

Lost hope in the land of dreams

**Settlers/Irony in the place for
which Rabin lived and died**

David Sharrock in Tekoa

SITTING on the edge of the emptiness of the Judean desert, Mark and Yael Ma-El smiled as they listened to the news that their prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, and the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, had finally reached agreement.

The Ma-El's have lived in Tekoa — which resembles a sleepy suburb, with cats and children on bicycles — since 1984. Today the settlement houses 230 families, most of whom work in Jerusalem, which is a 20-minute drive away. Bypass roads have removed the need to get too near the dusty Palestinian villages, but nobody is impressed by the mathematics of Areas A, B and C, which is at the heart of the land-for-peace deal nudged along in Wye Mills yesterday.

Their smiles are not of joy, exactly, but if you live as a settler in Tekoa, south of Bethlehem, you can at least cherish the irony of the moment. Tekoa was founded by Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in 1977, when Rabin was prime minister and Mr Peres was foreign minister.

The two politicians — one subsequently murdered by a rightwing extremist Jew — placed Tekoa seventh on a list of 26 settlements that were to be abandoned under the Oslo accords to make room for a new Palestinian state.

"We woke up one morning in 1995 and discovered what they were planning for us," Mrs Ma-El said. Her response was to join the Women in Green movement, a rightwing settler group, and get out on to the streets "to do everything in my power to get the Labour government out".

They succeeded, and for a while they believed that Mr Netanyahu would stay true to their vision of a whole land of Israel, encompassing what they call Judea and Samaria and what the rest of the world knows as the occupied territories of the West Bank.

Mrs Ma-El is in no hurry to get out on the streets this time, but there is no rage, just

disappointment tempered by realism.

"We kind of thought Bibi [Netanyahu] would be stronger and not give so much away," Mr Ma-El said. "But we argue a lot among ourselves about what's going on. Maybe Bibi's being really smart, he's getting the support of the centre so that when the war comes he can show that he did everything he could."

"I think he should have said, 'Forget Oslo, it's a disaster', but when the election comes the national movement will vote for him again, because, compared to the left he looks like a saint."

"I feel like I have no choice," Mrs Ma-El added. "We worked so hard to get this guy Bibi in, it's very difficult to switch and say 'Off with his head' like that. And then, he's got Ariel Sharon [as foreign minister] by his side — well if you can't trust Arik [Sharon's nickname], who can you trust?"

"And so now what? More civil disobedience? We tried all that in the good old days of the Labour government. I don't think it will make a lot of difference, and not many people will be doing it."

Some of the land adjoining Tekoa will soon be transferred to full Palestinian control. But Mr Ma-El said: "If the Arabs want to shoot us they'll do it, it doesn't make a difference who's in charge. We've been here on this hill for 14 years and the Arabs are over there and they still hate us."

"More than half of them are under the age of 20 and they are being taught in their schools to hate us and to be suicide bombers. What's a piece of paper compared to that? There's going to be a war here, what's happening at Wye has little to do with that. It's the same people on that hill over there who teach their children to hate us."

A short drive away is Tekoa Bet, an annexe where a new generation of settlers live in caravans perched on the next hill with dramatic views down a plunging wadi to the Dead Sea. They include Haim Roman, from Texas.

Mr Roman is confident that he will soon be able to build himself a house, regardless of the Wye summit agreement, which requires a halt to "unilateral actions" — a euphemism for more settlement construction.

"If he carries on this path Bibi won't be prime minister any more," he said. But he was notably unenthusiastic about getting involved personally in further settler protest.

There is a sense among these settlers — many in their late forties and early fifties — that they have their place in the sun and as long as they don't have to give it up they will reluctantly go along with whatever Mr Netanyahu negotiates.

"Bibi's done a very good job," another settler said, at the end of a long tirade against Mr Arafat and the broken promises he made at Oslo.

"Bibi was the best we had at the last election, now there's no serious candidate on the right to replace him. We don't have much choice."

Tekoa is named after the ancient Jewish city where the prophet Amos lived. It was Amos who wrote: "And the sons will return to their borders and will not be removed again."

The settlers of modern-day Tekoa are defiant but fatalistic. Mr Netanyahu has secured their homes, but they wanted the whole Judean cake, not just a hefty slice.

Arafat to reap a Wye whirlwind

And while Netanyahu's critics may be wrong in thinking he is adamantly opposed to Palestinian statehood, one thing is clear — he is determined to confine that entity as much as possible before its birth.

In this, he is no different from his Labour predecessors, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. In the five years since the first Oslo agreement it has emerged that the Palestinian state they envisaged was very different from the one Yasser Arafat has in mind.

In terms of territory alone, Labour intended to return a maximum of 66 per cent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, reserving the rest for Jewish settlements, control of water and protecting Israel's 'vital security interests'.

Arafat understood from the original Oslo deal that he would receive 90 per cent of land he had envisaged for his Palestinian state, sacrificing only 8 per cent for settlements, 1 per cent of Jerusalem and a further 1 per cent for Israeli military installations.

Now, the reality is beginning to sink in. But he has no options; he cannot retreat from Oslo and must bind himself ever closer to Washington in the hope that Israel's closest ally will play fair by the Palestinians.

Beyond the hype over the Middle East accord, **David Sharrock** in Jerusalem sees booby-traps ahead that threaten the peace process

Similarly, the agreement has finally taken the wraps off Gaza International Airport — while shuffling the issue of a seaport. The airport — a state-of-the-art airstrip where the Israelis will maintain a security presence — has been ready for a year. But as for the greater need of a seaport for Gaza, the summit could produce only a commitment to further talks. Gaza's economy has been on a slide ever since the Oslo agreements began to be implemented, with conservative estimates placing unemployment at 60 per cent.

Whenever it likes, Israel can seal off Gaza from the outside world, with fruit and vegetable merchants regularly complaining their produce is left to rot at the border in order to protect Jewish producers.

For many ordinary Palestinians the occupation, if anything, is getting worse. Recent opinion polls show a rising tolerance of terrorist attacks against Israeli targets. Under the critical eye of the US therefore, the PA is now faced with having to take ever more steps to restrain and deter Palestinian popular feeling.

Seen in that light, and with the flame of trust and hope that Oslo kindled between Israel and the Palestinians now snuffed out, the success of the nine-day Wye summit begins to look like another step on the road to disaster.

Malise Ruthven, Review page 16

The Arab-Israeli Conflict Timeline

1998–1999

January

February

March

April

2nd – Hamas vows revenge for the death of their master bomb maker. The Palestinian organisation believes that the Shin Bet (Israel's secret police) were responsible but Netanyahu has denied any such involvement.

– Israel bombs sites in South Lebanon.

4th – Dennis Ross, US envoy, shuttles between the sides in the conflict. Netanyahu threatens to cancel further withdrawals from the West Bank if Hamas carry out threats of violence. Madeline Albright, US Secretary of State, threatens to abandon the talks.

9th – The anniversary of the massacre at Deir Yassin.

10th – Hamas accuses Arafat of collaborating with Israel over the death of the bomb maker. The Palestinian Authority has concluded that he died due to an internal feud.

21st – Netanyahu and Arafat accept an invitation to attend peace talks in London on May 14th. This acceptance came at the end of Tony Blair's five day tour of the region.

30th – The fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel according to the Hebrew calendar.

May

5th – No dramatic breakthrough at the talks in London. Arafat and Netanyahu haven't met since October 1997 and meet Albright and Blair individually. Talks have been deadlocked since March 1997 and Har Homa. The sticking point is the amount of land the Israelis are willing to hand over.

6th – Arafat and Netanyahu are invited to talks in Washington given the failure of those in London.

7th – The US issues an ultimatum to Netanyahu to ensure that he attends the meeting.

13th – Netanyahu meets Madeline Albright in Washington. Many of his meetings whilst in the US are with Mr. Clinton's political enemies. There's considerable sympathy on Capitol Hill for Israel and some claim that Clinton is negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians because he's pushing Israel on land concessions. Clinton has also criticised Israel for delaying debate.

– Israeli jets fired on a Palestinian guerilla camp in Lebanon, killing up to 10.

14th – Official anniversary of the creation of Israel.

18th – A surprise meeting between Arafat and Albright: no progress.

19th – A serial killer has killed six Arab workers within three months in the Orthodox area of Jerusalem. So suspicious of the police are the Orthodox Jews that they are attempting to find the killer themselves.

June

10th – Hamas announces that it has rejected an invitation to join Arafat's Cabinet. Arafat was re-shuffling his Cabinet following accusations of corruption and mis-rule. It has been seen by some as an attempt to neutralise Hamas but Hamas has always rejected any involvement in the Palestinian Authority.

18th – Jewish settlers announce a campaign of civil disobedience as they are concerned that Netanyahu will concede the 13%. The deadline for doing so is June 24th.

22nd – Israel backs a plan to extend Jerusalem's borders into the occupied West Bank: the peace process is jeopardised. The 'Greater Jerusalem' would include the Palestinian East Jerusalem and would ensure Jewish control.

July

1st – President Weizman has attacked Netanyahu's handling of the peace process.

– The UN is considering a resolution condemning Israel's decision to create a larger Jerusalem which would include the Jewish settlements on the West Bank.

August

2nd – The percentage of Orthodox Jews (Haredim) in Israel is rising. They account for nearly 12% of the population and are attempting to separate themselves from secular Jews. Netanyahu relies on the Orthodox vote and is unlikely to ignore their demands.

September

Several senior members of Hamas have been killed by Israeli troops in Hebron. Hamas vows vengeance.

29th – Talks between Netanyahu, Arafat and Clinton have not led to an end to the deadlock. Netanyahu has re-assured the Jewish Right that no agreement would include a freeze on the growth of settlements in the Occupied territories.

October

8th – An assassination attempt, in Amman, on a relatively moderate leader of Hamas has been condemned, partly due to its poor organisation and partly due to the fact that it would have strengthened the more extreme wing of Hamas if it had been successful.

15th – Summit in Maryland, USA. Netanyahu has been strengthened by the impression that he has fought all the way in defending Israel where as Arafat may have been weakened because he appeared to be making concessions. Netanyahu cedes 13% but in reality, 3% of this land will be a nature reserve therefore only 10% of the land will be available to the Palestinians. Existing settlements will be permitted to expand even if no new settlements will be permitted. Clinton has staked his political reputation on the success of the Wye River talks.

– The Israeli government has approved the building of 1200 new homes for settlers, three miles within the West Bank, claiming that it was natural growth of a settlement nearby. This claim was denied by some as there is a mile between the two.

– Palestinian areas of the West Bank have been sealed off during the talk in fear on an attack by Hamas.

19th – First face to face talks.

– A Palestinian hand grenade attach south of Jerusalem has endangered the Wye Talks. 64 were injured and Netanyahu has suspended all negotiations other than on security. He claims that there will be no land for peace unless Arafat clamps down on terrorism. Hamas has accepted responsibility.

21st – Israel threatens to walk out of the talks if they don't get better security guarantees. Both sides have agreed on the 13% but are deadlocked on how to deal with the extremists.

22nd – Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan arrive at Wye River. Clinton is also in close contact with President Mubarak of Egypt who is meant to have considerable influence with Arafat.

24th – The final agreement restores some momentum to the peace process but it is only an interim deal. The deal is vulnerable to the actions of fanatic.

25th – Hope has been expressed that Clinton will visit the region to support the peace deal.

– The Palestinian Authority has begun to implement the policy against Hamas but it is the CIA and not Israel that will determine its success.

29th – Hamas attempted to derail the peace process through the use of a car bomb to ram a bus of Jewish settlers. The leader of Hamas, Sheik Yassin, has been placed under house arrest in Gaza by Arafat who claims that this is proof of his commitment to pursuing terrorism.

November

1st – The Israeli Cabinet again delays discussion of the peace proposals until the Palestinians put forward their plan for fighting terrorism. The Palestinians have promised to deliver this to the USA by the 2nd.

– The military wing of Hamas have warned Arafat that there may well be violence against the Palestinian Authority due to its security clampdown.

– Hizbollah has called for the death of Arafat for his signing of Wye.

– Jewish settlers have begun to clear land in Jerusalem for 132 Jewish homes in Palestinian East Jerusalem.

6th – Car bomb in Jerusalem carried out by Hamas, leading to the death of two bombers. Netanyahu hints that Israel will abandon the peace process unless acts of terrorism stop. However, this is seen by many as an excuse. Arafat has been very co-operative and his plan for fighting terrorism has been approved by the USA. His plan is being implemented with some success.

– Clinton has urged Israel not to stall the process. Cabinet talks were immediately suspended with only one minister objecting to the further suspension of Wye. It seems unlikely that Israeli withdrawal from land in the West Bank will occur as agreed at Wye.

– Netanyahu has made a new demand: that the Palestinians should abolish clauses in their charter which call for the destruction of Israel.

11th – After a seven hour debate, the Cabinet finally passes the Wye agreement. In return for his support, Netanyahu is expected to announce the development of new land at Har Homa which would effectively ensure that Jerusalem was circled by settlements. He faces problems with another settlement south of Bethlehem. As the price for their support of Wye, settlers are demanding the construction of a by-pass. This would involve the seizing of hundreds of acres of Palestinian land and would cause an uproar.

– In an effort to ensure that the deal will not be jeopardised, the Palestinians have arrested hundreds of Hamas activists.

16th – Israel announces that it will not withdraw from any land until Arafat publicly withdraws his pledge to declare a Palestinian state. Israeli withdrawal was scheduled to begin on the 15th. Netanyahu is believed to be currying for the support of hard liners and Arafat's statement is seen as a negotiating ploy.

19th – Israel finally gives orders for a troop withdrawal from areas of the West Bank.

20th – 7.1% of the land will return to Palestinian control today. The result of the land transfer will be that two settlements will be surrounded on three sides by Palestinian land. Netanyahu is in difficulty at home as several of his supporters in the cabinet have abandoned him due to Wye. He is now dependent on the goodwill of the Labour Party for survival. Some of his ministers believe that Labour should join Netanyahu and form a government of National Unity but the leader of Labour is against this.

24th – The International Airport in opened in Gaza: an important symbolic step towards sovereignty.

26th – Two Israeli soldiers were killed in South Lebanon by members of Hezbollah.

– Jewish settlers are being encouraged to accept the fact that some land has been lost to the Palestinians. There is a danger that disgruntled settlers may try to force a general election and replace Netanyahu with a more nationalist Prime Minister.

28th – Palestinians are expressing concern that the Wye agreement has already been broken. Arafat kept one term of Wye quiet: the building of a road network to link all Jewish settlements in the West Bank. This was designed to appease the settlers but will mean a loss of Palestinian farm land. Many Palestinians feel betrayed because they weren't consulted.

29th – Israeli planes attacked suspected Hezbollah sites in South Lebanon in retaliation for the recent deaths of four of its soldiers.

December

7th – Netanyahu narrowly avoids a vote of no confidence in Parliament. It's the fourth successive day of violence on the West Bank following the death of a Palestinian student.

8th – Israel announces that she will not hand over more land due to occur in the following week. Netanyahu seems to be moving further right to save his government and has demanded that Arafat renounces his plans to declare statehood net May. A deep seated sense of betrayal exists within the Palestinian community. Every time more land is granted them, less is available as land is seized in the name of the settlers. Most Palestinians feel that their civil rights are ignored.

13th – Clinton is due in the region tomorrow in order to recognise the Palestinian state. Netanyahu has been trying to play down the significance of the visit. US Jews feel that such links with Arafat genuinely threaten the security of Israel. Arafat appears to have gained US support but at a high price. Enthusiasm for Clinton's visit amongst ordinary Palestinians is muted: unemployment is high and real wages have dropped. Rioting has occurred on the West Bank, ignited by the failure of Israel to release sufficient political prisoners.

14th – Violence continues on the streets. Netanyahu increases tension by claiming that the Palestinians are failing to meet their commitments. At a meeting between Clinton, Arafat and Netanyahu, the main topic had been the release of prisoners.

15th – Clinton addresses a meeting of the Palestinian National Council. This was interpreted by Palestinians as a recognition of a Palestinian state but is unlikely to occur as the US would not wish to risk its relationship with Israel. The PNC renounced the use of violence against Israel thus effectively recognising its right to exist. Clinton's visit was seen as a great success.

14th – Demands for the release of 300 Palestinian prisoners, as agreed at Wye, continue.

20th – Netanyahu announces that the peace process will not continue until the Palestinians meet new conditions.

– There are open debates concerning who should succeed Netanyahu.

21st – The Knesset has voted to hold elections within the next six months, thus rejecting Netanyahu's policies on peace. Netanyahu is expected to freeze peace talks in the meantime but the Palestinians argue that the process should not be stalled because of Israeli domestic politics. Arafat does recognise that a new government is likely to be more in favour of progress. A delay in this process could lead to Palestinian violence which could prove useful to Netanyahu's campaign.

1999–2000

January

The prospect of Israeli elections in May have delayed the peace process. This delay is allowing Jewish settlers to seize land on the West Bank.

17th – Netanyahu faces a difficult task to win the next election. He needs to unite the nationalist right and the Orthodox behind him but the right feel betrayed by Wye. They believe that the West Bank was god given and reject its transfer to the Palestinians.

Question 2

Objectives 2 and 3 – The ability to understand, evaluate and use a range of sources of information.

Today we have a wide variety of sources at our disposal if we wish to study the Arab-Israeli conflict. The three sources listed below are only three of the types of sources available.

Which in your opinion is the most useful if you wished to study the prospects of lasting peace following Wye River? (5 marks)

Source 1

A BBC News Report transmitted in October 1998 describing the Wye River talks.

Source 2

Part of an article published in The Guardian marking the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of Israel. (Published in April 1998). The article describes the experiences of four people living in Israel.

“They have never met; each one belongs to a separate tribe of Israel. One was raised on pioneers’ dreams of a Jewish Utopia, another grew up with bitter memories of dispossession. One is a Jew from an Arab land, another an Arab stranded in a Jewish state. Two are religious, two are not. Two are women, two are men. They all have children, they all have known heartbreak – and now they are all aged 50.”

Source 3

The Home page of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Internet.



ISRAEL MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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It is our great pleasure to host you on our site. We have made every effort to provide as much information as possible, and new material is constantly being added. Most of the material presented here is available only on this server.

Please feel free to contact us with your questions and suggestions. Enjoy your stay.

An extract from this site on Wye River:

Wye River Memorandum: Status of Implementation as at March 1, 1999

Despite internal political developments in Israel, the Government of Israel has reiterated its commitment to the Wye Memorandum in all its aspects, together with all the other Israel-Palestinian agreements. Israel will continue to negotiate all outstanding issues and implements its obligations on the basis of reciprocity.

Mark Scheme

Question 1

- Level 1 Narrative only, or considers peace terms only. (1–4)
- Level 2 Considers mission at face value. Considers current context of circumstances of peace treaty e.g. Israeli right wing, America’s role.
Note: If more than context is considered, mark higher up level. (5–10)
- Level 3 Explains the significance of missions by considering the historical context against the current situation and/or peace terms.

Or, balanced assessment on a simple level. (11–15)
- Level 4 Well developed, clearly organised, well balanced assessment, set in historical context. (16–20)

Question 2

- Level 1 Describes content only or only considers one source. (1)
- Level 2 Considers all three sources.
Assesses reliability on a superficial level to reach verdict.
E.g. not useful or not reliable or argues “useful for what?” (2–3)
- Level 3 Quality assessment of usefulness, developed for all three sources. Considers context to assess usefulness.
Note: If only two are well developed, mark at top of level 2. (4–5)