

free palestine

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Don't blame the PLO:

Evasive Washington blocks peace process

KING HUSSEIN of Jordan, in a televised broadcast on 19 February, announced the end of the Amman accords, the joint PLO-Jordanian initiative aimed at securing a settlement to the Palestine conflict. The King declared that Jordan was 'unable to coordinate politically with the PLO leadership until such time as their word becomes their bond, characterised by commitment, credibility and constancy'.

At the same time, Jordan's parliament was preparing to vote a new election law to give West Bank Palestinian residents more representation and enfranchise Palestinians living in Jordanian-based refugee camps.

The two moves indicate that Jordan may now seek to embark unilaterally in

securing a settlement with Israel, aimed at bringing about an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, despite indications to the contrary in the King's speech. Such a move by Jordan, without the collaboration of the PLO, would directly challenge the PLO's status — recognised by the Arab League and the UN General Assembly — as 'sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'.

More likely, the King's speech was intended to force the PLO leadership to fall into line with the Jordanian approach, and accept the limited and imprecise assurances of Washington. A second form of pressure on the PLO came in the form of Jordan's signals to West Bank Palestinians to press for leadership changes within the PLO, and the implied

threat that Jordan might deal directly with its allies on the West Bank in seeking an Israeli withdrawal.

The Jordanian decision to break off discussions with PLO leader Yasser Arafat has been blamed on the PLO. Indeed, PLO duplicity and obstinacy over refusing to accept UN Security Council Resolution 242 and Israel's 'right' to exist, were implied quite clearly by King Hussein.

Yet by the King's own admission, the key pieces missing in the peace process jig-saw are held in Washington's hands — if not in Israel's.

The King indicated that there had been a significant shift in Washington's position, and implied that the PLO had not responded in a way which would

have paved the way for an international peace conference. He had received a written commitment in January in London from Mr Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs, which said: 'When it is clearly on the public record that the PLO has accepted Resolutions 242 and 338, is prepared to negotiate peace with Israel, and has renounced terrorism, the US accepts that an invitation will be issued to the PLO to attend an international conference.'

But Washington's declaration, issued by a junior State Department official, is important for what it does not say on the key issues concerning the Palestinians:

* **The PLO:** What status would the PLO be afforded? An 'invitation' could be as an 'observer', or it might mean that Washington would accept PLO members as part of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian, or Palestinian-Arab League, delegation. It is deliberately evasive on the issue of whether the PLO would be invited to any conference as a full participant.

* **Recognition:** The US statement is silent on whether Washington would recognise the PLO as the 'sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'. There is no indication on whether the US would agree to meet PLO leaders or consult with the PLO on matters concerning Palestinian rights and the peace process.

* **Palestinian rights:** The Murphy declaration made no reference to Palestinian rights — defined by the UN General Assembly as including the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been dispossessed; the right to self-determination and the right to an independent sovereign state free from external interference.

* **Terrorism:** If the PLO were to renounce 'terrorism', on the basis of the United States' understanding of the word, as embracing all armed resistance by Palestinian guerrilla groups to Israeli occupation, Washington would have effectively disarmed the PLO, and undermined its bargaining position before negotiations.

* **International Peace Conference:** The US statement makes general reference to an 'international peace conference', without clarifying the participants and their status, or the procedures and objectives that Washington would insist upon for such a meeting.

It is difficult, since King Hussein made reference to these points and PLO insistence that clarification or inclusion should be obtained from Washington, to see on what basis Jordan or anyone else can accuse the PLO of being responsible for what has been described as the breakdown of the Amman agreement and for obstructing the so-called peace process.

It is disturbing to observe King Hussein join the orchestrated campaign which has appeared day-after-day for some months in the western press intended, it would appear, to discredit the PLO both as representative of the

Palestinian people and as a party to the peace process. The campaign is based on unattributed opinion, credited to West Bank Palestinians in general, aimed at strengthening the Israeli-United States' insistence that PLO acceptance of 242 is central to any settlement. It ignores the fact that 242 does not address the Palestinian problem. Moreover, it ignores the obligations which 242 places unequivocally on Israel, yet Israeli implementation of 242 is never raised.

Although other UN resolutions from the General Assembly have stressed that respect for the national rights of the Palestinians is central to a settlement of the Middle East conflict, resolution 242 adopted by the Security Council on 22 November 1967 was a classic diplomatic compromise to end the June 1967 war. It provided for Israel's withdrawal from territories occupied in the war, and acknowledged 'the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force'. It might be argued, in this respect, that 242 is actually hostile to an independent Palestinian state.

242 was intended to restore the situation prior to the war on the territorial level, and to afford the Zionist state recognition by the Arab states. It was accepted by Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel, but rejected by Syria.

The PLO, not being a member of the United Nations, was under no obligation to accept or reject the resolution, but it made known its view that the resolution was a diversion which would not provide a just settlement to the conflict. The resolution, in fact, made no reference to the Palestinians; in between mention of 'freedom of navigation through international waters' and a section on 'territorial inviolability' and 'the establishment of demilitarised zones', the resolution called 'for the achievement of a just settlement of the refugee problem'.

Clearly, the resolution gives legitimacy to Israel's existence in Palestine, but it offers almost nothing to the Palestinians. The vague reference to 'refugees' would not redress the injustice suffered by the original Palestinian refugees of the 1948 war. Yet it reflects the American and Israeli perception of a just peace.

The architect of this monument to diplomacy, Lord Caradon, who was at that time Britain's representative to the UN, has himself admitted that the resolution falls far short of providing the basis for a just settlement to the Middle East conflict as it is now perceived. He has called for a new Security Council resolution which would detail the national rights of the Palestinians, as well as recognition of Israel.

Most Western governments have, since 1967, adopted a position compatible with such a new resolution, yet Washington, under constant and vigilant pressure from Israel and the Zionist

lobby, remains unable to give its endorsement to such a move.

It is a pitiful sight to see Washington unable to determine its own foreign policy, which some would argue would be in the mutual interests of both Arabs and Americans. But it is no less pitiful to see an Arab ruler praise Washington for policy shifts which everyone else might see as merely cosmetic.

Commenting on the attention currently being given to Resolution 242, a PLO commentary on 25 November pointed out: 'The PLO's stand on Resolution 242 is not a tactical matter which may differ from one day to the other. It is a known stand, and there is nothing new that calls for changing it, positively or negatively.'

An earlier commentary, on 18 November, from the Baghdad-based radio station, explained that 'these two resolutions (242 and 338) cannot be subjects of discussion on the Palestinian level...they are rejected in form and substance because they do not deal with the Palestinian issue as the cause of a people who have inalienable, legitimate and just rights, above all the right to repatriation, to self-determination, and to the establishment of their independent state'.

Nevertheless, PLO diplomacy centres on an international conference to secure a just and lasting settlement based on UN resolutions it is being implied that those aspects of 242 concerning Israel's existence and security would be composed with the rights of the Palestinians recognised in other UN resolutions, such as the General Assembly Resolution 3236, which provides for Palestinian 'self-determination without external interference' and the right to 'national independence and sovereignty'. It also recognises the 'inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and calls for their return'. 'These inalienable rights' says 3236, 'are indispensable for the solution of the question of Palestine', while it recognises that 'the Palestinian people are a principle party in the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East'.

Ironically while Israel and the United States place such emphasis on the implementation of resolution 242, the provisions place no obligations on the PLO, while Israel is requested to withdraw from the Arab territories it occupied in the 1967 war. Consequently Washington is promoting a resolution which places clear obligations on Israel. Security Council Resolution 338, adopted at the time of the 1973 October war which was drafted and sponsored by the US and USSR jointly, and which was accepted by Egypt, Syria and Israel, called on the parties concerned 'to start immediately after the ceasefire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 in all its parts'.

The autonomy syndrome. Who benefits?

THE PROPOSAL to give 'autonomy' to the West Bank Palestinians, put forward in February by the Israeli Premier Shimon Peres, has the tendency to appear like the cry of a desperate man. Or if you recall earlier Israeli one-liner peace proposals, such as 'territorial compromise' and 'Israeli-Jordanian condominium', it might more accurately be defined as the latest cry of a desperate man.

In essence, 'autonomy', 'territorial compromise' and 'condominium' have a number of common denominators. Israel would retain control over all areas of the West Bank, excepting certain Arab enclaves — a kind of Middle Eastern 'bantustans'. The Palestinians would be given restricted powers of local government, while Israel would remain firmly in control of regional administration, planning and foreign and security/defence matters. In effect these are the ingredients of the almost forgotten Allon Plan proposed by Israel in the 1970s.

The latest 'autonomy' plan brought firm rejection from Palestinian leaders on the West Bank, where such proposals are seen not as the first step towards full independence and national self-determination, but simply as a blocking mechanism to take pressure off Israel to reach a full peace settlement with the Arabs and to undermine international support for Palestinian statehood.

The Zionists have a further interest in promoting the autonomy syndrome. Both Labour and Likud elements in the present coalition government are committed to retaining control over most of the West Bank, which raises the awkward issue of the Palestinian inhabitants and their status. The Likud tends towards outright annexation of the territory, while Labour toys with 'autonomy' variations which are less likely to fuse the Washington administration. Likud would generally prefer to see the West Bank Palestinians moved (or more precisely 'expelled') from the West Bank into East Bank Jordan, while Labour's 'territorial compromise' follows the thinking of classic apartheid towards separate development.

Reporting the latest Israeli autonomy proposal, *Newsweek* observed: 'Their concern is that annexation would boost Israel's Arab population from 16 per cent to at least 37 per cent.'

Israel's Labour minister of economics and planning, Gad Yacobi, who has prepared to current autonomy initiative, writes: 'The present situation in Judea, Samaria (ie the West Bank) and Gaza entails the most appalling prospects for the existence and character of the state of Israel. It creates a state which is not democratic, in that it denies part of its,

☐ Israel's latest proposal calls for autonomy for the West Bank Palestinians, but would it enhance or undermine the prospects for a peace settlement? And does it offer Israel more than it offers the Palestinians?

inhabitants (ie non-Jews — ed) the right to vote and to be elected. The two existing tendencies are both destructive to Israel: in 1984 there were 74,000 Jewish children, as well as 75,000 non-Jewish children, born under Israeli rule.'

'If we become a country that does not grant equal democratic rights to all its citizens, we shall lose our identity, as well as our status in the Jewish and Western world. If we shall become a bi-national state, we shall not realise the aim of having a Jewish state in Eretz Israel. Therefore a political solution, which will enable most of the Arab citizens to be citizens of an Arab country, is essential to Israel.'

So much for the motives of the 'autonomy syndrome' which serve Zionist

rather than Palestinian interests, but what of the proposal itself?

According to Yacobi, 'Israel will unilaterally impose the autonomy in the regions of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. It will not include the Jordan Valley, the Jerusalem region, Gush Etzion, and the other Jewish settlements in these areas. In its framework, responsibility for internal affairs will pass to local councils. Internal law and order will be dealt with by local police. Our security services will be withdrawn from the towns, and will intervene only if communications with the Jewish settlements in these areas are in danger, or if a gathering poses a threat to Israel.'

Or as Ian Black of *The Guardian* explained it (11 February), 'It is clear, however, that under such an arrangement all key matters, including defence, settlement, economic policy and control of passage over the bridges into Jordan, would remain solely in Israeli hands.'

It is worth considering the recognised Palestinians' right to full independent, sovereign statehood and self-determination against what Israel is offering in the enthusiastic wording of *Newsweek*: 'Under it (autonomy), the Arabs would get full authority over such basic government institutions as schools, hospitals, local law enforcement and social-welfare programmes. The 104 Jewish settlements now on the West Bank would remain under the protection of the Israeli Army.'

Responses

The proposal to impose, or grant, autonomy on the West Bank Palestinians has been greeted with criticism from all sides.

Yitzhak Rabin, Labour's Defence Minister, rejected the idea and insisted that there would be no unilateral military withdrawal. In Gaza on 11 February, Rabin said the current structures of military government and civilian administration (sic) in the occupied territories would remain, despite the granting of a certain degree of independence to Arab towns to administer municipal services. 'But this is not autonomy. The situation must be clear: Israeli sovereignty, and from that point on there can certainly be autonomy in administering municipal services, but under no circumstances can it go beyond this at all,' he said.

Likud's Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister-in-waiting, Yitzhak Shamir described the Peres' proposal tantamount to PLO rule in the West Bank.

West Bank Palestinian personalities were no less unenthusiastic. Ibrahim Karayeen, a magazine editor, denounced



Security remains in Israeli hands

the proposals as 'a dose of tranquilizer, not a cure for our problems'.

Khalil al-Wazir, Deputy C-in-C of the Palestine Revolution Forces, described the plan as 'a new attempt by the Zionist enemy to evade international pressure to recognise the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, foremost of which is their right to self-determination'. The scheme was designed to 'polish the image of occupation', he said.

Israeli commentator Mark Gefen writing in the Hebrew daily *Davar* last November reviewed the Yacobi autonomy proposals now put forward by Shimon Peres, and questioned their validity.

He wondered how autonomy could be unilaterally imposed, and in the absence of the elected municipal councils, which Israel disbanded, to whom would the authority, albeit limited, be handed over?

Moreover, he asked, 'Does Yacobi really believe that if we divest ourselves of our involvement in the internal affairs of the Palestinians, they will gladly accept the great privilege of concerning themselves with sewage, sanitation and other domestic services?'

'Unilateral autonomy is a non-starter, which will not only fail to find support inside Israel, but also distract us from the real solution,' he warned.

life so unbearable that the inhabitants eventually seek a better life across the ceasefire line in Jordan. Utility, educational, and medical and social services deteriorate, and lack of investment in industry denies young Palestinians of work opportunities.

Yet while Arab councils are starved of funds for what many consider racial factors, for Israel the occupation is a profitable business, according to the West Bank Data Project, an Israeli research organisation funded by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, and headed by Meron Benvenisti, who has used the organisation to issue some embarrassing details about the effects of Israel's occupation of the West Bank. According to a WBDR study, the Palestinians have financed the occupation to the tune of \$700 million over the last 19 years.

'The Israeli occupation has been economically beneficial, providing a protected market for Israeli goods and a pool of cheap labour,' says Benvenisti. 'Yet the occupation does not constitute even a fiscal burden on the Israeli economy. On the contrary, Palestinians contribute large sums of Israeli public expenditure.'

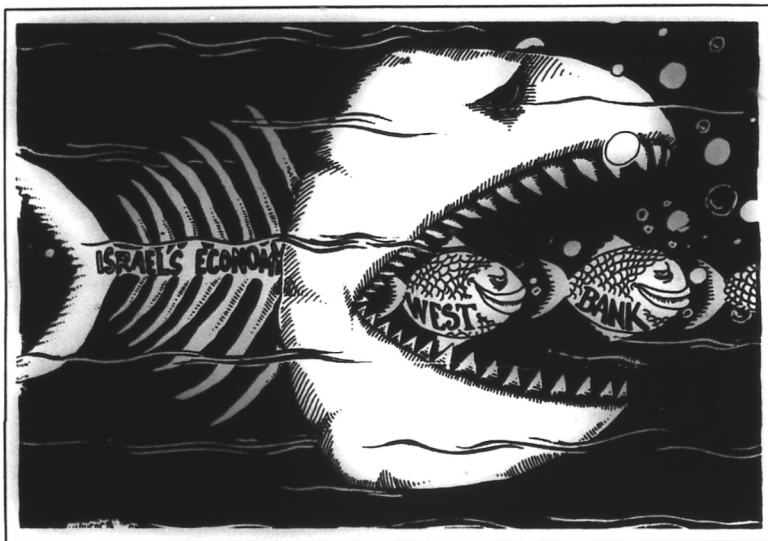
The West Bank, he says, is a closed budgetary system: All taxes collected in the region are used for activities of the military government, the deficit being made up by the Israeli Ministry of Defence. In 1984, the deficit was about 33 per cent of the total budget. But, the actual cost to the Israeli Treasury was different, because income taxes are also levied on about 80,000 West Bank Palestinians who work inside Israel. Since 1984, the amount collected in those taxes has exceeded the size of the deficit.

Moreover, this surplus does not include millions of dollars in import duties paid by Palestinians for goods brought into the West Bank through Israeli ports, as well as value-added taxes they pay on Israeli-manufactured goods.

Taking all these forms of taxation into account, the WBDR study concludes, 'West Bankers pay an occupation tax to the occupying authorities that can be estimated after 19 years at a conservative figure of \$700 million. This fact refutes government claims that the low level of expenditure on Palestinian infrastructure derives from budgetary limitations.'

Other Israeli policies have accelerated the West Bank's economic decline. Thomas Friedman, writing in the *International Herald Tribune* on 7 January pointed out: 'Palestinian farmers and industrialists are still restricted in the crops they can grow or factories they can open. The Defence Ministry recently reaffirmed that the only crops or manufactured goods permitted are those that will not compete with Israeli farm or factory products. But Israeli farmers and factory owners enjoy various government subsidies. Palestinian farmers, for instance, pay for water almost four times what Israeli farmers do. There are few restrictions on what Israeli producers can sell, and in some cases dump, on the West Bank.'

WEST BANK ECONOMY



Israel rules, Palestinians pay

☐ WHILE ARAB municipalities on the occupied West Bank struggle to maintain their basic infrastructure and services, Israel has developed an economic system which ensures that the Palestinians finance their own oppression.

LITTLE HAS changed under the Labour-led Israeli government of Shimon Peres for the Palestinians living under Israel's military occupation on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Improvements to the quality of life, promised by Peres, have been proven to be little more than a public relations exercise to justify Israel's continued illegal occupation of the Arab territories seized 19 years ago.

A strike last December by all Arab local councils and municipalities was staged to protest the blocking of funds by the Israeli government, which had failed to honour a promise to release \$1,070,000 to cover council deficits two months earlier.

The problems faced by the town of Lamoun in the Jenin area reflect the wider situation on the West Bank. The town has a critical problem in maintaining water supplies for the 10,000 inhabitants, who have been forced by the council's inability to finance repairs to the water supply system to buy water for the past six years. Last November, the Israeli authorities again refused to repair the water supply system, and rejected appeals for building permits needed for new housing and industrial and commercial development.

Such restrictions are seen as a not so subtle strategy by the Israelis to make



HUMAN RIGHTS

Refugee camp reign of terror

□ PALESTINIANS living in refugee camps on the West Bank have appealed for international backing to secure the release of children many under 12 years, as Israel imposes a harsh security regime.

THE INHABITANTS of the Ballata Palestinian refugee camp in the occupied West Bank have appealed for international efforts to pressure Israel to halt its 'repressive measures'. Last January 358 camp inhabitants were detained; the majority are said to be between the ages of 12 and 20. A large number are students, and include 10 girls, and tens of children under 12. More than 50 were detained on the night of 23 January during an Israeli security check in which all houses in the camp were searched, and the inhabitants interrogated.

On 26 November, a curfew was reported to have been imposed on the Ballata refugee camp. Curfews had also been imposed on the village of Dhanabeh near Tulkarem, following resistance operations in the area. On 3 February, a curfew was imposed by the Israeli military authorities on the refugee camp near Tulkarem. With the camp under siege, all the resident youths were rounded up in the local school while all houses were thoroughly searched, according to local sources.

Earlier, on 13 November, Israel moved more than 30 bulldozers and a large number of military personnel into Aqabat Jaber and Ain al Sultan refugee

camps on the occupied West Bank to start demolition of the townships housing refugees from the 1948 war driven from their homes in the coastal areas of Palestine. Areas around the camp were declared a military zone and closed off, while journalists were barred from entering the camps. According to WAFA, 5,000 dwellings, accounting for 90 per cent of the homes, had been destroyed by noon.

A report in the *Times* (London) has detailed the methods used by the Israelis in an incident at Shufat Camp, near occupied Jerusalem, when a lean-to dwelling was demolished. It is assumed that the family has been associated with someone involved in a resistance operation, but the details were not known as the dwelling, housing Mr Najib Djebis and his wife and 5 children, was pulled down. The dwelling had been constructed on the roof of a larger building, in which other families lived. 'Windows were filled in with breeze blocks and corrugated sheets, a doorway was bricked up, a metal door was welded closed and the furniture stacked in the garden,' the *Times* reported on 6 November.

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Deportations become more common

□ ARRESTS, administrative detention, deportation, confiscation of land — all continue to be part of daily life under Israeli military occupation.

SINCE LAST summer, 106 Palestinians — student leaders, trade union leaders, academics and others accused of PLO sympathies — have been subjected to

administrative detention, the euphemism for imprisonment without trial. Twenty-five others have been deported in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions. Ian Black, *The Guardian* correspondent, on 8 February reported how three Palestinians were 'ordered at gun point to enter a gap in the security fence, take a path through a dried-up river bed into no-mans-land, and cross the border from Israel into Jordan'.

According to PLO sources, over 100 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip are currently interned without trial, and 48 journalists are amongst those Palestinians restricted by town arrest.

Last October, Israel announced it was to deport four prominent Palestinians for 'subversive political activity'. They included:

- Dr Azmi Sha'abi, a member of the El Bireh City Council. Born in Jerusalem in 1947, he is a dentist, married with three children, and suffers from lung disease.

- Hasan Abdullah Jawad Faraj, a journalist associated with the Palestine Press Service, Al-Quds and Al-Mithaq publications, and the Bethlehem Press Office. He is an active member of the Arab Journalists Association. Born in 1953, he lives with his wife and two children in Dheisha refugee camp.

- Ali Abdullah Abu Hilal, a member of the Executive Committee of the Workers Unity Bloc and of the General Federation of Trade Unions. Born in 1955, he is married and lives in El Bireh.

- Zaki Mohamed Abu Stiti, who was freed from imprisonment in the last prisoner exchange in May 1985. Born in 1958, he is married and lives in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

Final confirmation of the deportation orders on Dr Sha'abi, Faraj, and Abu Hilal was announced in early February, when three other Palestinians from the West Bank, Mohamed Fanoun (32), Jalal Hafez (33) and Hassan al Amoudi, all of whom were released from prison last May in the Israeli-Palestinian prisoners exchange, were deported.

In the three months to 30 October, the Israeli military government in the occupied territories deported one trade union

leader, ordered the deportation of two others, and placed at least 17 trade unionists under administrative detention.

The administrative detention policy, reimposed by the Israelis on 31 July, enables the military government to arrest people and to hold them for six months without trial or filing formal charges, as well as enabling them to renew the detention order when the six-month period expires. In the pre-detention hearings, neither the defendants nor their lawyers have been allowed to hear the evidence against them. At least 100 people are currently being held in this manner, including students, journalists, university professors and doctors.

In December eleven more Palestinians from the Nablus area were put under administrative detention, and detention orders on a further five extended for another six months. The 11 have been named as Ahmad al Washesh, Yusef

Jaafar, Bilal Shakhshir, Salah Ayyad, Mohamed Hassan Rashed, Hamdan Mohamed, Khamis Abu al Dabaat, Mohanna Saleh Sinan, Yassin al Quawasmeh, Mahoud Ziadeh, and Nasser Abu Ajimeh. The five facing extended detention orders are Musa Ahmad Manasra, Ibrahim Rashid Mouhanna, Walid al Zoubaidi, Mouhid-din Hamamira, and Isaac Ibrahim Sabah.

One reason for the detentions and deportation orders involving so many trade union leaders appears to be to undermine the power of the Palestinian labour movement which poses a challenge to the Israelis over both the Zionists' illegal military occupation of Palestinian territory, and the economic exploitation of Palestinian labour. In addition, of course, it serves as a powerful deterrent to discourage Palestinian workers joining a union. In one union, it is reported, nearly half of the executive board is currently in prison.

Israeli occupation authorities. The frequent closure of Palestinian universities, and the arrests of student leaders, appears designed to deliberately jeopardise the studies of the new generation of Palestinian leaders.

An-Najah is the largest Palestinian university in the occupied territories. On 31 July last year, Israeli troops stormed An-Najah as students were preparing for their final exams, and two days later the Israeli military closed the university for a two-month period. The closure came two weeks before the end of term, as students were attempting to recover lost time from a four month closure.

In a summary of the stormy relationship between the university and the occupation authorities, the Washington-based Palestine Human Rights Campaign describes An-Najar as 'a prime target' for harassment. In 1983, the University was closed for 3 months, work was halted on building projects, and a peaceful demonstration on campus was stormed by Israeli soldiers using tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. An-Najar was closed for 127 days in 1983 through a combination of military orders and Israeli roadblocks. In 1984, it was closed for four months, while the August 1985 closure delayed education for An-Najar's 3,500 students, and forced postponement of the graduation of 500 students and suspension of registration for 900 students until late November.

Sa'eb Erakat, Director of Public Relations at An-Najah, responded to the closure by describing it as 'an Israeli campaign of collective punishment against all Palestinians in the occupied territories in order to satisfy the demands of Israeli settlers'.

Four students from An-Najar were also served with administrative detention orders: Mohammed Abdul-Jalil Ismail Ramadan aged 28, Hassan Selah Ali-Ayub aged 22, Abdul Rahim Abdul Latif Mohammed al-Messadah aged 30, and Rashan Said Issa Abu Hassan aged 28, described by the Israelis as 'leading terrorist activists'. The occupation authorities claimed to have seized 'large quantities of hostile material' published by Al Fatah, the Democratic Front and the Popular Front.

The key to the Israeli actions, however, appears to lie elsewhere. The arrests came as students were preparing for student elections in which Palestinian nationalist candidates were described by the *Washington Post* as having 'a clear edge'. Observers point out that the move is consistent with Israeli attempts to crush any Palestinian leadership which may emerge that is not acceptable to the Zionists.

If that was the objective, it clearly failed. The Fatah supporters' bloc secured 52 per cent of the votes, it was reported on 8 January, against opposition from Leftist, Islamic movement and rejectionist supporters. Fatah supports also won students elections during December at Bir Zeit and Hebron universities.

WEST BANK

Universities' closure part of relentless campaign

PALESTINIAN universities continue to face persistent harassment from the Israeli military authorities, who seek to impose their authority through arrests, closures and other forms of intimidation. In December, Mahmoud Sawalhah, Professor of English Literature at an-Najah University in occupied Nablus was arrested by the military authorities. The previous month, they arrested Sami al Kilani, the university's physics profes-

sor. Along with student Abdul Latif Ramadan, the three are reported to have been placed under administrative detention, bringing the total number of students and professors from an-Najar being detained without trial to twenty-one.

Last August, an-Najah University was closed for a period of two months in what is seen as a relentless campaign by the



Israeli soldiers block the road to Birzeit University



Eastern Bloc strengthens ties with Middle East

FOLLOWING POLAND's early October lead, two other East European states have signalled their readiness to open diplomatic links with Israel, although none has gone as far as approving full diplomatic relations. Meanwhile in the Arab world, two Western-aligned conservative states, the neighbouring Gulf states of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, established ties with Moscow in late 1985, while Kuwait and Jordan have turned to the USSR for arms supplies refused by Washington. During February, the Soviet news agency Tass called for improved ties with Saudi Arabia, which has traditionally been cool towards Moscow. A Tass commentator said that Moscow and Riyadh could achieve a great deal if they worked together for a Middle East peace settlement.

Although some have claimed Moscow was behind the recent coup in South Yemen, where a more hardline group seized control, Moscow is unlikely to want a return to Aden's once hostile approach to its conservative Arab neighbours. The Soviet Union is benefiting from a swing away from Arab subservience to Washington in both Egypt and Sudan.

At the same time, Israel has been conducting limited discussions with the Soviet Union through Jewish intermediaries to test the possibilities of restoring diplomatic ties between Tel Aviv and Moscow. The USSR broke diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967 in protest over Israel's occupation of Arab territories in the June War.

Moscow is aware that an international

□ EASTERN BLOC countries have been strengthening their ties on both sides of the divide in the Middle East in a series of moves intended to strengthen Moscow's claim to be represented at an international conference to settle the Palestine conflict.

conference to resolve the Middle East conflict is unlikely to secure US and Israeli agreement so long as diplomatic relations remain broken. It is therefore keen to strengthen its ties with the Arab states, while testing reaction in the Arab world to the Arabs' traditional Eastern bloc allies establishing closer ties with Israel.

Poland is unlikely to have taken the initiative to establish low-level contact without the approval of Moscow. Warsaw's pioneering role was perhaps enhanced by the fact that both Israel's Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir are Polish settlers in Palestine. Israeli interests in Poland will be handled through the Dutch Embassy in Warsaw, while Polish diplomatic representatives in Tel Aviv will be based in the PKO Polish Bank's premises.

According to Israeli sources, Hungary has indicated that it is prepared to open an office in Israel, and to accept an Israeli representative in Budapest. Similar exchanges between Tel Aviv and Prague are expected following 'secret

contacts held recently with representatives of the Czechoslovak government'.

Soviet Jews

In October a delegation of Israel's national airline El Al visited Moscow. Although the visit was not officially announced by either side, Western diplomats believe the talks concerned opening air links between Moscow and Tel Aviv and an airlift of Soviet Jews seeking to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Contacts between Moscow and Tel Aviv began earlier in July when Soviet officials in Paris held talks with Israeli officials including the treasurer of the Jewish Agency, Akiva Lewinsky. Talks in Paris were also reported to have been held between the Israeli and Soviet ambassadors who met at the home of Daniel Barenboim. Subsequently, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze held talks with Israeli Premier Peres at the UN in New York.

Tel Aviv is seeking, apart from the restoration of diplomatic ties, to boost the number of Soviet Jews arriving in Israel. In October, for example, only 40 of the 164 Jews allowed to emigrate from the USSR actually went to Israel. Often the figure is lower than 20 per cent. The Zionists are, therefore, keen to reduce the 'drop-out' which occurs when Soviet Jews arrive in Vienna and make known their intention to seek residence countries other than Israel, such as the United States.

Israel, faced with rapidly declining numbers of new Jewish immigrants from the West and a rising rate of Jewish emigration from Israel, is pressing the Moscow to increase the number of Jews allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union, which it considers the most hopeful source of large numbers of Jewish settlers into Palestine.

In 1978-79, 80,000 Jews were allowed to leave the USSR, but by last year this had dropped to a mere 900. In the first 10 months of 1985, the number was recorded at 920. If relations improve, Zionists are predicting the early emigration of 15,000 Jews from the USSR in the initial rush.

The Syrian axis

Israel also sees the Soviet Union as the key to securing a peace agreement with Syria, which is both publicly hostile to any settlement with the Zionist state and greatly dependent on Soviet military support to maintain a credible military force against Israel, and also to deal with internal unrest. Israel, therefore, believes that the USSR could influence Damascus to come to the negotiating table as Washington encouraged Egyptian President Sadat to sign the Camp David accords.

It would enhance Moscow's standing in the conservative Arab states if the

Soviets were seen to be instrumental in securing a resolution of Israel's occupation of Syrian territory on the Golan, although Gorbachev would need to consider the negative consequences of being seen to be pressing an Arab state into a rapprochement with Israel. In the final event of such a development, only Libya would be likely to protest.

The recent Soviet-Israeli exchanges, according to reports in Israel, involved an Israeli offer to evacuate up to a quarter of the occupied Golan Heights, and to permit a Syrian civilian presence in the rest of the area, conditional on Syria making the evacuated area a demilitarised zone and other areas near the border. Other aspects of the Israeli package involved emigration visas for Soviet

Jewry, as mentioned earlier, dropping Israeli opposition to Soviet participation in an international Middle East peace conference, and ending anti-Soviet propaganda in the West and to the Soviet Union. These proposals were at least 'floated' to the Soviets by Edgar Bronfman, President of the World Jewish Congress, Israeli sources claim.

However, the danger for Israel in opening discussions on so many issues is that Moscow might respond with a proposal based on linkage. Some Israelis fear that the Soviet Union might shift the emphasis from the Golan-Soviet Jewry axis to an offer which involves relaxed emigration regulations for Soviet Jewry in return for territorial concessions by Israel on the West Bank.

the Golan Druze have, in the words of R. Scott Kennedy, co-founder of the Resource Centre for Non-Violence based in Santa Cruz, California, 'waged a courageous and effective non-violent campaign against Israeli occupation', and 'demonstrated the efficacy and power of non-violence as a method of social struggle which can be utilized by unarmed civilians confronted by overwhelming police and military force'.

The 1979 annexation of Arab Jerusalem by Israel brought international condemnation of this blatant violation of the Geneva Conventions by the Zionists. To avoid a similar outcry over the Golan, Israel adopted a strategy to entice the Golan Arabs to request Israeli identification cards and citizenship and thereby establish a *de facto* annexation. The scheme failed even in the face of severe enticement in which some Druze working in Israel lost their jobs or faced harassment for resisting the change in identification. Those who accepted the ID cards found themselves shunned by the Druze community.

Faced with such resistance, Israel's Likud government finally resorted to outright annexation in December 1981. Further non-violent resistance was organised by the Druze community, with industry in northern Israel crippled for several weeks when Druze labourers refused to go to work, while those who took Israeli identification were ostracised. In response, Israel placed nine village leaders, considered ring-leaders of the resistance, under administrative detention.

Scott Kennedy recalls, 'Although the Israelis fabricated press reports to the effect that the Druze resistance had been abandoned, as more became known of their struggle, an astounding story of non-violent resistance unfolded.'

* The villages were cut off from one another by armed soldiers. When one village ran short of food, the villagers walked *en masse* to the neighbouring village, overwhelming by sheer numbers the IDF soldiers positioned there to prevent it.

* The elderly and young violated curfew in order to harvest crops. Arrest of the elders created greater resolve among the villagers. When some children were arrested and carted off in helicopters, even more went out into the fields.

* A group of villagers massed in the town square. An Israeli official in a helicopter hovering above the crowd ordered the soldiers to fire on the crowd to disperse them. The soldiers refused the direct order.

* Groups of women surrounded Israeli soldiers, wrested at least sixteen weapons from their hands, and handed the guns over to army officers, suggesting the forces be removed. Guns sometimes were swapped in exchange for the release of Druze in jail.

* A diversion resulted in several soldiers being locked inside a stable. Villagers took the keys to the commanding officer, and told him where they were

FOCUS REPORT



Blackout on the Golan

FOR ALMOST twenty years the Golan Heights has been occupied by Israel, and although this Syrian territory's liberation is a central issue in the implementation of UN resolutions demanding Israel's evacuation of Arab territories seized in the June 1967 War, it is rarely in the news and is ignored when the issue of a Middle East settlement appears on the international agenda.

But like other Arab territories occupied by Israel, Arab families have been dispossessed of their land, homes and even towns have been razed to the ground, citizens have been deported, democratic elections suspended, and a vigorous Zionist settlement programme activated. Like Arab Jerusalem, the,

☐ SYRIA'S territory on the Golan Heights, which looks down on Damascus in the distance, has been occupied by Israel since the 1967 War. Its liberation would be central to any peace settlement, although it is rarely on the political agenda or in the news.

Golan has been illegally annexed to Israel in violation of the Geneva Conventions and international law, under the Golan Heights Annexation Act passed in December 1981.

Yet for all the lack of press coverage,

locked up, and suggested he let them out and send them home.

After four months of non-violent resistance, the Israeli government appeared to accept that efforts to enforce citizenship should be abandoned. Scott Kennedy recalls, 'Instead, the Israelis escalated from pressure to outright repression. An estimated 14-15,000 Israeli soldiers swarmed into the area. Seizing the village schools for military camps, they sealed off the Golan Heights from Israel and other territories and imposed a siege which was to last for 43 days. Electricity and water to the villages were cut off. In one demonstration nine people were wounded as it was broken up. At least two people died because ambulance service to nearby hospitals was denied Golan residents.'

Today there are 35 Israeli settlements on the Golan, with 7,000 Israeli settlers providing a frontline against Syria, and reinforcing Israel's policy that withdrawal from the Golan is not negotiable. 13,000 Syrian Druze live in four villages, Ayn Qinia, Mas'ada, Majdal-Shams and Buq'ata.

Recent resistance to Israel's occupation has led to a news black-out, although Israeli sources say the network centres on Majdal-Shams with its 9,000 inhabitants. On 27 November, Israel radio reported a one-year prison sentence handed down by the Nazareth district court on Madhat al-Salim, a Druze youth from the town. His crime was to hoist a Syrian flag decked with revolutionary poems on top of the local school.

Despite the black-out, the leading Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* has reported 'signs

of unrest' and the discovery of what it described as a Druze 'terrorist network'. It noted that the names of the detainees had not been disclosed, nor any details of their activities. Elsewhere in the report, reference was made to the mining of 'several roads used by the security forces'. Security sources were cited as disclosing 'the emergence of new hostile elements within the Golan Druze community, in addition to those who have already spent time in Israeli jails'.

Traditionally, the Israeli tactic has been to attempt to court the Druze community, stressing their separate identity from other Muslim communities. Yet, in reality, the same techniques used in other occupied Arab lands have been applied on the Golan.

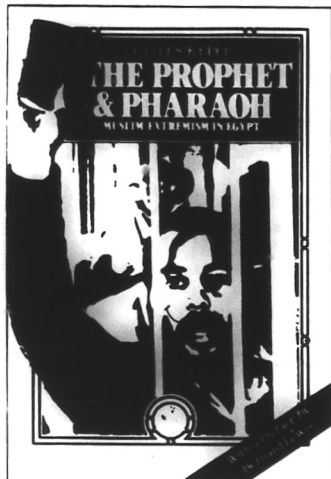
Israel claims the collaboration of municipal leaders, but in reality the Golan councils were appointed in 1975, and according to *Ha'aretz* 'their composition has barely changed since then'. The earliest date considered for elections is December 1986, but the newspaper notes, 'It is not clear whether even these elections will be held as planned, for the authorities are worried about the possibility of non-cooperation and mass abstention. To take part in the elections would legitimize the Israeli annexation, and Syria's supporters in the Golan would oppose this.'

Starved of funds, the nominated councils are unable to impress the population. The development budget of Buq'ata, the second largest Golan town with 3,700 inhabitants is 29 million shekels, or about £13,000. Unemployment amongst school-leavers in Majdal-Shams is presently running at 82 per cent, but the town boasts not even a football pitch.

Meanwhile, reports that Israel's Prime Minister, Shimon Peres has put evacuation from the Golan on the agenda in contacts with the Soviet Union has aroused the militancy of the regions 7,000 Zionist settlers, added to which they complain of inadequate funding for the development of their settlements. The reports, which suggest Israeli compromise over the Golan territory in return for Moscow restoring diplomatic relations with Israel and easing restrictions on the emigration of Soviet Jews, are also blamed for strengthening Arab resistance and militancy.

It is, therefore, perhaps no coincidence that in late November the Israelis began to make an issue over Syrian development near the ceasefire line (which the press have incorrectly described as the border) of a chain of five villages from Ahmadiya, near el Kuneitra, down to Al Asbah, and each half not more than an hour's walk from Israeli-occupied territory. Such settlements along the ceasefire line offer the Syrians an excellent means of intelligence gathering on Israeli activities in the occupied territory. Ironically, they mirror the Israeli practice of establishing settlements along the ceasefire lines of occupied Arab lands as a means of monitoring Arab activity and policing the borders.

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Lands confiscated

THERE are continuing reports of land being confiscated from Arab towns and villages on the West Bank. According to the Palestine News Agency (WAFA), recent examples include:

Al Dura: 80 acres of land were expropriated from the village of al Dura (40 km south east of Hebron) on 14 November. The land will be transferred for use by a local Zionist settlement. Since the area was occupied in 1967, the village has lost 1,250 acres of valuable agricultural land through confiscation.

Beit Hanina: The town of Beit Hanina recently found that 75 acres of land had been expropriated in 1980, although they claim they were unaware of the seizure until construction began last December on a new Zionist settlement.

Al Tour: At the village of al Tour, a further 75 acres have been seized, and olive trees uprooted.

Thaniriyya and Samou'a: 125 acres of land seized from these two villages in the Hebron area.

Nahalin: Villagers report the Israeli authorities recently uprooted a large number of trees to make way for an airport to be developed on lands seized from Arabs in the Tell el Maleh area.

Beit Fourek: 1,000 acres of fertile lands used for agriculture seized on 5 February by the Israeli authorities.

Beit Laha: 13 acres seized from this village north of Gaza during early February; more than 400 had been confiscated earlier.

Israel seeks 'powerful comeback' in Africa

ISRAEL is mounting a major diplomatic offensive in Africa in the hope of restoring diplomatic ties with those states which broke links with Tel Aviv following the October War in 1973. Only the recent triumph in January by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement kept Israel from reopening its embassy in Kampala, where Gen Okello's junta had pinned its survival on the arrival of Israeli crack units in Uganda to hold the capital and Entebbe.

The collapse of Israel's ties with Africa's newly independent states in the 1970s was a severe setback not only for Israel. In



state after state, Israel had been involved in providing economic and military assistance to regimes keen not to be too closely identified with the United States. Hence, Washington recognised the benefits of channelling aid through Israel to prop up compliant regimes facing insurgent nationalist forces.

With the Arab states in disarray and unable to agree a unified stand against Israel — either militarily or politically — and aware that many African states are disillusioned by the levels of Arab aid, coupled with the fact that Egypt itself now has diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv, Israel is now seeking to restore its links with Africa, and bolster US and Israeli interests in the continent.

On 20 February, David Kimche, Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, visited Lagos for talks with Nigeria's military rulers on restoring diplomatic relations, while earlier in the month Ivory Coast formally agreed to restore relations with Israel, following a secret meeting in Geneva last December between President Houphouët-Boigny and Shimon Peres.

Togo, Gabon, the Central African Republic, Cameroon and

Ghana have been mentioned as possible other African states to join Ivory Coast in restoring diplomatic ties with Israel. Zaïre renewed ties in 1982, and was followed by Liberia in 1983. Malawi, Lesotho and Swaziland never broke diplomatic ties.

The Geneva meeting aroused comment in several other African states. 'The Hebrew state is making a powerful comeback into Africa,' Yaounde radio said, describing the decision as 'rather expected'. There was no doubt that other African states would now be the object of the 'assiduous courting of Tel Aviv'. In Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou radio said that yet another African country was advancing lame excuses for its decision to resume relations with the country which refused to allow the Palestinians to live peacefully in their own land — with this 'slap in the face of militant Africa' — the Ivory Coast had let its mask slip.

In Dakar the Senegal newspaper *Le Soleil* felt that the cause of the break in relations with the African countries still existed and that the right choice for Africa lay in 'the revival of the sluggish Afro-Arab co-operation'. Libreville African No 1 radio from Gabon, speaking of

'the powerful return of Israeli diplomacy to the African scene', said that Gabon had nevertheless reaffirmed on several occasions that no decision had been taken to renew Gabon's ties with Israel, while Abidjan radio felt Ivory Coast had 'decided to be consistent' by ending the confusion which surrounded the issue of Israel's relations with Africa since Egypt had begun dealing with Israel.

One of the African states most closely linked with Israel in the field of military cooperation is Zaïre, where Brig-Gen Uri Sarguy of the Israeli Armed Forces was reported to be on a visit in late December, while in January it was reported that Zaïre's 14 Infantry Brigade, retrained by Israeli instructors after 12 months of 'serious training', had been handed over to the Zaïrean Armed Forces.

An Israeli military delegation also paid a recent visit to Liberia for what was described as 'a five-day working visit'. The Israelis were reported to have held talks with several high-ranking Liberian security officials, including Defence Minister Gray D. Allison, on future cooperation between the two countries.

Sharon's plan to expel the Palestinians

DETAILS have emerged in the Israeli press of a move by Israel's current Trade and Industry Minister, Ariel Sharon, to have a plan prepared for the expulsion of all Arabs from Israel. Sharon apparently ordered the plan be prepared in the 1960's — before the 1967 June War in which Israel seized control of the West Bank, Arab Jerusalem, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. At that time Sharon was serving in Israel's northern command.

According to a report in *Davar* on New Year's Day, 'He ordered one of his officers to draw up a detailed plan with the following information: how many trucks would be needed if one was to load the entire Arab population on them, including mixed Arab-Jewish couples, and expel them from Israel.'

It appears the plan was not officially prepared. The officer given the task cautioned that he could not undertake such a study without the knowledge or approval of the commander of the northern region, and warned of the dangers of such a document being later discovered on the files of the northern command.

Hussein's speech: Palestinians stand by PLO over 242

IN the wake of King Hussein's criticism of the PLO and its leader Yasser Arafat over their refusal to accept UN Security Council 242 in return for an assurance from Washington that the PLO would be invited to attend 'an international conference' on the Palestine conflict, the response from Palestinians has supported the PLO leader. One week after the King's 200 minute review of the 'peace process', there were no signs amongst the Palestinian community — other than from the Syrian-sponsored Palestinian groups — of any moves to support a change in the PLO leadership, and even the Damascus-based groups could hardly dispute the PLO's resistance to accepting Resolution 242.

Yasser Arafat's first response was to reiterate the PLO's commitment to the Jordanian-Palestinian accord for cooperation in pursuing a Middle East settlement. He expressed 'surprise' at Hussein's comments, but stressed, 'We are ready to resume the dialogue in the interest of all.'

Arafat's insistence on continuing the joint approach was reflected in comments by West Bank personalities. Zafer al-Masri, the Israeli appointed Mayor of occupied Nablus responded by saying, 'I simply cannot imagine the Palestinians in the occupied territories accepting anything which the PLO rejects.'

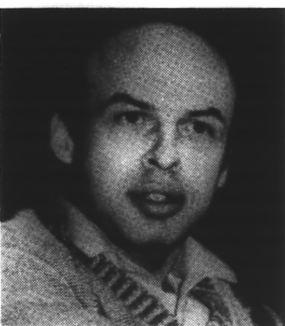
'We West Bankers need the PLO. We can do nothing without them,' said Dr Saeb Erakat, professor of political science at Al-Najar university. 'Hussein has tried to destroy the PLO before in 1970, and once again Israel is using him against Arafat. It is the usual Israeli game of pitting Arab against Arab.'

In Britain, one of the Palestinian community's leading personalities, Musa Massawi, Professor of Law at the Polytechnic of Central London, and himself often critical of Arafat, expressed his views in a op-ed article published by *The Times* on 25 February.

'Few Palestinians,' said Prof Massawi, 'are grieving at the failure of the talks between King Hussein and Yasser Arafat. Indeed, many are jubilant that Security Council Resolution 242 has been unequivocally rejected on behalf of the Palestinians.'

The US offer, he added, was 'an insult to the Palestinian people', and Resolution 242 had 'no special sanctity, either legal or moral'.

He averred, 'It is because the PLO has so often categorically rejected Resolution 242 that Israel and its allies, chiefly the USA, have insisted on the resolution's acceptance as a precondition. If Yasser Arafat were suddenly to turn round and accept this resolution, then the Israelis would immediately contrive another precondition equally indigestible to the PLO.'



Shcharansky to study Palestinian issue

ANATOLI Shcharansky, the Soviet Jewish dissident released from imprisonment in the Soviet Union during February, has said that he plans to visit the Israeli occupied West Bank to study the Arab-Israeli conflict. He said that he was keeping an open mind on the Palestinian rights issue and would 'fix a public position only after a long study', according to a report in the *International Herald Tribune* 19 February.

West Bank land scandal defended by Shamir

THE fraudulent purchase of Arab land on the West Bank, which has led to police enquiries and the interrogation of high-ranking Likud party officials, has been defended by Israel's Foreign Minister, Yitzhak Shamir. As *Free Palestine* (October/November 1985) reported, at least 12 of the 114 Zionist settlements on the occupied West Bank have been planned or

actually built on fraudulently obtained property, as hundred of West Bank Palestinians protest they have been cheated of their land.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian journalist, Hassan Abdel Halim, of the Jerusalem daily *Al-Fajr*, is believed to have been killed because of his investigations into the fraud. His body was found in late December after he disappeared on 3 October. Although Israeli police have claimed he died when an explosive went off in his hands and that he was not murdered, colleagues are convinced he was killed because of his discoveries.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of a new Zionist settlement in December, Shamir, the Likud Party leader who is due to become Israel's Prime Minister later this year, said: 'There is no theft of land here — we are returning to the land of our fathers. We will stand firm and resist these libels because the truth of settlements is the truth of Zionism.'

A report in *The Observer*, 15 December, recalled an earlier Shamir comment last August when details of the scandal began to emerge: 'Sometimes tricks and schemes were needed and unconventional means used to purchase and redeem land. It is intolerable that the investigation of isolated cases of land purchases should turn into a witch-hunt of all such purchases with the aim of preventing this Zionist mission. Even while they investigate criminal acts, the police must consider the national interest.'

Palestinian armed resistance increases

Israel's figures for Palestinian resistance operations inside Israeli-held territory during 1985 show an increase of 32.6 per cent over the previous year. According to Israel's Police Commissioner, David Kraus, during 1985 there were 573 'hostile terrorist incidents' in Israel. PLO reports, however, put the figure at 'approximately 1,000, which included the throwing of grenades, shootings and the throwing of 194 Molotov cocktails'. PLO figures show a total of 129 Israelis wounded, and 27 killed as a result of grenades, shootings and stabbings, and 106 Palestinians wounded and 28 killed, 'the majority as a result of the army's shootings'. The PLO said the number of administrative arrests as of 31 December

reached 153 Palestinian prisoners, while 2,000 citizens and students were arrested for security reasons, and the total of Palestinians in Israeli jails for security reasons had reached approximately 3,000 prisoners.

Thirteen new settlements

THIRTEEN new Zionist settlements are to be constructed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during 1986, Israel's Housing Minister David Levi told a Herut conference in January. According to the Hebrew daily *Ha'aretz*, Levi added that the 'territorial compromise' and 'local government' options for the West Bank's future were 'illusions without any basis in reality'.

Gun law for Hebron

ZIONISTS settlers in the West Bank have been urged to gun down suspected Palestinian 'terrorists'. They were told by the former Israeli Chief of Staff Rafael Eytan, who is now a member of the Israeli parliament, that in dealing with 'terrorism' they should vary their response. 'For instance, in Tunis we bombed them, and in the process also killed a Tunisian policeman and cleaner. What we did with an F-15 in Tunis can be done in Hebron with an Uzi. If you know of a terrorist there, go and kill him in his bed,' Eytan told students when asked what could be done about 'terrorism'.

Israeli aid to Sri Lanka

Israel is providing material aid to the Sri Lankan government in its war against Tamil separatist organisations, President Junius R. Jayawardene confirmed in a newspaper interview during January. Last October, Jayawardene held secret talks with Shimon Peres, the Israeli Prime Minister, in Paris to discuss renewing diplomatic relations which were severed in 1970. Israel opened a special interests section in the US Embassy in Colombo in 1984, and there have been several reports of Israeli secret service agents in Sri Lanka advising the island's security forces on counter-insurgency tactics against Tamil guerrillas.

Torture and theft: Israel invades southern Lebanon

ISRAELI troops withdrew from areas of southern Lebanon in late February, leaving a trail of arson and torture, according to local inhabitants, western journalists and UN peacekeeping observers. The pretext for the Israeli invasion, involving three battalions backed by tanks and helicopters, was the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers operating inside Lebanese territory in the so-called 'security zone' by members of the Muslim fundamentalist group Hizbollah on 17 February.

Responsibility for the crisis was placed squarely on Israel by the UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, who blamed the situation on the Israeli presence in southern Lebanon. Since the 1982 Israeli invasion, Zionist troops have never been fully withdrawn from Lebanon, keeping several hundred troops and Israeli intelligence agents in charge of a border-strip of Lebanese territory, assisted by the Israeli-trained and supplied South Lebanon Army, a 1,500 man local militia. The two kidnapped Israelis had been patrolling inside this Israeli-controlled zone when they were seized.

At least 19 Lebanese villages were stormed by Israeli helicopter-borne commandos, and searched with the assistance of SLA gangs armed by the Israelis. Thousands of villagers, including a day-old baby, were rounded-up, imprisoned and interrogated.

Israel's Prime Minister praised the Army for its 'maximum control in the field', but independent sources told a very different tale. At Shagra village, journalists reported seeing bloodstained desks at a school used as an interrogation centre. According to Julie Flint, *The Guardian's* correspondent, 'Scattered all over the small room were objects villagers said were used in the interrogations — chair legs, wooden sticks, cigarette butts in ash trays still sitting on electric stoves, electric coils and nails with which the interrogators reportedly pierced ears.'

Irish troops in the UN peace-keeping force were, she said, 'refused access to the detainees, Irish troops in the UN peace-keeping force were, she said, 'refused access to the detainees, although screams could be heard and several people could be seen badly hurt in the school yard'. She had seen five villagers who had been 'brutally beaten and burnt on the back with cigarette ends', a student, Radwan Ashur, whose hands

had been badly damaged when his interrogators walked on them in their army boots, and another man who had his penis 'burnt with a cigarette lighter'.

According to UN sources, from Shagra alone 55 men and six women, one of them pregnant, were taken prisoner by the Israelis and taken away, three houses were dynamited, and others looted and wrecked. Several dozen cars were stolen. Similar incidents were reported from other villages in the area.

Washington not serious, says Arafat

THE PLO is ready to attend an international peace conference 'based on the legitimate rights of the Palestinians people, particularly their right to self-determination, the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement, and all of the UN resolutions including Resolution 242,' PLO leader Yasser Arafat said on 20 February, following King Hussein's dramatic denunciation of the PLO during a televised speech three days earlier.

However, Arafat condemned the US administration and the Israeli government, accusing them of 'carrying out diplomatic and media manoeuvres' and 'not seriously endeavouring to find a

just solution to the Palestinian cause'.

He said the US administration was waging 'a diplomatic offensive against the PLO designed to force the organisation to recognise Resolution 242'. He noted that this resolution 'does not deal with the Palestinian cause'. He said Washington and Israel did not want a peaceful solution or an international conference, adding, 'A proof of this is that the USA has not yet informed the Soviet Union of anything concerning this conference'.

EEC plans talks with PLO

THE European Community is to contact the Palestine Liberation Organisation and other parties to the Middle East conflict in an effort to break the deadlock in the peace process, it was announced in The Hague on 25 February, only one week after King Hussein's public announcement that Jordan could no longer work in alliance with the PLO leadership. The EEC is keen to stress its move it not a new 'peace initiative', but its timing has served to remind both Israel and Jordan of the PLO's central role in any moves towards a settlement.

Israel has been unsuccessful in its efforts to move the EEC states away from their declared view that the PLO should be involved in any peace initiative. The Israeli Premier Shimon Peres returned to Israel in January at the end of an unsuccessful tour of European capitals having failed to impress European leaders with any Israeli alternative, and without their support for the Israeli call for direct talks with Jordan, despite an orchestrated public relations campaign to promote Mr Peres as a moderate and realistic politician.

Britain's Mrs Thatcher softened Israel's humiliation by promising to end Britain's role in the Arab boycott of Israeli goods (although this will not remove the restrictions on British companies), but tough words for Mr Peres came in West Germany from Chancellor Kohl, who rejected Israel's stance on the Palestinian issue and stressed Bonn's commitment to Palestinian self-determination. West Germany, he pointed out, advocated the cause of self-determination for the German people, and could not deny this to others.

Israel's only gain in the European arena in recent months has been the establishment of diplomatic ties between Israel and Spain, but Spain's entry into the ECC has led to Israel's concern over the future of its agricultural exports to the Common Market countries.



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