

NORTHERN STAGE PRESENTS THE WINNER OF THE 2017 TONY AWARD FOR BEST PLAY



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## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

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J.T. Rogers is a multiple award-winning, internationally recognized American playwright who lives in New York. His plays include *Oslo*, *Blood and Gifts*, *The Overwhelming*, *White People*, and *Madagascar*.

In May 2017, Rogers won the Lucille Lortel Award for Best Play, the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Broadway Play, and the 2017 Drama League Award for Outstanding Production of a Play, all for *Oslo*. *Oslo* was nominated for seven 2017 Tony Awards, including Best Play, as well as two 2017 Drama Desk Awards, including Outstanding Play. It ultimately won the Tony Award for Best Play and the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play. In 2017, *Oslo* also won the Obie Award for Best New American Theatre Work.

“As a playwright, I look to tell stories that are framed against great political rupture. I am obsessed with putting characters onstage who struggle with, and against, cascading world events — and who are changed forever through that struggle. While journalism sharpens our minds, the theater can expand our sense of what it means to be human. It is where we can come together in a communal space to hear ideas that grip us, surprise us — even infuriate us — as we learn of things we didn’t know. For me, that is a deeply, thrillingly, political act.”

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## TERMS TO KNOW

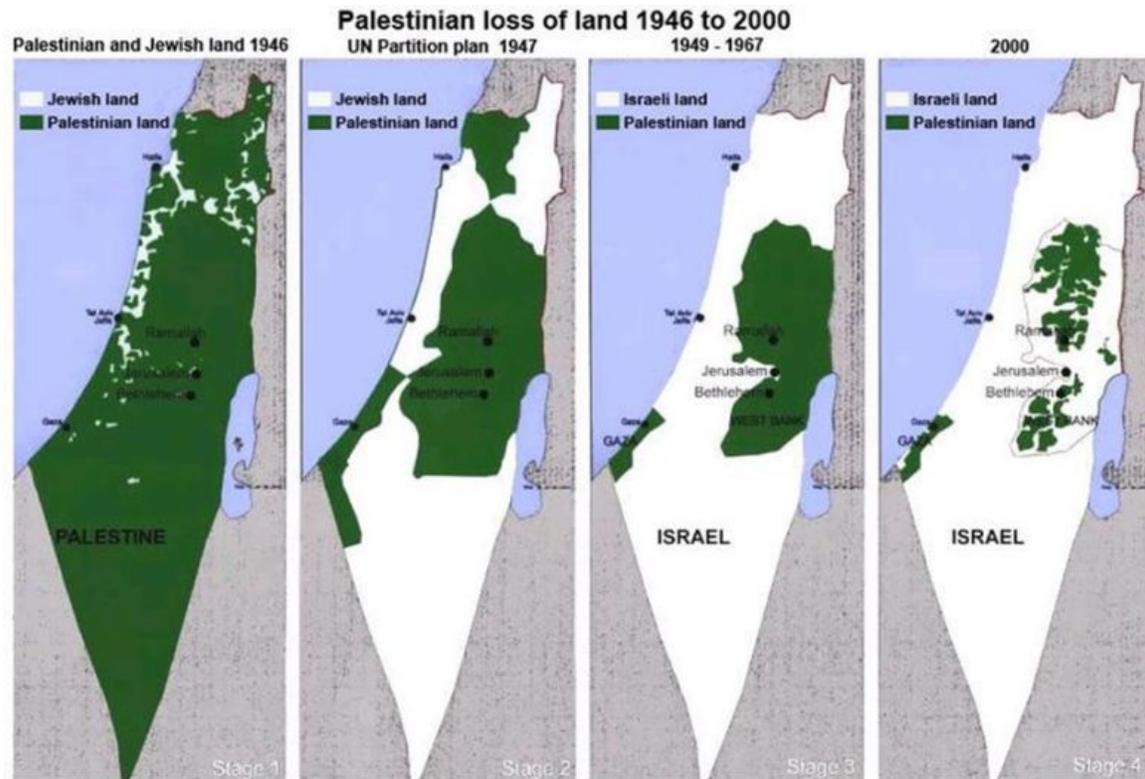
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- **PLO:** Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO represents the world’s Palestinians (Arabs who lived in Palestine before the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel). Their legislature is the Palestine National Council, and they are governed by the Palestine National Charter/Covenant, which calls for “the complete elimination of Israeli sovereignty in Palestine and the destruction of the State of Israel”.
- **The Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS):** Norway's only foreign intelligence service that reports to the Minister of Defense. The NIS collects information about situations and conditions outside the nation’s borders to help provide Norwegian authorities with a solid foundation on which to make decisions in matters that concern foreign, security, and defense policies.
- **Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF):** Founded in 1990 by Hirschfeld and Pundak as a non-profit, non-governmental think tank, whose goal is to support Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab economic, political, and civil engagement, working toward a two-state solution. This is in opposition to the PLO, that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel.
- **Intifada:** Means tremor, shivering, or shuddering in Arabic. In the Palestinian context, Intifada refers to aggressive non-violent resistance of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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The three regions currently known as Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank were once all the territory known as Palestine. Ownership of the land is claimed primarily by two groups: Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

Israeli Jews, whose ancestors began migrating to the area in the 1880s, claim the land based on a promise from God and also the need for a safe haven from widespread hostility toward the Jewish people (known as anti-Semitism). Palestinian Arabs say they are the rightful inhabitants of the land because their ancestors have lived there for hundreds of years.

**1947:** After the Arab-Israeli War of 1947, Palestine is divided into the areas above, known as Israel and Palestine, and some 700,000 Palestinians become refugees.

**1964:** The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is formed.

**1967:** "Six-Day War" takes place. Prior to the Six-Day War, attacks against Israeli forces by fledgling Palestinian guerilla groups based in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan increased, leading to retaliation by Israeli armed forces. The conflict lasted from June 5-10 and was a decisive victory for Israel. The Arab countries' losses in the conflict far outweighed those of Israel - Egypt's casualties numbered more than 11,000, with 6,000 for Jordan and 1,000 for Syria, compared with only 700 for Israel. The conflict

created hundreds of thousands of refugees and brought more than one million Palestinians in the occupied territories under Israeli rule.

**1987:** First Palestinian Intifada begins. On December 9 in the Jabalia refugee camp, an Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) truck collided with a civilian car, killing four Palestinians. A protest movement arose, consisting of resistance and civil disobedience, including strikes, boycotts, and violence against the IDF and its infrastructure within the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Israel initially deployed approximately 80,000 soldiers and fired live ammunition. In the first 13 months, 332 Palestinians and 12 Israelis were killed, according to some reports. Among the Palestinians, many children and adolescents were killed or injured. The global diffusion of images of soldiers beating adolescents with clubs led to the adoption of Israeli forces firing semi-lethal plastic bullets. Over the six years of conflict, the IDF killed almost 1,200 Palestinians, with around 23,000-29,000 Palestinian children suffering injuries. Among Israelis, approximately 100 civilians and 60 IDF personnel were killed, and more than 1,400 Israeli civilians and 1,700 soldiers were injured.

**1993:** Oslo Peace Accords signed by Israel and the PLO. Under the Accords, the Gaza Strip (a rectangle of land along the Mediterranean coast between Israel and Egypt) was turned over to the newly created Palestinian Authority, to form one wing of an emerging Palestinian state, along with the West Bank.

**1995:** Oslo II Accords signed between Israel and the PLO, giving Palestinians control over parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

**1997:** West Bank City of Hebron is divided into areas of Israeli and Palestinian control.

**2000:** Beginning of the Second Intifada. Violence began in September 2000 after Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister of Israel, made a visit to the Temple Mount. This was seen by Palestinians as highly provocative, and Palestinian demonstrators, throwing stones at police, were dispersed by the Israeli army, using tear gas and rubber bullets. High numbers of casualties among civilians and combatants resulted. The death toll, including both military and civilian, is estimated to be about 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis, as well as 64 foreigners. Many consider the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit on February 8, 2005 to be the end of the Second Intifada, when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon agreed that Palestinian factions would stop acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere and, in parallel, Israel would cease all military activity against Palestinians everywhere.

**2003:** Israel begins construction of the West Bank security wall/fence.

**2005:** Ariel Sharon withdrew all Israeli settlers from Gaza, making it the first territory completely in Palestinian hands. Israel kept tight control over border crossings and continued to conduct raids.

**2015:** The Vatican recognizes the State of Palestine

**2016:** United States commits \$38 billion over ten years to military assistance for Israel.

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## WHO'S WHO

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### **Mona Juul**

- Born 1959 in Steinkjer, Norway
- Norwegian Diplomat in 1993
- State Secretary in Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000-2001
- Norwegian Ambassador to Israel, 2001-2004

### **Terje Rød-Larsen**

- Born November, 22 1947
- Moved to Cairo in 1989; performed detailed sociological study of the West Bank, Gaza, and Eastern Jerusalem and made personal connections in the region.
- Appointed Ambassador and Special Advisor for the Middle East peace process to the Norwegian Foreign Minister in 1993
- Became the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories at the rank of Under-Secretary-General in 1994

### **Johan Jørgen Holst**

- Born November 29, 1937 – Died January 13, 1994
- Norwegian diplomat
- Minister of Defence from 1987 to 1989 and from 1991 to 1993

### **Jan Egeland**

- Born September 12, 1957
- Norwegian diplomat, political scientist, humanitarian leader and former Labour Party politician
- State Secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1990 to 1997
- United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator from 2003 to 2006

### **Marianne Heiberg**

- Born December 7, 1945 – Died December 26, 2004
- Began working for the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) in the 1980s and was among the prime Middle East policy experts, studying ethical conflicts and peace-keeping operations in the region
- In 1994, Heiberg was director of the UN organization for aid to Palestinian refugees UNRWA field office in Jerusalem
- From 1995 to 1997 she also held the position of Special Advisor to the Director-General of UNESCO for its Culture for Peace program

### **Yasser Arafat**

- Born in Cairo, 1929 – Died November 11, 2004
- Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (1969-2004)
- Won Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 with Rabin and Peres
- President of the Palestinian Authority (1996-2004)

### **Hassan Asfour**

- Official PLO liaison with Palestinian Delegation at multilateral US-sponsored talks
- Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council
- President of Human Rights & NGO Affairs Commission

### **Ahmed Qurei**

- Born March 26, 1938 in Abu Dis near Jerusalem in British controlled Palestine
- Developed economic plan submitted to the World Bank in 1993 for the Palestinian territories
- Founded and directed the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) in 1993 – international donors to the Palestinian cause

- Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority 2000-2003

### **Yitzhak Rabin**

- Born March 1, 1922, Jerusalem – Killed November 4, 1995 in Tel Aviv–Yafo by right-wing extremist
- Directed the defense of Jerusalem during the Arab-Israeli Wars (1948-1949)
- Chief of Staff of Israel's armed forces during the Six-Day War (June 1967)
- Israel's Ambassador to the US in 1968; Prime Minister of Israel 1974-77, 1992-95
- Awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 with Peres and Arafat

### **Uri Savir**

- Born in Jerusalem in 1953
- Israel's Director-General of the Foreign Ministry from 1993-1996
- 1988-1992 Director of the Israeli Consulate in New York
- 1996 – established the Peres Center for Peace (current President)
- *The Process: 1,100 Days that Changed the Middle East*, his book on Oslo, was published in 1998.

### **Yossi Beilin**

- Born June 12, 1948 in Tel Aviv
- Worked in the signal corps in the IDF during the Six-Day War (1967)
- 1984 – appointed Cabinet Secretary for Peres; 1986 – Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Member of the Knesset (legislature) 1988-1999; Deputy Minister of Finance 1988-1990
- 1990 – Established the Economic Cooperation Foundation with Hirschfeld and Pundak
- Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs under Peres in 1992

### **Joel Singer**

- Legal Advisor to the Israeli Foreign Ministry
- Served 18 years in the Israeli military prosecutor's office, where he specialized in international law and became the legal adviser on matters relating to the occupied territories

### **Ron Pundak**

- Born May 14, 1955 – Died April 11, 2014
- Israeli historian and journalist
- Executive director of the Peres Center for Peace in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Co-Chairman of its Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum

### **Yair Hirschfeld**

- Senior Professor of Economics at the University of Haifa
- Prof. Hirschfeld was a key architect of the Oslo Accords in 1993. He has been a strong supporter of the two-state solution and has urged the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli government to accept some form of this solution.

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## The Oslo Accords

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Secret meetings, organized by the Norwegians and carried out between the Israelis and Palestinians, were carried out in 1992 and 1993. The pact established a timetable for the Middle East peace process and planned for an interim Palestinian government in Gaza and Jericho in the West Bank. After the signing, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat shook hands. The United States was not actively involved in the negotiations in Oslo.

### The Accord called for:

- Israel to withdraw from Jericho and Gaza, and eventually the West Bank
- Five years of limited autonomy for Palestinians in those areas
- Election of Palestinian Legislative Council within nine months
- Establishment of a Palestinian police force
- The question of Jerusalem was left undecided

### Timeline:

**April 1992:** Terje Rød-Larsen, head of a Norwegian research institute, suggests to Israeli politician Yossi Beilin that Norway act as an intermediary between Israel and the PLO.

**September 10, 1992:** At a secret meeting in Tel Aviv, Israel, Norwegian State Secretary Jan Egeland formally offers his country's help.

**December 1992 to April 1993:** Fourteen meetings are held, in London and Norway, between Professor Yair Hirschfeld and Ahmed Qurei.

**April 1993:** After several months, Qurei insists on meeting with someone officially representing Israel's government. Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General Uri Savir takes over for Hirschfeld. Qurei and Savir meet 11 more times between April and August.



**August 19, 1993:** Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres flies to Oslo, Norway, and meets with Qurei. He witnesses the signing of the agreement between Savir and Qurei.

**September 10, 1993:** The PLO reaffirms its recognition of Israel's right to exist, and in turn, Israel recognizes the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

**September 13, 1993:** The Oslo Accords are signed by Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas, witnessed by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, in Washington, DC.

**October 1994:** Arafat, Peres, and Rabin are awarded the

Nobel Peace Prize.

**September 28, 1995:** A second significant agreement is signed in Washington, DC. This agreement is often referred to as Oslo II.

**November 4, 1995:** Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated at a peace rally by an Israeli ultranationalist who radically opposed Rabin's peace initiative and the signing of the Oslo Accords.

**Early 2000:** Israeli and Palestinian leaders are unable to resolve key issues to agree on a final settlement.

**September 2000:** The Second Intifada: Riots, attacks, and suicide bombings end the peace process.

**September 30, 2015:** Mahmoud Abbas accuses Israel of not committing to the Oslo Accords and declares that Palestinians "cannot continue to be bound by these agreements."

Today, tensions are still high between Israelis and Palestinians. While most non-Muslim countries recognize Israel's legitimacy and maintain diplomatic relations, they are generally critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and the ongoing occupation of the West Bank.

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## FURTHER READING

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- A very brief timeline of the history of Palestine/Israel conflict from *The New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/studentactivity/20090109gazahistory.pdf>
- *The Process* by Uri Savir. Matthew Cohn, playing Savir in Northern Stage's production, says, "This is an eminently readable and extremely engaging account of the negotiations and the years after."
- *The Norway Channel, Secret Talks*, by Jane Corbin. Susan Haefner, playing Mona Juul in Northern Stage's production, says, "This book gave a great sense of Mona's drive and passion; it let me inside the person I am playing."
- Al Jazeera Documentary: *The Price of Oslo*  
Part 1 <https://youtu.be/ism-ctaSbw0>  
Part 2 <https://youtu.be/TgFWEVQTeHM>
- *Touching Peace: From the Oslo Accord to a Final Agreement*, by Yossi Beilin
- *From Oslo to Jerusalem: The Palestinian Story of the Secret Negotiations*, by Ahmed Qurie.

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## POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Do you think the Oslo Peace Accords were successful?
2. How are peace and respect related?
3. Why is the distinction between "existence" and "legitimacy" so important to both sides?
4. What do you think of Terje Rød-Larsen's approach to peace negotiations? Are they appropriate? Did they make future matters worse?
5. Are there lessons from *Oslo* that you could apply to our modern-day political climate?
6. Can you think of a time when you resolved a conflict through discussion and mediation?

Sources:

[https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/theater/oslo-and-the-drama-in-diplomacy.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/theater/oslo-and-the-drama-in-diplomacy.html?_r=0)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.\\_T.\\_Rogers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._T._Rogers)

<https://www.history.com/topics/oslo-accords>

<https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/189-israel-palestine/38356-the-oslo-accords.html>

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<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/studentactivity/20090109gazahistory.pdf>