even if would survive in the long term. The confidence that Israeli parents had after 1967 that their young children will not have to fight to survive in war as they had was shattered. Nothing captured the Israeli national mood, and highlights how deeply driven the Israelis were in this period from 1973 until 1993 (the eve of the Oslo Accords) for any possible solution, even grasping at straws, than the lyrics of a wildly popular song written in 1994 – “the Children of Winter 1973”:

“We are the children of winter 1973

You dreamt us first at dawn at the end
of the battles

You were tired men, grateful for their
good luck

You were worried young women and
you so wanted to love

When you conceived us with love in
winter 1973, you wanted to fill up with
your bodies that what the war had
taken away

When we were born, the country was
wounded and sad

You looked at us you hugged us, you
were trying to find solace

When we were born, the elders blessed
us with tears in their eyes

They said: “May these children never
have to go to the army.”

And your faces in the old picture prove
that you said it from the bottom of
your hearts When you promised to do
everything for us

To turn an enemy into a loved one

You promised a dove, an olive tree leaf,
you promised peace

You promised spring and blossoms

You promised to fulfill promises, you
promised a dove

We are the children of winter 1973

We grew up, and now we're in the
army with a weapon and a helmet on
our heads

We know how to make love

We laugh and cry

We are men we are women

and we too dream about babies

This is why we will not pressure you, or
makes demands of

you, or threaten you

When we were young you said one
needs to keep promises

If necessary, we will give you the
strength

We will not hold back; we just wanted
to whisper -

“We are the children of that winter in
the year 1973”¹

Added to this national disaster was also a political shift. Coinciding with the shock and aftermath of the 1973 War, Israel's Labor Party, which had ruled the state unopposed since its creation, lost the elections and control over parliament in 1977. The socialist ideology which had animated the party and around which the state had been organized had run its course and was increasingly rejected. Israelis were becoming the vanguard of the post-socialist era emerging. Moreover, the arrogance of the socialist Labor Party's leadership was seen as responsible for the calamity of the 1973, and it had also been seen increasingly elitist and out of touch with the common man, especially the more traditional and Sephardi (Oriental) Jewish communities. In terms of demographic trends among Israeli Jews, the Sephardi were becoming a majority and were only likely to become more so, adding to the woes of the Labor Party. Essentially, the Labor Party had not only lost the election of 1977, but it was seen to be becoming increasingly unelectable, especially since its informing socialist ideology was a dead horse on which to ride. As such, the party and the elites around which it was organized retreated into

an ideology of “delivering peace,” as well as began to invest greater power in the unelected branches of the Israeli state, such as the judiciary. At any rate, the Israeli Labor Party, which still defined the left at that time, understood the possibility of delivering a peace treaty to be a path to salvation.

Adding insult to injury to the Labor Party’s misfortune, however, in 1978, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the leader of the anti-Socialist Likud Party, established the “Framework for Peace in the Middle East” which established peace between Israel and Egypt, but also called for an autonomous Palestinian entity in Gaza, Judea and Samaria. The peace treaty, called “the Camp David agreement” was criticized by other Arabs because the negotiations that led to it did not include representatives from the Palestinians. Israel’s concessions on the Palestinian issue, however, were born of a important shift: the issue to be resolved was no longer the problem of 1948 (should Israel exist), but focused instead on the problem of 1967 (what to do about the Judean, Samaritan and Gazan Arabs that lived under Israeli control).

Still, from the time of Israel’s creation the concept remained that the conflict was primarily an Arab-Israeli conflict whose resolution would be a general Arab-Israeli peace that would then open the door to resolving amicably the problem of Arabs that had fled Israel in 1948 (by absorption in place) and those living under Israeli control (through territorial withdrawals or forms of autonomous rule, or both).

Israel throughout the 1980s embarked on several plans to grant greater local autonomy to Arabs living in the territories which Israel had captured in 1967 -- such as village leagues, local elections, granting Jordan significant administrative roles, etc., ... -- but

these efforts were often plagued by the intrusion of outside powers (such as radical Arab neighbors, the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1979, and the Soviet Union as well). The instrument of choice to sabotage these attempts at local governance and kill those that cooperated with the Israelis in any was the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which had been created by the Soviet’s KGB in 1964 as part of the effort to align its attempts to delegitimize Israel as a foreign colonial entity marked for elimination with its broader effort to seize the mantle of a global anti-colonial campaign. As such, the PLO was entirely defined not around the problems of 1967 – indeed it was formed three years before the 1967 War – but around relitigating the verdict of 1948. Similarly, for Nasser, the PLO was an instrument to extend his tentacles of power into other Arab states as part of the Arab “Cold War” between traditional elites and monarchies and revolutionary, pro-Soviet Arab nationalist regimes. The living conditions of Arabs under Israeli control had no role in the PLO’s *raison d’eter*; its utility to its creators was entirely as a negation of Israel in concept.

And as a Soviet-moored organization serving a Soviet strategic goal, it could be none other than focused on Israel’s destruction since its main aim was to attack the West as evil colonialists and the West’s allies as artificial colonies. As such, the conflict was subtly transformed from an Arab-Israeli conflict, which can be resolved by peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, to an Israeli-Palestinian (Arab) conflict, which can only be resolved by replacing “colonialist” Israel with “indigenous” Palestine.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Arab nationalism as well as the orphaning of the PLO, a group of Israelis – still laboring under the shock of the 1973 war, committed as the obligation of parents to the vow that they had undertaken from the ruins,

ashes and scars of that war to avoiding another war, and still in a quest for political relevance and ideological validation as the “peace party” -- began to think that the fact that the PLO had been stripped of its strategic rationale (the Soviets were gone and Nasser a memory) had in parallel disabused it of the very *raison d’être* that had breathed into it life – the question of 1948 and the imperative of Israel’s annihilation – and imposed on it instead a practical interest in survival as a pliant accomplice in an effort to solve the problem of 1967.

Eventually, an agreement was reached in 1993, the “Oslo Accords” between Israel and the PLO where Israel agreed to recognize the PLO as “the legitimate representative” of the Palestinian people, and in turn, the PLO’s head, Yasir Arafat, “renounced terrorism.” Israel agreed to withdraw from parts of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian authority would then take over governing to it – ostensibly committing itself to cooperating with Israel to combat terrorism. In the second phase, final negotiations would take place to resolve any remaining issues, and with that, remove any rationale for any Arab state to remain at war with Israel.

Thus, was the accepted the idea in the West to invert its traditional view of how to resolve the conflict, and that the only way move forward is through first resolving the “Palestinian” issue rather than the other way around. This view became overnight the new “consensus” of the elites dealing with Arab-Israeli affairs in the U.S., Europe, and Israel. Accordingly, skeptics were delegitimized, vast state structures were reorganized or created around upholding the new vision and all events were understood and interpreted within the context of upholding and validating the new orthodoxy.

Oslo in the context of, rather than a break from, the past

To truly appreciate the context through which one should examine Oslo’s impact on global ideas and strategy in detail, one must travel back to the 1960s. It was the height of the Cold War. The Soviet threat against the West enjoyed momentum – the twin defeats of France by the FLN in Algeria and the Vietcong in Vietnam; the rise of pro-Soviet Arab nationalism; the bogging down of the U.S. in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; and the build toward nuclear parity with the West. The “correlation of forces,” as Russia termed it, was shifting in its direction.

The successes by the Vietcong in Vietnam and the FLN in Algeria convinced the Soviets to escalate their efforts in further championing subversive liberation movements – and their national sponsors -- under the rubric of anti-colonial Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The PLO was created – and the idea of an “indigenous Palestinian nation” was fabricated -- as part of that effort to align them with the successful FLN and Vietcong efforts. This is not a matter of analytical interpretation. Evidence was provided in conversations between the right-hand man of the Vietcong head, General Giap, the PLO, Romanian President Nicolai Ceaucescu, and the KGB that were revealed by one of the architects of that strategy, Ion Mihai Pacepa. Pacepa was a KGB officer and onetime chief of Romanian Intelligence and was assigned to handling Arafat. Pacepa defected to the United States in 1978. Years later he was interviewed in the *Stanford Review*, which wrote:

Pacepa recorded several of his conversations with Arafat when they met in Romania at the palace of brutal dictators Nicolai and Elena

Ceausescu. In these conversations, Arafat unequivocally states that his sole aim is to destroy Israel.

Pacepa and the KGB were delighted. They consulted General Giap, a close associate of Ho Chi Minh, who was involved with the North Vietnamese propaganda effort during the Vietnam War. Giap recommended to Arafat that he ‘stop talking about annihilating Israel and instead turn your [Arafat’s] terror war into a struggle for human rights.’ It had worked in Vietnam, he claimed, because transforming the conflict from one of ideologies (Socialism vs. Capitalism) to one of an ‘indigenous’ people’s struggle for liberty had turned the tide of popular support in the West against the war.

Similar advice was provided to Arafat by Muhammed Yazid, minister of information in two Algerian wartime governments. He wrote ‘wipe out the argument that Israel is a small state whose existence is threatened by the Arab States, or the reduction of the Palestinian problem to a question of refugees; instead present the Palestinian struggle as one for liberation like the others. Wipe out the impression that in the struggle between the Palestinians and Zionists, the Zionist is the underdog. Now it is the Arab who is oppressed and victimized in his existence because he is not only facing the Zionists but also world imperialism.’²

But the problem was that they had to invent a distinct – and hitherto non-existent—“indigenous” peoplehood to supplant the Jewish claims to the land recognized by the League of Nations and in the UN Charter as a valid deed by virtue of historical claim. So, the idea of the “Palestinian people” was born. As the Jewish Policy Center noted, this culminated in what Zuheir Mohsen, a senior PLO leader, admitted in 1977:

The Palestinian people do not exist. The creation of a Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the state of Israel for our Arab unity... Only for political and tactical reasons do we speak today about the existence of a Palestinian people, since Arab national interests demand that we posit the existence of a distinct ‘Palestinian people’ to oppose Zionism. Yes, the existence of a separate Palestinian identity exists only for tactical reasons.³

Lest one thinks that this concept of Palestinianism is limited simply to Israel and Zionism, and not a far broader assault on Jews and the West, Ion Pacepa related that Yuri Andropov, who eventually became head of the KGB and Secretary General of the Communist Party and leader of the Soviet Union, told him:

We needed to instill a Nazi-style hatred for the Jews throughout the Islamic world and to turn this weapon of the emotions into a terrorist bloodbath against Israel and its main supporter, the United States... [the Soviets] had sent some 4,000 such agents of influence into the Islamic world... In

addition, they spread throughout the Islamic world an Arabic translation of the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’, a tsarist Russian forgery that had been used by Hitler as the foundation for his anti-Semitic philosophy.⁴

It was an easy sell for the Soviets since they had inherited the moribund network of Arab and Islamist subversive networks – developed by the Kaiser in World War I, cultivated by the German government under the Weimar Republic, and then during the Nazi era as a strategic assault on the British and French regional positions. Those networks did not disappear when they were orphaned by the Nazi collapse but were nurtured by the Soviets. By the 1960s, they became a powerful off-the-shelf structure for the KGB to tap to build its terror networks and the anti-Semitic, but progressive, narrative that animated them.

Moreover, as described in Claire Sterling’s book, *The Terror Network*, the Soviets globally created a conglomeration of similar “anti-colonial” and “anti-fascist” global terror networks – including a powerful array of European (e.g., the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Red Brigades, the IRA and the ETA) and south American terror movements (e.g., the Bolivian National Liberation Army, the National Liberation Army of Colombia) -- surrounding the PLO.⁵ The PLO became the Helios around which the solar system of the global terror networks revolved. The PLO emerged by the late 1960s as the network’s logistics and training epicenter primarily in Jordan until September 1970, and then in Lebanon.

But the terror network was not only about terror. The web of terror was created across the world to support and invigorate allied liberation and radical progressive political movements – all of whom orbited

the central structure of the PLO “hydra of carnage.” The essence of the assault was to recreate the sort of climate of chaos and nihilist ideological ferment in the West that had gripped Russia in the early 1900s and which had led to the rise of the Soviet revolution to begin with.⁶ The mystique of the chic anarchist – embodied best in the 1970s by the destructive but highly fashionable terrorist (like Arafat, Guevara, Carlos or Baader) – was the modern evolution of the original Russian anarchists. The aim was the same: perpetual revolution to affect total destruction to pave the way for radical transformation.

It is, thus, impossible to fully grasp the Soviet strategy against the West, and the role the PLO played in it, unless one understands the milieu in which the political movements in Russia arose that led to the revolution, and the role such nihilism and its anarchist agents played in bringing Russia into its destructive path. Over the last century and half, Russia has consistently attempted to recreate, duplicate, and evolve that atmosphere into Europe and the United States. To do so, the KGB tapped the global network of terror, with the PLO at the center, into not only the operational backbone of that structure, but also its symbolic, emotive focus of progressive mobilization. Russia, through the PLO and its terror universe, was trying to create a fashionable political and intellectual climate that guts the will of West by capturing its imagination and twisting it into a nihilist chic animus around radical progressivism. The PLO became even more important after the successful police work of European governments in cracking the European terror groups in the 1980s, leaving the PLO as the primary workhorse of this strategy.

To create this atmosphere of nihilist anarchism in the West, the KGB turned to Russia’s own history, especially the world of its own anarchists and nihilists a century

earlier, to craft these characters and movements. One sees among modern radical progressives crisp echoes from the Russian past.

Ivan Turgenev described the archetype as the fictional character of the anarchist Yevgeny Vassilyich Bazarov, in his conversation with a Russian conservative, Pavel Petrovich, in *Fathers and Sons*:

Bazarov: In these days, the most useful thing we can do is to repudiate – and we repudiate...everything...

Pavel: What, no art, poetry...?

Bazarov: Everything...

Pavel: However...you repudiate everything, or to put it more precisely, you are destroying everything. But one must construct too, you know.

Bazarov: That is not our affair; the ground must be cleared first...

Pavel: Nihilism is a panacea for every ill – and you, you are our saviors and heroes?... Action, destruction, but how can you destroy without even knowing why?

Bazarov: We destroy because we are a force.⁷

Destruction is power, a force, and it is seductive for youth and intellectuals prone to a utopian or messianic impulse. It lies at the heart of the radical spirit of progressivism. It is not only a means, but an end unto itself.

But what role does destruction and its agent, terrorism, play in Soviet strategy other than just sow chaos in the West?

Another great Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky, helps us in understanding the strategy and aims. He, as did Turgenev, not only pegged the nihilistic, anarchist phenomenon, but also described its strategic vision and its relation to radical, totalitarian, transformation in the character of Stepan Verkhovensky in *The Demons*. In a clear reference to reversing the process of Mount Sinai – a Judeo-Christian concept that laid the cornerstone of the Western concept of nation and forging one people from disparate tribes through a shared structure of law rather than simply subjugation and annihilation – Dostoevsky writes in the voice of Verkhovensky:

If it should be necessary, we'll drive them for forty years into the wilderness. But one or two generations of vice are absolutely essential now. Monstrous, disgusting vice which turns into an abject, cowardly, cruel and selfish wretch – that's what we want! And on top of it, a little fresh blood to make them get used to it... We shall proclaim destruction – why?, why? – well because the idea is so fascinating... There is going to be such a to-do as the world has never seen. Russia will become shrouded in fog, the earth will weep for its old gods, and it will be then that we shall let loose...⁸

He preceded this passage with the following:

Slaves must be equal; without despotism there has never been any freedom or equality, but in a herd, there is bound to be equality... The thing we want is obedience... We will destroy that desire; we'll resort to

drunkenness, slander, denunciations; we'll resort to unheard of depravity; we shall smother every genius in its infancy. We shall reduce everything to one common denominator: full equality... Slaves must have rulers... Desire and suffering are for us; for the slaves.⁹

Verkhovensky, of course, made an exception for himself. Later in the book, it becomes clear that he envisions his role as savior and the creator of the new world. The aim of anarchy is to make himself nothing less than the new Pharaoh.

Verkhovensky and Bazarov were fictional and Russian, but they could as well have been describing the very real Andreas Horst Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, Renato Curcio and Margherita Cagol, Yasir Arafat, Carlos the Jackal, or Che Guevara – as well as the activist intellectual movements in the West, the animation and confidence of which depended on and was nourished off the terror universe. As the radically progressive terrorism, anarchism, nihilism, and intellectual collapse were all intertwined parts of a whole that had brought Russia to the point of revolution in the early 1900s, so too was it Soviet strategy by the 1970s to replicate the effort and recreate the means in the West.

Thus, as the 1970s ended, the age of radical progressivism in the West was rising, empowered by a prevailing fashionable perception of Soviet ascendance and underpinned by a deeply nihilistic, destructive but exceedingly seductive animus cultivated by the Soviets. The tide seemed unstoppable and its success inevitable. The KGB, in its effort to destroy the West, understood that Israel was not only a key strategic target because of its success as a Western ally, but that the Jewish people as a whole are also a critical target

because its resurrection embodied the soul of Judeo-Christian culture that formed one of the three critical pillars of the West (e.g., Jerusalem, Rome and Athens) and embodied the Plato to NATO continuum. The events at Mount Sinai, the beginning of the modern West, had to be rejected and the process of Exodus be reversed to create slaves and captive minds. Destruction – perpetual revolution as Yasir Arafat himself always asserted -- was the aim, but also the means to returning mankind to Egypt and the slavery of Pharaoh.

And then came Iran

In the end, the U.S. also suffered a major strategic blow with the collapse of the Shah's monarchy in Iran and replacement with the Islamic Republic. Again here, Yasir Arafat was central to the Soviet effort to turn the Iranian revolution – albeit religious as it was – into an asset and new epicenter of global terror. The first foreign visitor to Tehran to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini was Yasir Arafat. Arafat assigned a key member of his own Force 17 – the elite praetorian guard unit in the PLO – Emad Mughniyah to Iran's control to form the external terror structures that became Hizballah. Hizballah became the anchor for the formation of the key Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps structure, the al-Quds force eventually headed by Ghassan Soleimani. In other words, it was through the PLO that the Soviets could leverage the Iranian revolution not only as a blow to the U.S., but as an asset – eventually a core -- to use as part of its global octopus of terror. It was clearly one of the greatest Western delusions to imagine Arafat as the antidote to Iranian influence and the barrier to the Islamic regime's terror. He was the benefactor of the former and godfather to the latter.

Returning to the early 1980s, the PLO became not only

a critical part of the overall Soviet attempt to create a fashion of nihilistic anarchism gripping Western youth and intellectuals, but it emerged as the center of gravity of the effort logistically, operationally, and symbolically. The PLO was about far more than just Israel. The cesspool of the international terror network, and the PLO most of all, became the animating spirit that fueled and emboldened radical progressivism's assault on the foundations of both Israel and the West. It was not just a cause celebre, but the core of the assault and thus the heart of progressive identity.

Simply, the effort to build and deploy the PLO furthered Israel's, indeed the Jewish people's, illegitimacy and "Palestinian" authenticity and indigenosity as the vanguard of the radical progressive offensive at the core of Soviet geopolitical strategy.

The conventional backdrop to Soviet efforts in the region

Yet, the Soviets also suffered a humiliating setback as well in the 1960s in a conventional geostrategic sense: the 1967 "Six Days" Arab-Israeli war. The humiliating defeat of the pro-Soviet bloc Arabs against Israel led the Soviets to escalate their efforts to help the Arabs reverse their conventional military—which was a devastating reflection on them as well — and challenge Israel in ways that regained the momentum and an image of ascendance of the Warsaw Pact armies for the Soviet-aligned world. As such, the effort to reverse the defeat of the 1967 War and battering Israel's military by showcasing the effectiveness of the latest Soviet weaponry against the Western-based Israel Defense Force (IDF) became the tip of the spear in the attempt to create a climate of shifting global correlation of forces toward Soviet dominance.

The effort focused conventionally on massive Soviet military assistance to prepare Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Libya to challenge Israel on the battlefield, while at the same time vastly escalating its support of the PLO. The fruits of this effort were felt in three areas: the shock to Israel of the 1973 War, the rise of the age of chic terror anchored to Yasir Arafat of the PLO, the mystique of Carlos the Jackal and the flamboyance of Che Guevara; and the increasing infiltration — using the concepts of Antonia Gransci -- of the "liberation movement" aura to strategically capture the West's elite academic, intellectual and cultural institutions.

The Soviets first helped Egypt and Syria tarnish Israel by drawing it into a long and relatively indecisive war of attrition between 1967-70, but that string of conflicts ended when Israel chose to escalate and deal a decisive blow to not only the Egyptian armed forces, but to Soviet personnel in Egypt. The Soviets understood at that point that the most advanced weaponry it could provide, and in the greatest concentrations possible, was needed to help Egypt and Syria launch an attack on Israel that would finally leave the Jewish state reeling and Western-based militaries under a cloud of doubt.

That attack came on Yom Kippur in 1973 and the Soviet efforts paid off. On the battlegrounds in Egypt and Syria, Israel prevailed in the end, but it suffered a horrendous price to get there. The pride of Israel that had delivered its victory in 1967 — the Israeli Air Force (IAF) — was grounded through most of the war by the dense surface-to-air missile system placed in Egypt and Syria. The grounding of the IAF, which flew the most advanced western aircraft, which had hitherto seemed to be invincible, rattled Western armies profoundly. Not only had tanks been destroyed by advanced Soviet anti-tank missile technology —

exposing the great vulnerability of NATO armor that was to hold the line in Europe – and not only was Israel subjected to relentless pressure of round-the-clock combat by the introduction of night-fighting equipment hitherto unavailable ubiquitously on the battlefield, but so too were NATO air forces. NATO air forces had previously been seen as so superior that they could compensate for the numerical inferiority of NATO ground forces – but were suddenly deemed compromised. The public image shifted strongly because of the 1973 war, and momentum gained steam for the idea that NATO was conventionally drifting behind the Warsaw pact. Added to that was the Soviet achievement of parity – codified formally in the SALT II treaty (which was never ratified) – in nuclear weapons.

The “correlation of forces” as the Kremlin liked to call it, was shifting across the board and by every measure toward the Soviet Union.

The desolation of Lenin

Then came 1982. Israel invaded Lebanon. While an unpopular war in Israel, it was a seminal moment – indeed a watershed – that shifted the strategic environment geopolitically. The Helios of the terror solar system – the Palestinian terror network -- was obliterated. Its straggling remnants were sent thousands of miles into exile. The apparition of the ostensibly implanted, artificial, and colonial Zionist state suddenly revealed itself as solid as titanium while the rock-solid “indigenous” PLO drifted away like a summer’s breeze leaving behind the immense arsenal, array of terror training camps, and international infrastructure that underpinned global terror networks. The chic, Ray-Ban bespectacled, strutting, terror-leader Arafat was forced ignobly and shamefully to file humiliated through a corridor within Israeli lines to

quietly board a ship that carried him and his cohorts far, far away into oblivion. Their mini state on Israel’s border was no more; they were now a band of drifting vagabond shadows of their former grand selves.

The 1982 Lebanon War was really two wars – one against the PLO and the other against the building Arab conventional military strength -- fought at once. Syria’s air defense structure -- which was deployed to Syria and the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon and included the latest Soviet weaponry and was the most dense forest of batteries and launchers in the world – was tasked to deepen the image of paralysis of the Israeli Air Force that it had suffered nine years earlier in the 1973 War. Instead, within hours it was reduced by Israel’s air force to smoldering ruins, along with seven dozen Syrian top-of-the-line Soviet fighter aircraft. The ghost of the 1973 Yom Kippur War – including the anti-aircraft superiority that haunted NATO and contributed strongly to the idea of NATO’s conventional erosion and Soviet dominance – had been exorcised. Instead, Soviet conventional forces were suddenly exposed as vulnerable and obsolete. The tide in the global “correlation of forces” perceptibly, materially, shifted. Then an unhinged German teenager unwittingly drove the point home five years later.¹⁰ The deranged Matheas Rust flew his little piper cub airplane right onto Red Square in Moscow on May 28, 1987.

At the center of the Cold War conflict, America had returned to take the initiative. The Reagan administration addressed the nuclear and ballistic threats and image of parity the Soviets had cultivated by deploying nuclear intermediate range missiles into Europe – despite immense subversive support lent to Europe’s nuclear freeze and green movements in the 1970s and 1980s (often using the same radical progressive personages and structures as the terror

and liberation networks), developing new generations of US ICBMs, and launching the anti-ballistic missile programs (“Star Wars”) that threatened to completely upend the meticulous nuclear balance calculations upon which the Soviets had relied to project superiority.

Simply, the confidence and robust behavior of the Reagan administration, and its British ally under Margaret Thatcher, left the Soviet Union ideologically anxious. Events on the ground revealed that such anxiousness was warranted.

As the 1980s ended, the progressive world of ideologues and activists in the West thus found themselves scrambling to deal with this parade of calamities. Soviet strategy relied on them, but they had relied on the image of Soviet ascendance to project the decay of the free (“capitalist, colonist, racist” in their terms) world. On every single front, the Soviet Union was, however, in retreat by the end of the 1980s.

Then came the death blow. The Soviet empire collapsed in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991. If that was not enough, Saddam Hussein – the claimant of the pro-Soviet mantle of radical, progressive Arab nationalism – lurched forward into Kuwait in 1991 only to be slammed into the dust a few months later by the U.S. military against which his Soviet-based forces – including his much-vaunted Republican Guard -- could put up little real resistance.

The 1980s turned the tide – and Israel was a key actor in this by destroying the PLO and exposing the Soviet military as inferior – in the 1980s. But the early 1990s became nothing less than dark, very dark, if not even apocalyptic days for progressives. To say the universe of progressivism – and all the other structures that revolved around the Soviet Union – suffered an existential crisis is an understatement that only exposes

the inadequacy of words that can describe the disaster global, radical progressivism was administered, in part by the Israelis themselves.

Along came Oslo: The salvation and resurrection of progressivism

This then is the context to understand the impact of the 1993 Oslo agreement in terms of geopolitics and the global interplay of ideas. In the darkness of progressive disillusionment, indeed abject desolation, suddenly one of the most powerful agents of their annihilation, Israel, shone a bright light that resurrected their Helios, the center of the terror and radical progressive solar system, and brought it back from oblivion, not to Beirut or Amman from whence it had been expelled, but into the heart of Israel.

Not only did Israel resurrect Arafat, breathing life back into the international terror structure, but it validated the entire KGB-spun narrative that was anchored to the championing of indigenous peoples against the evil, capitalist, racist colonial implants. For the PLO was not about the question of 1967. It was not about addressing the practical problems of what to do about the millions of Arabs who lived under Israeli control and whom Israel could not digest properly as citizens. There were many practical solutions and efforts that could resolve that issue, but the PLO was created precisely to obstruct the success of *any* solution that left Israel standing or legitimized. The PLO, created in 1964, as its *raison d’être* was about the question of 1948 – namely the illegitimacy of Israel’s existence – as the tip of the spear of the broader Soviet attack on the verdict of 1948 (the creation of Israel). It was the vanguard and beating heart of the much broader progressive attack, orchestrated by the KGB, on the West.

True, Israel had hoped the PLO – in exchange for its salvation – would in its weakness become a pliable inversion of itself that could assist Israel end the conflict, exorcise terrorism, legitimize Israel, abandon its KGB pedigree, and use its perch as the cause celebre of global progressivism to undermine it. Yet, the PLO could never become precisely that which it was created to destroy – the West, Israel and the idea of Jewish history that underpinned the Judeo-Christian pillar of the West. It could neither reconcile with the West nor become a force for stability any more than a shark could become a vegetarian.

Instead, the PLO through the very resurrection gifted it by Israel through the Oslo Accords became the life boat – the “Noah’s Ark” of sorts – of a dispirited, defeated, and floundering universe of global progressivism which by 1993 had absolutely nothing (save but a few Ivy League academics) on which to cling to avoid its final drowning and demise. By legitimizing the PLO – founded on the question of 1948 and not 1967 – Israel legitimized the negation of its very existence. It not only obliterated any possible solution governing the dispensation of the Arabs of Gaza and Judea and Samaria, but tore a gaping wound of delegitimization in Israel’s soul and narrative by admitting the Palestinians were an indigenous people and that they had a valid deed to the land as a people. But even more dangerously, it confirmed the core KGB assault on the West as the consistent patron of a colonial implants in an indigenous sea.

Oslo 30 years later

The role the 1993 Oslo Accords played in saving and resurrecting the global radical progressive camp is thus perhaps its greatest wage.

Israeli security and strategic elites never grasped that

the PLO was never really about the Palestinians, and certainly not about the questions of 1967 (the dispensation of Arabs living in the administered territories) but about being the vanguard in organizing the key structures of seductive, nihilist, anarchist destruction – the relish of spilling blood, “monstrous vice” and return to the wilderness of lawlessness -- of the West as part of the process of enslaving it to a radical progressive vision. Its sole purpose was about the radical progressive assault on the West as a whole, including Israel and the Jewish people themselves.

In failing to grasp the PLO’s very essence, Israel’s strategic elites dismissed the seriousness of the PLO threat as an irritant and reduced it into the idea of “current security” – a threat to life and limb of Israelis, really a law-and-order problem addressed through punishments and deterrence, but not to the survival of the state, rather than realize it was actually an issue of “basic security” – a core threat to physically destroy the state of Israel. While it was true that the PLO lacked the physical power to eradicate the Israeli military and conquer Israel, it was in fact as great as a threat – indeed, even a greater threat – to Israel’s survival than any army since it laid waste to the political legitimacy of not only the entire Zionist enterprise and the resulting state, but of Judaism and Jewish history itself and indeed the foundation of the liberal West as whole. Strategy is not about military power, but about the solidification and protection of political will. Israeli security elites never understood this aspect of the threat posed by the PLO, and thus never understood what validating the PLO in any form would inherently imply about both Israel’s own authenticity and that of the liberal West.

Israel can and will eventually deal with all the tactical and security issues – and rivers of blood –unleashed by Oslo and the PLO’s empowerment within Israel

and within the region. The price will be steep and paid all that is held dear – it is not only inevitable, but already ongoing.

Through the Oslo Accords, Israel gave global progressivism – which was now as committed to relitigating the question of 1948 as its KGB patron and PLO lifeboat originally intended -- a path to resurrection and concrete, and well-funded structure through which to do it. The strategic failure is a gift that will keep on giving.

As such, any attempt to cope with Oslo by remaining within its framework is a box out of which Israel cannot climb. Tactical answers to this core strategic threat only slow Israel's descent into strategic failure and further delegitimization, but it neither halts nor reverses it. Israel's legitimacy today is less secure, the Jewish people's attachment to the land of Israel less acknowledged, and the West's foundations as a whole are less solid than they were 30 years ago.

Sadly, and soberly, Israel and the West will descend together down this slope into defeat until the heart of progressivism – the PLO and the idea of Palestinianism themselves (two-state solution) – are dealt a decisive blow akin to 1982. In this twilight struggle between the PLO and radical progressivism on one side, and Israel and the West on the other, only one side will emerge as a survivor. They cannot be reconciled. No tactical answer devised by the most clever Israelis – not “harnessing,” “taming,” “cultivating,” nor “propping up” the premier agent of progressive attack, the PLO – can manage this strategic assault. There can never be peace between the idea of Israel and the idea of the PLO, nor between the idea of the West and the idea of radical progressivism.

The cost of moving beyond the PLO will be harsh for Israel. Indeed, the cost for the West in vanquishing

the specter of progressivism will be painful as well. Affairs of states laid on the foundations of flawed or deadly ideas often involve such tough decisions and agonizing drama. But once the PLO is removed and progressivism dealt a death blow, there can be opportunity. There can be a real chance to begin to deal with the real question of 1967, namely the question Israel thought it was addressing in Oslo regarding what to do about the millions of Arabs living in Judea and Samaria in the context of a strong, growing and increasingly solidly legitimized Israel. There are solutions, many in fact.

But all solutions will remain unfeasible until the PLO and the progressive demon of which it is part has been desolated. And only after the West abandons the idea that the broader Arab-Israeli conflict can be resolved only by first resolving the Palestinian issue is replaced by the pre-1993 understanding that only by achieving a broader Arab-Israeli circle of peace can one unlock an ever greater number of possibilities for resolving the Palestinian issue.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://danielgordis.substack.com/p/the-winter-of-73>
- 2 Fish, Christopher. “The Deception of Palestinian Nationalism,” Stanford Review, February 27, 2008. <https://stanfordreview.org/deception-palestinian-nationalism/>
- 3 Kemp, Richard. “Exposing the Soviet Lie of Israeli Apartheid,” Jewish Policy Center, Spring 2022. <https://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/2022/04/08/exposing-the-soviet-lie-of-israeli-apartheid/>
- 4 Elizabeth Boyd and Eli Cohen, “The KGB and Anti-Israel Propaganda Operations.” *Informing Science: the International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*, Vol 22 (2019). <http://www.inform.nu/Articles/Vol22/ISJv22p157-182Cohen6127.pdf>
- 5 Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network* (Henry Holt & Co; 1981).
- 6 The term “hydra of carnage” was coined as the title (*Hydra of Carnage - The International Linkages of Terrorism and Other Low-Intensity Operations - The Witnesses Speak*) of a 1986 US Department of Defense study into the international terror structure. The report was written primarily by Uri Ra’anan. See: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/hydra-carnage-international-linkages-terrorism-and-other-low>
- 7 Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 123-7.
- 8 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Demons* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 420-1.
- 9 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Demons* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 418-9.
- 10 Rust believed his act would build a bridge between the Capitalist and Communist worlds, which he would symbolize with his flight. Instead, it became a major strategic blow to the survival of communism by puncturing the balloon of the inevitability of the revolution’s victory. Instead, it emphasized that the tide of history was exposed as turning in the West’s favor due to the vast effort of the West to win, the defeats of the Soviet Bloc in the Middle East and now this. Elite confidence in the Politburo eroded in ways that eventually led to collapse.

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