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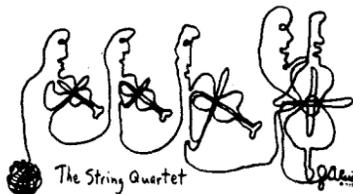


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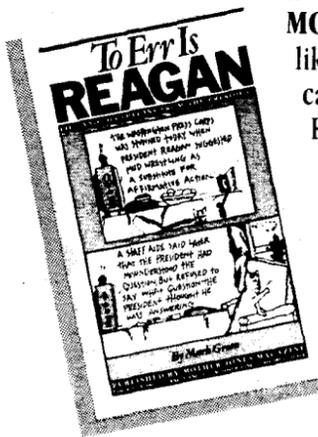
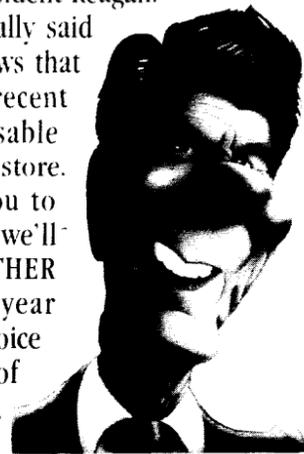
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# Israel fights off latest PLO peace initiative with iron fist's one-two punch

By Joe Lockard

JERUSALEM

**P**ALESTINIANS IN THE OCCUPIED WEST BANK and Gaza Strip met the Palestine National Council's (PNC) November 15 declaration of independence with fireworks and celebrations. In response, the Israeli army pulled out all the stops on its "iron fist" tactics.

Israel's response to the PNC's declaration is being waged on two fronts. Abroad, Israel began a diplomatic counteroffensive months ago, when Palestinian plans became apparent. At home, the Israeli government has stepped up repression in the face of escalating Palestinian protests.

Israel has declared the Palestinian declaration of independence null and void in the absence of territory and previous autonomous existence. Israeli diplomats have been actively lobbying Western nations against recognition of an independent Palestinian state.

Nonetheless, more than 50 countries—most of them in the Third World—have indicated that they will recognize an independent Palestinian state. More than 30 countries have already recognized the "State of Palestine."

Palestinian leaders said that they will seek to change their current observer status in the United Nations to permanent seating and will apply to join international organizations like the International Olympics Organizing Committee.

**Domestic clampdown:** Israel's domestic response eschewed diplomatic niceties: as one reserve sergeant described his operating orders in the Occupied Territories: "If the Arabs raise their heads above ground, I slam 'em!" This approach has been largely successful. The West Bank and Gaza Strip

## PR, South African-style

JERUSALEM—Israeli officials have approvingly cited South Africa's stringent press restrictions as an effective means of civil repression. And now, *In These Times* has learned, the Israeli government is apparently getting direct advice from South African military officials on how to keep things quiet in the Occupied Territories.

According to informed sources, the military government in the Occupied Territories has hosted delegations of South African military officers who travel in civilian clothes.

The government demonstrated South African-style media-control tactics in the territories during the Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting last month. Journalists were allowed to enter the West Bank only in convoys under military chaperon, and no coverage was allowed on the Gaza Strip. The Israeli government also prohibited the distribution of East Jerusalem Arabic-language newspapers inside the territories. —J.L.

were relatively quiet during and after the Algiers conference.

While army Chief of Staff Dan Shomron told Israelis that the end of the *intifada*—the Palestinian uprising—was near, his troops began a massive security clampdown.

Heavy reinforcements from reserve units were mobilized and dispersed throughout the Occupied Territories prior to the November 12 PNC meeting. The government deployed 1,000 extra police and soldiers in East Jerusalem alone, emphasizing the importance given to preventing demonstrations where international media could easily view the Palestinian response.

Approximately three-quarters of a million people were placed under all-day house curfew for five days. Concerned about demonstrations led by youth, the army closed all

## Abroad, Israel began a diplomatic counteroffensive months ago. At home, the Israeli government has stepped up repression in the face of escalating Palestinian protests.

educational institutions and took over village schools to quarter the soldiers.

Several hundred Palestinians were arrested and imprisoned. A first wave of arrests after Israel's November 1 elections concentrated on journalists and union figures. Just before the PNC meeting, security forces staged mass roundups of local activists.

Leading Palestinian intellectuals were required to report to military government offices, where they received warnings about expressing support for the Palestinian declaration of independence. Others were not as lucky: Taha al-Mutawakel, secretary of the Palestinian Writers Union, was slapped with a six-month term of administrative detention, his second such imprisonment.

**Housing demolitions:** In an action timed to show a strong Israeli hand, soldiers bulldozed and dynamited some 30 West Bank houses built without a license. The enforcement was selective and demonstrative, since thousands of West Bank houses have been built without official permits, which are frequently difficult to obtain.

This was only the extension of an ongoing policy of destroying family residences as retaliation for acts of Palestinian resistance. In Gaza on November 10 soldiers dynamited nine family homes of Palestinians arrested on suspicion of anti-occupation guerrilla activities. On November 9 near Masu'a, a West Bank settlement where a Palestinian youth killed an Israeli soldier and was afterward shot dead, the army leveled the shacks of

about 70 families.

Israeli Arabs fared little better. Though condemned by government ministers for choosing a date coinciding with the PNC finale in Algiers, Israeli Arabs staged a nationwide general strike in protest over the recent demolition of unlicensed homes and government refusal to provide housing assistance as in the Jewish sector.

**Israel's hard line:** "The Palestinian public reacted to the declaration with joy," East Jerusalem *Al-Fajr* newspaper editor Hanna Siniora told *In These Times* the morning after the Algiers declaration. "We regard it as a re-establishment of our national identity. Today the Palestinian people have said that we wish to end the period of conflict and war, and we are extending our hand in peace."

Israeli politicians immediately rejected the significance of the Palestinian declaration of independence, along with the PLO's

acceptance of U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338. "It is only publicity, nothing more," said Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in a radio interview. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin described the PNC declaration as "meaningless." Their words precisely echo the sentiments of Israel's far-right settlers.

Siniora disputes the interpretation of Israel's leadership. "This declaration is genuine," he says. "We have accepted a two-state solution and shown our willingness to negotiate on the basis of the 1967 borders."

The PNC policy changes, Siniora concludes, "were three gifts for the *intifada*. First, independence itself; second, the assertion of Palestinian national unity in the face of an occupation; and third, a triumph for Palestinian internal democracy."

Israel was once "waiting for a telephone call" to start peace talks. Now it has hung up the phone on the Palestinians. □

Joe Lockard is a Jerusalem-based journalist.

## The rules of disorder in the Israeli parliament

JERUSALEM—The daily news in postelection Israel surpasses fiction. Fiction is believable.

The opening of Israel's new parliamentary season gave the country its first seizure of political surrealism when the oldest Knesset member, Yair Sprintsak, rose to preside. He delivered a rambling speech calling for expulsion of over 40 percent of the population west of the Jordan River—that is, the Palestinians.

Left-wing members at first tried to add an anti-racism clause to their oaths, in response to Sprintsak's diatribe. After this formula was rejected amid scenes of screaming and shoving, they meekly took the standard pledge.

Next, the right-controlled Knesset elected Dov Shilansky, of the Likud bloc, as its new speaker, the third highest office in the country.

Shilansky is a convicted terrorist who spent 16 months in prison for attempting to dynamite the Foreign Ministry in 1951 during German reparations negotiations. Now a lawyer, Shilansky has called for immediate public lynching of Arab criminal suspects, and he advocates the "transfer" solution. He provides parliamentary support for efforts to build a temple prophesied in Messianic sections of Judaic writing. Construction of the "Third Temple" would require demolition of the Moslem-controlled Dome of the Rock and al-Aksa mosque.

The first piece of legislation introduced was the "Who is a Jew" bill. This proposal would give the Orthodox religious establishment hegemony over defining Jewish identity, especially regarding conversions. Angry Holocaust survivors point out that the last time secular legislation was passed on this religio-cultural topic was the Nuremberg Laws in Nazi Germany.

Most of the approximately 200,000 proselytes to Judaism in the U.S. who were converted by Reform and Conservative rabbis would be deemed non-Jews by such legislation. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's initial support for the bill was shaken by reports of mass outrage in Jewish communities abroad, especially from the normally quiescent and supportive mainstream Jewish organizations.

Fund-raisers suggest that the drop in

American Jewish contributions to Israel may exceed \$100 million annually. Ruth Cheshin, head of the Jerusalem Foundation, a fund that solicits private foreign contributions for Israel, estimates that 90 percent of its major donors are couples in which one partner is a convert. She predicts that the foundation, which has channeled more than \$500 million in foreign donations into municipal amenities during the last 18 years, will go out of business if the bill passes.

Shamir's position is nearly impossible. A crucial bloc of five ultraorthodox Knesset members threaten that, unless the bill is guaranteed passage, the bloc will prevent the establishment of a narrow Shamir-led coalition. This bloc is controlled by a Brooklyn-based religious figure known as the Lubavitcher Rabbi. That rabbi, Menachem Schneerson, has never visited Israel, but now dictates the shape and policy of its government.

Another right-wing bloc of Knesset members is conditioning its participation in the new government on legislation that pardons the "Jewish Underground" and other Israeli terrorists in prison for murdering Arabs. The bill also provides legal immunity for Israeli settlers who kill Palestinians in the Occupied Territories due to "security distress," effectively issuing carte blanche to Jewish settler death squads.

Faced with extremist pressures from ultraorthodox and ultranationalist parties, Shamir has been conducting semi-secret negotiations with the Labor Party in an effort to form a broad Likud-labor coalition and cut out the small parties.

Important elements within Labor, particularly the faction headed by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, want to remain in political power despite the party's election defeat. This sector of Labor rationalizes its reluctance to enter the opposition by citing "a responsibility to the country" to prevent Likud-made economic and military catastrophes. Some observers, however, call Labor "the second Likud" and suggest that the pair have become natural partners in government.

Just now, the political forces churning Israel's innards are going a long way toward rehabilitating the "crazy state" theory of government. —J.L.