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Contexts

Topical

Palestinian Unity Government 1

Historical

The Barbary Wars 2

Biblical

Territory of David & Solomon 3

Calendar

This Month

Welcome

A variety of material this month, from the Unity Government of the PNA, announced this week, to the Barbary Wars of 200 years ago, and the territory conquered, occupied and controlled by David and Solomon 3,000.

But first, before you read on, a question:

From Jerusalem, if you wanted to travel to the Euphrates River, in which direction would you go, and how far do you think it is?

Write me at pkclark@pmbx.net & let me know what you think.

Palestinian 'Unity' Government

On Thursday, March 15th, the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, accepted the line-up of the new government proposed by Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. Abbas is head of Fatah, Yasser Arafat's party, for many years the strongest party within the PLO. Haniyeh is leader of Hamas, which a year ago overwhelmingly won the Palestinian election, but which then brought on a Western embargo on aid and a refusal on Israel's part to transfer to the PNA taxes it had collected on behalf of the authority. Internal tensions between supporters of secular Fatah and Islamist Hamas led to rising violence, especially in poverty-ridden and despairing Gaza, where Hamas is strongest. Various truces failed to settle this violence, which continued even after the two parties made statements of reconciliation at a conference promoted by Saudi Arabia.

One of the results of that conference was the progress towards the formation of a Unity Government in the Palestinian territories – one in which the *Cabinet* was made up of a balanced number of Hamas and Fatah members, as well as non-aligned 'technocrats' with skills in the fields (finance, etc.) in which they hold ministry positions.

The last position to be decided, that of **Interior Minister**, was one that has been problematic ever since the last years of Yasser Arafat, when he refused to yield control of the security forces even to a member of his own organization, Fatah, his then Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas.

Interior Minister: **Hani al-Qawasmi** (Aged 49, with 5 children Qawasmi is a professor and lawyer, with little experience in security matters.)

Finance Minister: **Salam Fayyad** (Fayyad was finance minister in the previous Fatah-controlled government. He worked for the World Bank and was the IMF representative to the PNA from 1995-2001. He founded an alternative party, Third Way, but this did poorly in the 2006 elections.)

Foreign Minister: **Ziad Abu Amr** (Abu Amr from Gaza is an independent lawmaker and political science professor. Though he represented Hamas in the 2006 election, he is Fatah's choice for this post.)

Deputy Prime Minister: **Azzam al-Ahmed** (From Jenin, he is the leader of Fatah's representatives in parliament. He has long been close to Abbas, an ally since their days in Tunisia, and is a known opponent of Hamas.)



As his first appointment after the government was approved, Abbas appointed **Mohammed Dahlan** as his National Security Advisor. Dahlan is perhaps Hamas' strongest opponent, and the appointment was met with complaints from Hamas.

Though the platform for the new government fails to explicitly accept Israel, it does refer to it in terms that accept it as a negotiating partner with boundaries up to the 1967 ceasefire line.

Some excerpts:

"resistance is a legitimate right for the Palestinian people that is guaranteed by all international conventions. Our people have the right to defend themselves before any Israeli aggression"

The unity government will "respect" past agreements signed with Israel and "respect" international resolutions

"stability and peace in the region are dependent on ending all forms of occupation in the Palestinian territories, including removing the racist wall, settlements and stopping the Judaisation of Jerusalem".

The government will seek to "maintain and broaden" the current ceasefire with Israel in the Gaza Strip "in return for Israel's cessation of its occupation measures ... such as assassinations, arrests, incursions, house demolition, clearing of lands, excavation in Jerusalem," and for the "lifting of checkpoints and reopening of crossing points, the ending of travel restrictions and the release of prisoners".

The government authorises Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah to handle negotiations with Israel, "based on the commitment to achieve Palestinian national goals", and to present any "fateful" agreement to a national vote.

The Barbary Wars

During the 16th century, privateers – semi-independent mercenary ships that fought for the booty obtained from their conquests – assisted the emerging Ottoman Empire to assert its control over the Mediterranean. After the expulsion of the Moors from Spain with the conclusion of the long 400-year *reconquista*, the *Corsairs* based on the North African coast were instrumental in maintaining Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya under the control of the Ottomans.



The Ottomans paid the *corsairs* to raid and attack European towns and ships on the North African Barbary coast. Khair Ed Din *Barbarossa* was the most famous of these. His family was Turkish, but based on the island of Djerba, in southern Tunisia. The Ottoman Turks paid Barbarossa to defend Algiers. He was able to capture the city in 1529, avenging his brother who had earlier been killed there by the Spanish.

In 1534 Barbossa took Tunis for a short time, an event that contributed to the defeat in 1574 of the Hafsids, the Tunisian dynasty that had resisted the Ottoman conquest.

By the late 18th century the United States had won its independence, but was unable to protect the Mediterranean trade that it was involved in. There are records of the numbers of ships operated by the Barbary States: Algeria, 19; Morocco, 20; Tunis, 94; Tripoli, 11. These were based in various ports of the territory – Tunis, for example, had ships based in Bizerte, Tunis, Mahdia, and elsewhere.

In 1785 the United States had no navy to defend its shipping, when two of its ships were captured by the Barbary pirates.



The Burning of the Philadelphia

These ships were the schooner, *Maria*, out of Boston, taken on July 25, 1785, and the *Dauphin*, taken five days later. Between them 21 Americans had been taken captive by the Algerian corsairs, and the USA paid a \$60,000 ransom for them. Then, for the next 15 years the USA paid about \$1m per year, 20% of its annual budget in 1800.

When Jefferson became president in 1801 and refused to pay such bounties to the *privateers* the Barbary states declared war. Jefferson sent the navy to patrol the region but in 1803 the *Frigate Philadelphia* ran aground in Tripoli harbor and was captured. Its captain and crew were taken hostage.

In a daring raid in 1804, Lt. Stephen Decatur led a group of sailors into the harbor, to burn the ship, preventing the pirates from using it (see picture).

Tripoli was difficult to assault, but in 1805 a group of US marines (aided by Greek, Arab & Berber mercenaries) made an overland raid on Derna, from Cairo. An attack on Tunis was also necessary before the Bey submitted to US demands. This temporarily concluded the hostilities, and the first period (1801-1805) of the Barbary Wars.



Lt. Stephen Decatur

Hoever, as soon as 1807 Algiers began again taking American ships and sailors hostages. Due to the worsening situation that led up to the War of 1812, the US was unable to respond as it wished. After the war, in 1815 a force of 10 ships was sent to deal with the problem. Led by Decatur they attacked Algiers, taking hundreds of prisoners, negotiated a treaty releasing the USA from tribute obligations, and freed 1,642 prisoners and slaves currently held. Decatur then pushed through a similar treaty in Tunis.

The Dey of Algiers repudiated the treaty almost as soon as the ink was dry (and Decatur's ships were on their way to Tunis). The following year, however, a European fleet bombarded Algiers, effectively enforcing the treaty Decatur had implemented, and ensuring that Christians would no longer be captured and enslaved by the corsairs.

This Month

Feb	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Mar	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
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