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## Shimon Peres and the 9/11 Attacks

By Sheldon Richman  
October 2, 2016

The death of former Israeli prime minister and president Shimon Peres (age 93), the last major figure of Israel's founding generation, has brought an outpouring of tributes for a man who reputedly had, as President Obama put it in his eulogy, "the capacity to see all people as deserving of dignity and respect."

Unfortunately, the Polish-born Peres's life did not display such a capacity. Many Palestinians and Lebanese suffered and died because of him. Considering his prominent role in the founding of the self-declared State of the Jewish People, this should go without saying. Israel was established largely by Europeans on land from which three-quarters of a million Muslim and Christian Palestinian Arabs were expelled. Others were massacred by Zionist paramilitary forces, one of which Peres worked for. The year before Israel declared independence (1948) largely on Palestinian-owned land, Peres was put in charge of personnel and weapons acquisition for the paramilitary force called Haganah. This systematic ethnic cleansing is known as the *Nakba*, or catastrophe. Hundreds of former Arab villages were destroyed to make room for Jewish villages. Zionist and Israeli leaders were not shy about acknowledging this. In their view Jewish land had to be redeemed and restored to its rightful owner – the Jewish People – and the "exiled" had to be in-gathered, no matter the cost to others. This was the Zionist project.

As a member of the Labor Party, Peres also played important roles in creating Israel's Mideast monopoly nuclear-weapons arsenal (unlike Iran it has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and does not permit international inspections) and in building illegal Jewish-only settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank after the [June 1967 war](#) against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Before that war, he helped administer military rule over the remaining Palestinian Arabs inside Israel. He also forged Israel's military and nuclear alliance with apartheid South Africa.

In 1995 Peres, who maintained that the [Palestinians had victimized themselves](#), became prime minister after Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish fanatic for entering into the Oslo Accords with the Palestine Liberation Organization. (Rabin, like some other Israeli leaders, feared a loss of a Jewish majority in Israel and so favored a rump Palestinian state in parts of the West Bank. Rabin, Peres, and Yasser Arafat won the Nobel Peace Prize for this dubious agreement.) In his campaign for prime minister a year later against Benjamin Netanyahu, Peres (who was also defense minister) sought to establish his hawkish credentials by launching a war against Lebanon (which Israel had devastated and occupied for nearly 20 years beginning in 1982). Peres named his war Operation Grapes of Wrath. According to veteran Middle East reporter [Robert Fisk](#):

“The joint Nobel Peace Prize holder used as an excuse the firing of Katyusha rockets over the Lebanese border by the Hezbollah. In fact, their rockets were retaliation for the killing of a small Lebanese boy by a booby-trap bomb they suspected had been left by an Israeli patrol. It mattered not.

“A few days later, Israeli troops inside Lebanon came under attack close to Qana and retaliated by opening fire into the village. Their first shells hit a cemetery used by Hezbollah; the rest flew directly into the UN Fijian army camp where hundreds of civilians were sheltering. Peres announced that ‘we did not know that several hundred people were concentrated in that camp. It came to us as a bitter surprise.’

“It was a lie. The Israelis had occupied Qana for years after their 1982 invasion, they had video film of the camp, they were even flying a drone over the camp during the 1996 massacre – a fact they denied until a UN soldier gave me his video of the drone, frames from which we published in *The Independent*. The UN had repeatedly told Israel that the camp was packed with refugees.

“This was Peres's contribution to Lebanese peace. He lost the election and probably never thought much more about Qana.”

Fisk was an eyewitness to the atrocity. “When I reached the UN gates, blood was pouring through them in torrents. I could smell it. It washed over our shoes and stuck to them like glue. There were legs and arms, babies without heads, old men's heads without bodies. A man's body was hanging in two pieces in a burning tree. What was left of him was on fire.”

Over 100 civilians were killed. Fisk continued:

“There was a UN enquiry which stated in its bland way that it did not believe the slaughter was an accident. The UN report was accused of being anti-Semitic. Much later, a brave Israeli

magazine published an interview with the artillery soldiers who fired at Qana. An officer had referred to the villagers as 'just a bunch of Arabs' ("arabushim" in Hebrew). 'A few Arabushim die, there is no harm in that,' he was quoted as saying. Peres's chief of staff was almost equally carefree: 'I don't know any other rules of the game, either for the [Israeli] army or for civilians....'"

This atrocious record – hardly the record of a humanitarian – has been cited in critical obituaries of Peres. (Besides Fisk's see critical obits [here](#) and [here](#).) But much less noted was Peres's role in helping to pave the road to 9/11.

What possible role could Peres have played in the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon? Recall Peres's cynical election-year onslaught against Lebanon and the massacre in Qana. It was his Operation Grapes of Wrath that radicalized key individuals who would plan and carry out those attacks.

As Middle East scholar Juan Cole [wrote](#):

"In 1996, Israeli jets bombed a UN building where civilians had taken refuge at Cana/ Qana in south Lebanon, killing 102 persons; in the place where Jesus is said to have made water into wine, Israeli bombs wrought a different sort of transformation. In the distant, picturesque port of Hamburg, a young graduate student studying traditional architecture of Aleppo saw footage [of the destruction]. He was consumed with anguish and the desire for revenge. As soon as operation Grapes of Wrath had begun the week before, he had written out a martyrdom will, indicating his willingness to die avenging the victims, killed in that operation—with airplanes and bombs that were a free gift from the United States. His name was Muhammad Atta. Five years later he piloted American Airlines 11 into the World Trade Center."

Lawrence Wright, author of *The Looming Tower*, reported:

"On April 11, 1996, when Atta was twenty-seven years old, he signed a standardized will he got from the al-Quds mosque. It was the day Israel attacked Lebanon in Operation Grapes of Wrath. According to one of his friends, Atta was enraged, and by filling out his last testament during the attack he was offering his life in response."

The Egyptian Atta was the leader of the cell in Hamburg and then in the United States without whom the hijacking of airplanes on 9/11 almost certainly could not have happened.

Atta was not the only one moved to action. Investigative reporter James Bamford [told](#) Scott Horton that Osama bin Laden "frequently mentioned Qana during those times. It was a very inflaming incident in terms of his own development of his hatred for the United States, and as well for other people throughout the Middle East."

In his 1996 declaration of war against the United States, bin Laden [wrote](#) that among other crimes perpetrated against Muslims, "The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana, in Lebanon are still fresh in our memory.... All of this and the world watch and hear, and not only didn't respond to these atrocities, but also with a clear conspiracy between the USA and its' [sic]

allies and under the cover of the iniquitous United Nations, the dispossessed people were even prevented from obtaining arms to defend themselves.... The youths hold you responsible for all of the killings and evictions of the Muslims and the violation of the sanctities, carried out by your Zionist brothers in Lebanon; you openly supplied them with arms and finance.”

Lebanon and Qana, as we see were not the jihadis’ only grievances against the United States, but Peres’s war was one more count in a long bill of indictment against the United States, whose government has underwritten the Israeli military to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. Peres would have had no way of knowing that five years later his war would produce such a dramatic act of revenge against the American people. But that should not lessen our condemnation of him. His mission in life – Zionism – required the degradation and destruction of the indigenous people who did not fit into his vision. It was inevitable that some kind of vengeful backlash would result. As usual, the victims were innocent bystanders. Perpetrators like Peres get to die of old age.