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Arlen Specter: How a Jewish Boy from Kansas Became a Mediator for Middle East Peace

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Abstract

Amongst all the things Senator Arlen Specter had accomplished in his thirty years as a United States Senator, one of the most fascinating is that of the late Senator's work on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The long-held debate of the borders surrounding Israel & Palestine has made politicians and people choose sides. As a Jewish individual, Senator Specter had to set aside his religious and personal beliefs to affectively pass legislation in the state of Pennsylvania and United States Congress. One of Senator Specter's largest areas of study was Middle East Diplomacy. His Pro-Israel stance led him to have an aura of power that led him to have such a successful senatorial career. Senator Specter seemingly acted as a liaison between President Netanyahu and President Assad. Serving as a peacemaker for two of the tensest sovereigns in the world is not an easy feat. An examination of Senator Specter's legislation, archival collection, as well as books written about the Senator and his legislation, demonstrates the impact and importance his diplomacy and conversations can have on foreign policy.

Preface:

In accordance with fellowship guidelines, this analysis is made in part through the Arlen Specter Center Research fellowship at Thomas Jefferson University.

Introduction:

From the beginning of his legal career to his time in the U.S. Senate, and up to his passing, Senator Arlen Specter was advocate for negotiation and consensus-building at the same time that he was never afraid to voice his opinion¹. Senator Specter held true to this throughout the entirety of his legal and political career. Being a minority himself, as a Jew, the Senator felt a particular responsibility towards those whose rights are being infringed upon². Many formative and difficult obstacles from his upbringing – such as anti-Semitism, poverty, and a childhood with immigrant parents — shaped him into the Senator he was. When Senator Specter was applying to universities, he was faced with a challenge; the University of Kansas did not admit Jewish students into their fraternities³, so he opted for the University of Oklahoma for his first year⁴. Between his 2nd and 3rd year at Yale Law School, Senator Specter worked as a clerk for Pershing, Bosworth, Dick, and Dawson law firm⁵ in 1954-55. During this time, the Senator had contemplated settling in Denver, Colorado however when the firm partners found out he was Jewish, they refused to renew his contract⁶.

In the U.S. Senate, Senator Specter's outreach always revolved around communication, and the pursuit of peace. His negotiation and communication skills were on full display during the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Yasser Arafat's first visit to the Clinton White House in September of 1993⁷. Chairman Arafat's appearance at the White House initially

¹ Senator Specter was still a freshman Senator when Ronald Regan became President. In "Arlen Specter: An Oral History" the Senator states that he would agree with the President on what he thought was right, and vice versa.

² "I've always had an interest in civil rights and constitutional law". "As a minority, it was necessary to be able to protect my rights". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 31.

³ "I went to University of Oklahoma for my first year because the University of Kansas did not have a Jewish fraternity, and the fraternities at the University of Kansas did not admit Jewish students". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 21.

⁴ Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 21.

⁵ "I was doing great in the firm until they found out I was Jewish". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 22.

⁶ Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 22.

⁷ Laine, Evan Edward. *Arlen SPECTER: SCANDALS, Conspiracies, & Crisis in Focus*. Pittsburgh, PA, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021, 111.

disturbed the Senator, as he felt that the Chairman was a terrorist⁸. However, Senator Specter held strong in his belief that communication and bringing everyone to the table was the first step towards resolution.

Morton Klein — President of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), who knew Senator Specter well — stated that because of the Senator’s Judaism, as well as his problem-solving nature, he felt an inclination to help resolve the Israel/Palestine⁹. According to Klein, it wasn’t just the Senator’s Judaism that enticed him; it was his personality that brought him to seek peace in the Middle East¹⁰.

The Role of Judaism in his Upbringing:

During Senator Specter’s fifty-year tenure as a public official, he possessed a strong belief in the importance of good-faith negotiation – even with leaders whom he felt posed a threat, such as a Yasser Arafat, the former chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)¹¹. Senator Specter recalls shaking the Chairman’s hand – a gesture the Senator believed aided in his efforts in the United States/PLO negotiations peace¹². To fully understand Senator Specter and his mentality towards his political career, one must go back to the beginning of the Senator’s life.

The arc of Senator Specter’s legal and political career was impressive and points to his dedication to public service, starting with his upbringing. At the age of 18, Senator Specter’s father Harry Specter, fled Russia from the czar’s wrath¹³. Specter remembers his father recalling that the czar was sending Jewish men to Siberia. He immigrated from Russia to escape the harsh and brutal weather of Siberia.

⁸ Laine, Evan Edward. *Arlen SPECTER: SCANDALS, Conspiracies, & Crisis in Focus*. Pittsburgh, PA, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021, 111.

⁹ This information is based off an interview conducted by Georgia Skuza with Morton Klein of ZOA, in July of 2021.

¹⁰ This information is based off an interview conducted by Georgia Skuza with Morton Klein of ZOA, in July of 2021.

¹¹ Laine, Evan Edward. *Arlen SPECTER: SCANDALS, Conspiracies, & Crisis in Focus*. Pittsburgh, PA, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021, 111.

¹² Senator Specter, though he had his reserves for shaking Chairman Arafat’s hand, ultimately did. This gesture, he believes, helped with his efforts and his relationship with the Chairman, for the goal of peace.

¹³ In chapters 1 & 2 of “Arlen Specter: An Oral History”, Senator Specter recalls his parent’s immigration from Western Europe to the U.S. Midwest.

The Senator's mother, Lillie Shanin was merely a child when she and her family left the Ukraine; it is unclear as to whether it was due to religious violence, labor related issues, or another reason. As Harry & Lillie raised their family in the 1930s in rural Kansas, hardship was common as the Dust Bowl took hold. Senator Specter recalls selling fruit out of the back of his family's car to make ends meet and the lack of work forced the Specter family to move in with family in Philadelphia. This began the Senator's introduction to the city in which he would make his name and career¹⁴.

The Senator showed promise in adolescence and learned to be an entrepreneur as a youngster. Hilda (Specter) Morgenstern was the Senator's eldest sister. She would encourage the Senator to earn As in high school; as a result, she would pay him¹⁵. Life was not always easy for the Specter family; Harry Specter used a Yiddish saying *schver tzu machen a leben*, which translated to "it's hard to make a living". With that in mind, Senator Specter's parents habituated the fact that education was vitally important¹⁶.

Lest we forget that anti-Semitism was deeply present during this period, as well as lack of diversity. Senator Specter was the only Jewish adolescent in schools, both in Kansas & Philadelphia¹⁷. When Senator Specter was in grade school, Christian prayers were still commonplace¹⁸. Even as a young boy, the to-be Senator Specter was concerned with school prayer — which made him hyperaware of the lack of diversity and civil rights in public schools, and this stuck with him through the entirety of his career¹⁹.

Israel/Palestine Conflict:

As a young boy, Senator Specter was fascinated by the foreign affairs happening across the nation, and the world, which later influenced his career in foreign

¹⁴ "We stayed in Philadelphia for about a year". "I started school in Philadelphia". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 12.

¹⁵ "When I graduated from high school, she wrote me a check for \$266". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 10.

¹⁶ "My brother didn't want to go to college, but my father told him to go the first year". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 11.

¹⁷ "School was a little tough being the only Jewish kid in class". Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 12.

¹⁸ Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 12.

¹⁹ Arlen Specter et al., *Arlen SPECTER: An Oral History* (Camp Hill, PA, PA: Pennsylvania Cable Network, 2017), 12.

affairs, as a public official²⁰. Multiple members of his family, including the Senator himself served in the armed forces — during World War II, Senator Specter’s father listened intently to the situation evolving in Europe, with the juvenile future Senator, at his side²¹.

As a freshman senator, Specter knew that he wanted to be involved in the foreign affairs branch of policy and, because of this, landed positions on the Intelligence Committee (Chairman from 1995-1997) and the Appropriations Foreign Operations Subcommittee²². As a result of these positions, Senator Specter became a key player in the 1993 peace negotiations between the Israeli government and the PLO²³. However, the Senator and Chairman Arafat’s story begins well before the first peace deals were brokered.

On September 3rd, 1993, the leaders of Israel and the PLO came to visit the White House: Chairman Yasser Arafat of the PLO and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, & Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel²⁴. The Senator recalls this visit by Arafat as being a “tough day”²⁵ and the Senator believed that Arafat should be indicted for his crimes against U.S. and Israeli nationals²⁶. Ill-feelings aside, the Senator made a wise decision to shake Chairman Arafat’s hand, a

²⁰ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 290.

²¹ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 290.

²² Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 291.

²³ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 291.

²⁴ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

²⁵ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

²⁶ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

handshake that the Senator believes aided their relationship and laid the groundwork for future negotiations²⁷.

After this historic meeting with Chairman Arafat, President Clinton, Prime Minister Rabin & Foreign Minister Peres, the Senator got to work. In Cairo during December 1993, the Senator met with Chairman Arafat, who seemed to be open to seek a peace deal with Israel²⁸. Chairman Arafat and the PLO were quick to interpret these meetings as confirmation that the U.S. would press Israel to return land to the Palestinians²⁹.

Oslo Accords:

In 1993, the first set of the Oslo Accords were signed by Chairman Yasir Arafat of the PLO and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel³⁰. Although President Bill Clinton is pictured standing between the two men, it was Senator Arlen Specter that heavily corresponded with Chairman Arafat and bridged the gap from adversary to acquaintance.³¹

There were two sets of agreements signed in the mid-1990s — the first was signed in 1993 (Oslo I Agreement) and the second in 1995 (Oslo II Agreement). Joel Singer, the attorney and chief negotiator for Israel released his account in 1999. In his publication, Singer details the secret meetings between Israel and the PLO, and the eventual signing of the Accords³². Singer explains that, like the previous agreements attempted to be brokered between the two

²⁷ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

²⁸ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

²⁹ When visiting Jericho, shortly after meeting Arafat in D.C. and Cairo, the Senator saw Palestinian flags flying in the Israel city, only an hour's drive from Jerusalem.

³⁰ United States Government, Office of the Historian. "The Oslo Accords and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process." U.S. department of state. U.S. Department of State, 1993. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo>

³¹ The Senator met with Chairman Arafat on numerous occasions, both in the United States and overseas. Often the Senator would be invited to dinner with Arafat and his family, as discussed in the "Confronting Assad, Arafat, Saddam, and Fidel" chapter of *Passion for Truth: From Finding JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to Impeaching Clinton* by Arlen Specter with Charles Robbins.

³² Joel Singer's *Mayday for Oslo* Singer details his involvement in the planning and drafting of the Accords. P. 25

states, there was to be an interim period, in which neither state was allowed to declare a permanent status of Gaza and the West Bank, until said interim period had ended³³. The agreements consisted of the acknowledgment of Chairman Arafat and the PLO's right of Israel to live in peace as well as renouncing the terroristic remarks, regarding the destruction of Israel³⁴. Conversely, Prime Minister Rabin recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, in exchange for Chairman Arafat's cooperation³⁵. Furthermore, one must remember that this conflict is more than a land dispute, it is a religious dispute. To that end, this historic compromise did not come without sacrifices. Both parties had to relinquish land they felt was crucial to their national identity³⁶.

To widespread dismay, however, the Oslo Accords were unfavorable to both the Israeli & Palestinian governments³⁷.

After the initial shock of Chairman Arafat being honored at the Clinton White House³⁸, Chairman Arafat & Senator Specter formed a professional, as well as a personal relationship. It was their personal relationship that Senator Specter used to his advantage when speaking to Chairman Arafat³⁹ regarding his violation of the Accords. The Palestinian Liberation Organization had violated the Accords with the continued terrorist attacks and violent propaganda being emitted by Arafat & the PLO⁴⁰. Senator Specter, knowing that the PLO had violated the peace treaty, confronted Chairman Arafat himself on numerous

³³ Joel Singer, "Mayday for Oslo - JSTOR," JSTOR (The National Interest, 1999), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42897139>, 26.

³⁴ Avi Shlaim, "The Oslo Accord," The Oslo ACCORD (University of California Press, 1994), <https://users.ox.ac.uk/~ssfc0005/The%20Oslo%20Accord.html>, 25.

³⁵ Avi Shlaim, "The Oslo Accord," The Oslo ACCORD (University of California Press, 1994), <https://users.ox.ac.uk/~ssfc0005/The%20Oslo%20Accord.html>, 26.

³⁶ Avi Shlaim, "The Oslo Accord," The Oslo ACCORD (University of California Press, 1994), <https://users.ox.ac.uk/~ssfc0005/The%20Oslo%20Accord.html>, 26.

³⁷ In Professor Evan Laine's book *Arlen Specter: Scandals, Conspiracies, and Crisis in Focus*, it was noted that the "only consistency in the process was the unpopularity on both sides", 110.

³⁸ Professor Evan Laine explains in his book *Arlen Specter: Scandals, Conspiracies, and Crisis in Focus*, that the Senator had a hard time with Chairman Arafat being honored at the White House, 111.

³⁹ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

⁴⁰ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

occasions⁴¹ and had sponsored various legislation sanctioning Chairman Arafat⁴². Senator Specter met with Chairman Arafat in Gaza in 1995 and confronted him as to why he condemned the terrorist attacks against Israel in English, but not in Arabic⁴³. Chairman Arafat, clearly taken back by the statement attempted to avenge himself and state that he spoke in both English and Arabic, condemning the attacks.

Senator Specter, however, knew that was the furthest from the truth⁴⁴. Senator Specter gave the Chairman another chance to halt the terrorist attacks against Israelis, as the PLO was receiving financial aid from the United States in 1995. When the Chairman did not do enough to control Hamas and attempt to call off the attacks, Senator Specter decided to take legislative action.

The first piece of legislation, co-sponsored with six other senators, was called the “Specter-Shelby Amendment”⁴⁵. In 1997, Senator Arlen Specter and Senator Robert Shelby of Alabama, asked the United States government to stop all financial aid to Palestine and the PLO, until all terrorist attacks, slander against Israelis, and the call for the destruction of Israel was stopped absolutely⁴⁶. In the 105th Congress of the United States, in 1997, the Specter-Shelby Amendment was passed into law, blocking all financial assistance to the Palestine Liberation Organization, sanctioning Chairman Arafat greatly.

In 1999, Senator Specter met Chairman Arafat in his office in Washington D.C.; this was after the first piece of legislation was passed into law, halting all U.S. financial assistance to Palestine.

⁴¹ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

⁴² Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

⁴³ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

⁴⁴ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

⁴⁵ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 294.

⁴⁶ Congress.gov “S.Res.121 – 105th Congress (1997-1998): A resolution urging the discontinuance of financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless and until the Palestinian Authority demonstrates a 100-percent maximum effort to curtail terrorism.” September 10, 1997.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/senate-resolution/121>

The Oslo Accords were built on a basis of open-ended, ambiguous solutions⁴⁷. The drafters of the Accords had believed that this peace negotiation can only go forward, when the two parties agree to trust each other⁴⁸. However, they must proceed at a gradual pace, due to the magnitude of the issue. Though the over-arching process of the negotiations seemed as though they would be successful, the ambiguity of the language of the Accords meant that each side would be able to interpret them in their own regards, with their states' best interest in mind⁴⁹.

Another theory as to why the Oslo Accords failed is one that is familiar to many, the lack of cooperation and continued terrorist attacks on behalf of the PLO⁵⁰. Chairman Arafat had expressed to Senator Specter his distaste with the Oslo Accords, however, as mentioned previously, there was so much ambiguity within the language of the Accords, that the interpretation of the Accords was done so by the PLO and the Israeli government⁵¹.

Furthermore, a leader cannot tell their citizens that they are sure the other side will not continue to cause harm when the leader themselves are not even certain. Prime Minister Rabin did his best to persuade the Israeli people that this would be a peaceful process and they were ready to listen⁵². However, one Jewish Israeli extremist went so far as to assassinate Prime Minister Rabin, due to his distrust in the peace negotiations⁵³.

Conversely, the PLO wasn't the only government that was guilty of violating the Accords. Israel annexed the West Bank during the negotiations of

⁴⁷ In Orde F. Kittrie's review of *More Process than Peace: Legitimacy, Compliance, and the Oslo Accords*, they discuss how and why the Oslo Accords failed, citing the language of the Accords themselves and their "open-endedness". P. 1663

⁴⁸ In Orde F. Kittrie's review of *More Process than Peace: Legitimacy, Compliance, and the Oslo Accords*, they discuss how and why the Oslo Accords failed, citing the language of the Accords themselves and the hope that the two states would learn to trust each other over time. P. 1663-64

⁴⁹ In Orde F. Kittrie's review, the drafters hoped that the big issue, creating a peace solution, would be resolved in 1993; everything else could be solved at a later date, but the Accords were riddled with ambiguity. P. 1670

⁵⁰ An act that earned Chairman Arafat sanctions sponsored by Senator Specter was the act of "allowing known-terrorists to roam freely inside Palestinian Authority controlled territory", according to James Phillips, a contributor for *The Heritage Foundation*.

⁵¹ A *Washington Post* article by Charles Krauthammer from April 1997 states "the fictional Oslo Arafat created".

⁵² Even with the looming threat of land being taken away, many Israelis listened and trusted PM Rabin. In the end, however, it was not enough for some.

⁵³ According to The Guardian article "Yitzhak Rabin: He never knew it was one of his people who shot him in the back" on November 4th, 1995, 25-year-old Yigal Amir shot and killed the Prime Minister, attempting to halt the peace agreements.

the Oslo Accords⁵⁴. There is insubstantial information on these actions, unlike those of the PLO violating the Accords. The Israeli government and the PLO had conflicted with each other since 1987, with Israel's occupation of the West Bank, before, during, and after the Oslo Accords were signed⁵⁵. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) attempted to control people with deadly force. From 1987-93, casualties escalated quickly, with most of the deaths being those of Palestinians⁵⁶. The conflict ended briefly with the signing of Oslo Accords I, however the occupation of the West Bank by Israel, did not⁵⁷.

U.S. media outlets and politicians, Senator Specter included, had multiple opportunities to label Israeli soldiers as “terrorists” such as they did with Chairman Arafat and the PLO, but neglected to do so.

After the failure of the Oslo Accords, Senator Specter desired to meet with Chairman Arafat, as there was speculation that Arafat would unilaterally declare Palestinian statehood⁵⁸. Chairman Arafat explained that this speculation was due to his dissatisfaction with the Oslo Accords⁵⁹. Chairman Arafat also expressed his annoyance for receiving no word of praise from Senator Specter or the U.S. government, for changing the PLO's position on the destruction of Israel⁶⁰. Striking a meager deal with the Chairman, Senator Specter decided that, if Arafat did not declare Palestinian statehood, he would praise Arafat's willingness to wait for a peace deal with Israel, before claiming Palestine as a state⁶¹. This cooperation with Chairman Arafat, allowed for an open-ended treaty to be

⁵⁴ According to an interview with Joel Singer, the attorney who represented Israel in the Oslo Accords; “the annexation of the West Bank was a violation of the Accords”.

⁵⁵ Yoel Elizur and Nuphar Yushay-Krien's journal *Participation in Atrocities Among Israeli Soldiers During the First Intifada: A Qualitative Analysis*, they explain and review the atrocities committed by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians. An uprising by the Palestinian Intifada against the occupation of the West Bank by the Israeli Defense Forces. These six years of battle led to severe casualties on both sides. P. 253

⁵⁶ Yoel Elizur and Nuphar Yushay-Krien's *Participation in Atrocities* details the methods the IDF took to control the uprising. P. 253

⁵⁷ Yoel Elizur and Nuphar Yishay-Krien's *Participation in Atrocities* P. 253

⁵⁸ Senator Specter felt that for Chairman Arafat to declare Palestine a state, there must be a peace treaty with Israel. *Passion for Truth*, (2000), 295.

⁵⁹ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 295.

⁶⁰ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 295.

⁶¹ Specter, Arlen, and Charles Robbins. *Passion for Truth: From FINDING JFK's Single Bullet to Questioning Anita Hill to IMPEACHING CLINTON*. New York, NY: William Morrow, (2000), 295.

brokered between the two powers; if Arafat was unwilling to compromise, he wouldn't have trusted Senator Specter's commitment to addressing the Senate floor.

Nearly a decade after the first Oslo Accords were signed, in April of 2002, the Senator made a press release "urging" the Bush administration to proceed with the peace negotiations without Chairman Arafat⁶² due to his lack of cooperation regarding negotiations.

The Legacy of Oslo in Light of Recent Events:

After Senator Specter severed ties with Chairman Arafat, he continued to sanction the Chairman and the PLO with a bill barring all U.S. financial assistance until the PLO halts the anti-Semitic, anti-Israel content in the media and textbooks⁶³. The Senator's final piece of legislation sanctioning the Palestinian Authority came in 2008, calling on President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority to call off the destruction of Israel, as well as the terrorist attacks against Israel⁶⁴.

Since the failure of the Oslo Accords, there have not been any successful peace agreements between the two states. Two months before the Senator's passing in October of 2014, there was a cease-fire between the Israelis and Hamas. However, since the Senator's passing, tensions along the West Bank and Gaza have increased significantly — specifically since May of 2021. With missiles being launched from Israel and Hamas bases with civilians being caught in the middle, the need for peace negotiations have arguably, never been higher. Senator Specter had the unique gift of dialogue and achieved the often-ambitious process of bringing everyone to the table. The Senator was able to speak with Chairman Arafat, whom he once labeled a terrorist, on multiple occasions and was able to form a sense of comradery with the Chairman to proceed with the Oslo Accords. Although the Accords were unsuccessful, and the relationship between the two often consisted of bills sanctioning the Chairman and PLO, future politicians and leaders have much to learn from Senator Specter's tactics from the Oslo peace negotiations.

⁶² According to the University of Pittsburgh Digital Collections of Senator Specter's Senatorial Papers, this press release from April of 2002 cited Arafat as a "terrorist" due to his actions of being personally involved in paying terrorists. The Senator asked for an omittance of Arafat from future negotiations.

⁶³ In the 106th Congress (1999-2000), Senator Specter proposed a bill halting all U.S. financial aid to Palestine until they stopped anti-Israel propaganda in the areas, they have control of, in the West Bank and Gaza.

⁶⁴ In the 110th Congress (2007-2008), Senator Specter proposed his last bill sanctioning the Palestinian Authority, as well as the Fatah Party's constitution that contained anti-Israel propaganda.

On the contrary, we must learn to hold each side accountable for their actions. U.S. politicians and the media labeled Chairman Yasser Arafat and the PLO a terrorist. However, they did not label the Israeli Defense Forces and Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres terrorists, for their atrocities committed against Palestinians. The situation is clear: we need a peace negotiation that is more stable than Oslo, however we must also hold each side accountable. When the Palestinians did not stop anti-Israel propaganda, Senator Specter sanctioned the PLO. Conversely, the U.S. made the decision to not sanction Israel, even with their involvement of terrorist attacks against Palestinians, as well as their violations of the Oslo Accords.

Conclusion:

Senator Arlen Specter's diplomacy, not only of Israel/Palestine but those that encapsulated the arc of his thirty-year senatorial career were exceptional. From a young boy in rural Kansas, to negotiating peace treaties between Israel and Palestine. The Senator never let his morals go array, and he never let his voice go unheard. Politicians and leaders after Senator Specter have much to learn from such a dialogue-oriented politician such as himself. U.S. politicians arguably have Senator Specter to thank, due to his concentrated work in the 1993 & 1995 Oslo Accords Agreement. Without Senator Specter, the peace negotiations may have disintegrated, before they were even started. As a minority, Senator Specter felt a pull to aid those that have had their rights infringed upon – it was this narrative that shaped his legal, and senatorial career moving forward.

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