

THE PALESTINIAN BESIEGED--I

By MARK A. BRUZONSKY

Arab let-down

With the Arab defeat in 1948, the conflict was transformed, at least for most observers in the West, into that between Israel and "the Arabs"—for the Palestinians were demoralised, scattered, and helpless. This was the period of the culmination of the first defeat of Palestine: Zionism had triumphed against many odds and in a larger part of Palestine than specified in the UN partition plan, and the Hashemite throne annexed the West Bank, while Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip.

SECOND DEFEAT

Today, we are probably living through the second historic defeat of Palestine—the end to hopes for true mutual recognition and an honest two-state solution, though a faint and fading glimmer of hope remains. We are today living as witnesses to a crossroads in history; the end of one chapter and the quandary of how to begin another. And pregnant in the final death of the partition approach is the possibility, actually the likelihood, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will yet evolve in new, potentially cataclysmic directions.

As British journalist Alan Hart concludes in his recent book *Arafat: Terrorist or Peacemaker?*

What is likely to happen if and when the Palestinians are forced to conclude that politics and compromise do not get results? My guess is that Arafat will be swept aside by Palestinian radicals who, with the growing support of Palestinian and then Arab masses, will commit themselves to the first real Arab revolution... which will have as its objective the overthrow of the existing Arab order and its replacement by revolutionary Arab leaders who will be prepared to confront the West and Israel by all means, no matter what the cost. Such a struggle would probably not end until the region and possibly the world had been devastated by a nuclear holocaust.

Even in the 1950s, under the leadership of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, Egypt showed signs of wanting to find a way to make a deal with Israel, so long as something reason-

able for the Palestinian people could be arranged. At that time, a deal struck by Egypt, even one without Palestinian participation or consent, might have taken root. But new developments intervened and the struggle became more deeply embedded in the fabric of regional politics and history.

LEGITIMACY

With the advent of the PLO in 1964 there was something new—a Palestinian component with real Palestinian players of the next generation emerging, though still taking their cues from Arab leaders. It was Nasir's Egypt that breathed life into the PLO, and it was Egypt's foreign minister, Ismail Fahmi, at the 1974 Rabat summit who proposed the PLO as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people".

Nevertheless, the PLO and the Palestinian revolution have always been highly suspect for the conservative Arab regimes, which cling to power and privilege with decreasing legitimacy and thus through increasing surveillance, repression, and, whenever possible, co-optation. Then, as now Jordan and other Arab states stood in opposition to a truly independent Palestinian movement and competitively did what they could—while paying lip service to Palestinian nationalism—to force the movement under their wing.

The PLO first became a symbol of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, and then of the Palestinian quest for self-determination in part of Palestine; but it also became a weapon in the inter-Arab struggle for dominance. The PLO was never a serious military, or even terrorist, threat to Israel. Rather, the PLO became the embodiment of an historic wrong, a moral weight threatening Zionism's ethical foundations, a unique claimant on world society which had midwifed Israel's birth in partial atonement for the Nazi slaughter. When Yasir Arafat appeared before the United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 1974, he did so as a protégé of world society. He was accorded the stature of a head of state. He symbolised the third world's quest for dignity, assertiveness, and justice.

Even the Israeli establishment took note and—still then in the aftermath of the shock of the October 1973 war—openly began debating the serious issues involved in a real compromise with the Palestinian nationalists.

But virulent public opposition to the PLO increasingly became Israel's course, and the opposition heightened with the Likud's ascent to power. The basic issue was never the PLO as such, nor terrorism, for that matter. Rather, Israel had to decide whether to reopen the central questions of Palestinian nationalism and the basic historical debate over partition. And, except for a very marginal humanistic movement within Zionism, the answer in recent years has always been in the negative, even though liberal Zionists sometimes continue to masquerade as if they were in favour of partition in an attempt to assuage their own guilty consciences.

For the Arabs, meanwhile, behind-the-scenes intrigue continued, with constant manoeuvring to make sure that neither Palestinian secularism nor democracy actually took root without Arab establishment control—in the West Bank or anywhere else. For if either of these potent forces were actually unleashed in a free Palestine, what could the kings and potentates of Arab-dom expect in their own realms?

King Hussein had hardly forgotten the lessons of his own civil war; nor was he about to share power honestly with a truly independent PLO. Public words did not indicate real policies; and Hussein, with Israel's acquiescence, kept as much control of those on the West Bank as he could, while carefully circumscribing Palestinian activity within his own kingdom.

Palestinian nationalism, in the eyes of those holding power throughout the Arab world, threatened to become a virulent cancer and had to be both used and controlled, a reality which partly explains why the Palestinians stood alone against the full might of Israel in the summer of 1982.

MOVEMENT

By that time, however, the die had been cast. The Palestinian revolution had been tamed into a movement begging for a small piece of Palestine. The PLO's leaders had been nurtured into the prevailing Arab state system and thus placed in competition with the other Arab power centres, most notably in Amman and Damascus, but also in Cairo and Riyadh. Moreover, the movement was itself to come to reflect the Arab state system—symbolised by the largely ceremonial and impotent Arab League—of which it had become a part. In turn, such developments led the PLO to incompetent representation, nepotism, corruption, and cult worship of the leader. Such a PLO was fit to take its place

at the negotiating table and in the corridors of Arab power, but it was no longer fit actually to fight for Palestine.

The determined Zionists knew this all along however much they chanted against terrorism and occasionally smiled at the notion of negotiations. The PLO had neither the might nor the political sophistication to achieve its new goal of a Palestinian state carved out of the occupied territories to exist alongside and in connection with both Israel and Jordan.

COLLAPSE

Meanwhile, Israel worked overtime and effectively to discredit any Arab initiatives which threatened to reopen the subject of a comprehensive peace and which might have gained significant world support.

And so, by the mid-1980s, we are witness to what seems in all probability to be the second major defeat of Palestine—the collapse of mutual recognition as a Palestinian strategy for dealing with the reality of Israel, and the resurgence of Arab state actors—most importantly Jordan (with the help of Saudi Arabia) and Syria—in competition to control Palestinian politics and to check independent Palestinian political power. Indeed, by January 1986, King Hussein had finally taken the cautious step of sending to the Jordanian Parliament, in the words of the *New York Times*, "a new electoral law that reasserts Jordan's responsibility for the Israeli-occupied West Bank and provides representation for Palestinian refugees in Jordan."

Consequently, the basic vision of mutual accommodation and peaceful coexistence is now being kept alive through American-sponsored, Israeli-nurtured, and Arab-promoted diplomatic artificial resuscitation.

Whether the sheer act of beginning some form of negotiations can hold back the rage and dissatisfaction that has been building in the Arab world is difficult to predict. Suffice it to say that there is serious fear and escalating concern in Washington, Jerusalem, Cairo, Riyadh, and Amman; and the fear is such that the public presentation of the bleak situation has been increasingly sugar-coated and diplomatic circles are busy manufacturing multiple forms of camouflage to disguise political reality. (To be concluded)

[The writer is Washington based journalist who specialises in Middle East affairs]

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Little hope for children of poverty

Today is International Children's Day.

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It was out of the deeply traumatic embarrassment of the 1967 defeat, and while the Jewish world itself was being transformed into a Zionist-controlled monolith on matters relating to Israeli foreign policy, that the roots of the original conflict re-emerged and the PLO, invigorated by new leadership, itself seized the reigns from those who had been humiliated by the might of the Israeli state. It was also out of the 1967 conflicts—about which new evidence suggests direct American participation—that the U.S. began the shift from a modicum of "evenhandedness" to what has become an all but *de jure* military alliance with the Jewish state.

At first, the all-or-nothing aspects of the conflict predominated as the newly resurgent Palestinian movement substituted rhetorical bravado for actual power. But reality, however slowly, took hold and the contact between conqueror and vanquished in the occupied territories helped make the reality of a Jewish state understandable—however reluctantly acceptable to many Palestinians, and hence to many Arabs.

In the years following the "victorious" October 1973 war, it became progressively evident that the goal of the political elite within the Palestinian revolution had evolved from victory over Zionism to accommodation with Israel. Just as World Zionist Congress resolutions never precisely defined the borders of the new Jewish state, so too with the Palestinians. Nowhere, in some many words, did the idea of "peaceful coexistence" between Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have unambiguously quotable expression. And yet, at first secret meetings began between Jews and Arabs, and then between Israelis and Palestinians, including members of the PLO. The concepts of mutual recognition and coexistence began to take hold.

U.S. CONNECTION

Tragically newly flushed with power and territory, and increasingly frightened by the rising wealth, if not military power, of the Arab and Muslim worlds—a fear often manifested through heightened arrogance—Israel began to grow accustomed to its new status of hegemony. Moreover, the American connection became a source of growing intransigence as Israeli leaders found larger and larger amounts of economic and military aid being made available, and Washington began to expect Israel to take steps in the third world which America found difficult to take itself.

By the time of the arrival of the Reagan administration, the impotence and confusion of the Arab

all along rejected any compromise with Palestinian nationalism. The U.S. and Israel have interacted in recent years so as to enhance the imperialist, militarist, and anti-third world (including anti-Arab) factions in both countries. Even Israel's Labour party has submerged its pretensions toward international socialism and accommodated the rightist elements in the U.S. government and within American Jewry—as well as within Israel itself. "So extreme has become the rejectionist front in Israel that Peres is perceived as a moderate," noted one expert Washington analyst.

And yet, as the late 'Isam Sartawi once noted in an interview with *Le Monde*, "The Labour party is more dangerous for us than the Likud because the language and methods it uses are more acceptable to international public opinion. But asking us to choose between Begin and Peres is the same as asking whether we prefer to die by drowning or strangulation."

STRUGGLE

With the advent of the Carter administration, there was hope indeed. The struggle for a reasonable, historic compromise escalated. The slogans "Palestinian homeland", "comprehensive peace", "mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO," were all in the open. There were superpower talks behind the scenes, leading to the 1 October 1977 Joint Statement. Most important of all, there was a commitment from the American president and secretary of state to an honest and real political settlement that tackled the root issues of the conflict.

But all that was soon to fade as the Zionist movement vehemently counterattacked. Soviet-American rapprochement degenerated after the Soviet Afghan adventure began, and the Arab world found itself uncertain, confused, leaderless, and unable to capitalize on its new wealth and leverage. Moreover, the American progressive liberals failed themselves, and the Carter presidency lost both momentum and credibility. The thirteen days at Camp David thus took on an aura of urgency within American politics far beyond the issues of the Middle East. In an effort to buttress his crumbling presidency, Jimmy Carter led Anwar Sadat (and all of us) into a Camp David from which we have yet to recover and for which Sadat was at first ostracized and then hardly mourned by his own people.

In the aftermath of Camp David, the PLO's expulsion from Beirut, the American collapse vis-à-vis a Palestinian "homeland", and the Israeli assault on the PLO in Tunis symbolizing Israel's determination never to accommodate Palestinian nationalism, the vision of mutual recognition and any form of a two-state accommoda-

tion of diplomatic illusion that only further delays the day of real decision. For with the dissolution of the mutual recognition option, the entire construct of the past decades' "moderate" diplomacy disintegrates; the very notion of a stable, peaceful coexistence evaporates. The humiliation continually inflicted by Israel on the Palestinians and the entire Arab world is fuelling a major radicalization of Arab societies.

As for responsibility for today's predicament, there is much to share. The PLO's own incompetence as a political organization has to be noted, however much it chose the course of compromise. But, of course, Israeli intransigence has also been substantially to blame, as has American shortsightedness and duplicity, Egypt's mistaken course, and the impotence of the progressive and liberal forces in the West, especially in the U.S.

The future course of the struggle for Palestine should now become the focus of an open, wide-ranging debate for all Palestinians and for Jews who have come to appreciate that only by reaching a just compromise with the Palestinian people can there be real security, as well as moral vindication, for Israel. Outside powers have not only proven unable to resolve the conflict, but they have usually contributed to its continuation and often switched horses when self-interest dictated.

STRATEGIES

Today, Israel's economic and psychological situation, as well as its international standing, make possible long-term strategies that may not previously have been foreseen. Palestinian options go beyond acquiescence and capitulation to today's conditions, if a reasonable historic compromise cannot be achieved now with the contemporary balance of power and with the current outlook in the U.S. and Israel, then ways of altering today's realities need to be discussed and new plans formulated.

But there is yet a major preliminary step whose time has definitely come. The PLO of Yasir Arafat, the PLO which has for so long, but also so inadequately, championed the mutual recognition approach, has an obligation to itself and to history to clarify fully its position. Most of all it has an obligation to the people it has led, to the cause it has served, to the memory of so many who have suffered and died.

Though the PLO has achieved significant accomplishments in the past, many of its current representatives have proven to be either incompetent or corrupt, and the organization as a whole has shown itself grossly incapable of handling the all-important public relations aspects of contemporary international diplomacy.

Constantly outmanoeuvred both

wanted to be supportive.

For all of his talents in working within the Palestinian and Arab contexts, Yasir Arafat has been a public relations bonanza for Israel among Western audiences. Thus, to be fully candid, he has been a public relations disaster for his people. His style, manners, and language have made it very difficult for his message to be conveyed effectively. And he has refused to enlist the assistance of those Palestinians who have the capabilities he lacks. Moreover, in recent years, Arafat has presided over the very disunity and internal conflict of which he has warned and for fear of which he formerly justified his political ambiguity.

DEFEAT

Admittedly, in defeat there is a scattering of former supporters and competition to align with other factions. Yet the defeat in this case is as much a product of faulty PLO (and Arab) diplomacy as the cause of the organization's fracturing.

Consequently, the historic responsibility to clarify today's situation before finally having to admit failure and acknowledge the need to reconsider totally the future course of the Palestinian struggle falls to this man who has led the PLO for nearly a generation.

What is needed today from the Palestinian side is a clear strategy toward an understandable goal and public relations clarity. This needs to be coupled with an appreciation that there are times when politics is more theatre than substance, more manipulation for starting position than actual engagement at a negotiating table. Moreover, the competition is not simply between the PLO and Israel; it is also between the PLO and the various Arab state authorities, including, of course, His Majesty King Hussein.

Of course, the real culprits in this overall situation are Israel and the United States.

So of course it is the U.S. and Israel, the two real rejectionists when it comes to a comprehensive and just Middle East peace, who should be contemplating new attitudes and policies, and it is they whom history should primarily fault for having blocked, so far, an honourable peace. In the short term it may seem that Israel has succeeded in its quest for regional dominance, territorial expansion, and Palestinian subjugation, and that U.S. interests have been furthered by encouraging Israel on that course.

Yet, however, much the real responsibility is theirs, these two parties have made their choices and neither shows serious signs of any basic re-evaluation. They will have to live with the consequences, which in the long run could prove most difficult, and potentially disastrous. It is the U.S. and Israel who have created today's deadlock and who perpetuate the conflict. Together, it is they who are determined to negate Palestinian nationalism, to keep the Arab world divided and insecure, and to maintain Israeli hegemony throughout the region. In time, history will

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economic and military aid being made available, and Washington began to expect Israel to take steps in the third world which America found difficult to take itself.

By the time of the arrival of the Reagan administration, the impotence and confusion of the Arab world and the growing power and assertiveness of the Israeli lobby in the U.S. combined to make it possible for the U.S. Israeli strategic alliance to become public, thereby further strengthening the hand of the Israeli hard-liners, who had

Beirut, the American concept of a Palestinian "homeland", and the Israeli assault on the PLO in Tunis symbolizing Israel's determination never to accommodate Palestinian nationalism, the vision of mutual recognition and any form of a two-state accommodation- including talk of a homeland associated with Jordan- has shriveled nearly beyond recognition.

Today, the Palestinian revolution faces three choices- all bleak in its second historic defeat: acquiescence, renewed struggle in

either incompetent or corrupt, and the organisation as a whole has shown itself grossly incapable of handling the all-important public relations aspects of contemporary international diplomacy.

Constantly outmanoeuvred both politically and in the press, the PLO has failed to build a large, committed, and active constituency of supporters beyond the Palestinians themselves. Moreover, it has confused and alienated many who are sympathetic and who have

deadlock and who perpetuate the conflict. Together, it is they who are determined to negate Palestinian nationalism; to keep the Arab world, divided and insecure, and to maintain Israeli hegemony throughout the region. In time, history will accurately record this period. But for now, it is the imperialists, the colonialists, and the militarists who also dominate the presentations of the issues of our day- at least in the West, and especially in the U.S. (Concluded).

Syria's foreign exchange reserves drop

LONDON, June 2: Syria's reserves of foreign exchange have fallen to around 100 million dollars, which is just enough to cover the country's imports for two weeks, the 'Financial Times' reported on Monday.

The shortage has forced the Syrian authorities to impose drastic measures to safeguard existing reserves, the report said, quoting but not identifying an executive of the Syrian Central Bank.

The 'Financial Times' said that recently, the Syrian commercial bank had stopped parents wanting to send money to their children studying abroad from buying dollars because these were needed to purchase food and medical supplies ahead of the Ramadan fast.

Several million dollars were involved, the paper said.

The paper said Syria's financial problems stemmed from a reduction in cash aid from the Gulf states, a drop in revenue sent home by Syrian expatriate workers, disappointing export earnings, and above all huge military spending.-AFP

USSR, Japan to continue peace treaty talks

TOKYO, June 2: Japanese Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe returned home on Sunday from Moscow with a Soviet pledge to continue peace treaty negotiations.

A Japan Air Lines jetliner carrying him arrived at Marita airport at 10.14 a.m.

Before his departure from the Soviet Union, the two countries issued a joint communique reaffirming plans for an exchange of visits by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Despite a strong Japanese request, the communique did not mention a territorial dispute between the two countries over four northern islands which has continued since the end of World War II.

But the communique did say Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze has accepted Abe's invitation to visit Tokyo next year for another round of regular ministerial consultations which Japan

said will cover the dispute.

Regular Foreign Ministers talks resumed in January after an eight year suspension when Shevardnadze visited Tokyo and discussed with Abe the territorial issue which Japan regards as the major obstacle to the signing of a peace treaty.

Abe hinted at a news conference just before leaving Moscow that visits of Japanese to their family graves on the Soviet controlled islands may resume this summer after an year break.

Japan suspended the visits in 1976 after the Soviets started requesting former islanders to carry Japanese passports with a Soviet visa instead of a simple Id card issued by the Japanese government.

In return for limited Soviet concessions on the issue, Japan agreed to resume science and technology co-operation talks sometime this year.

During the second round of talks that lasted four hours on Saturday, officials said, Abe and Shevardnadze agreed that the easing of tension on the Korean Peninsula

would benefit both countries.

They also dealt with the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the officials said without elaboration.-OANA

Arens to visit Pretoria

JERUSALEM, June 2: The Israeli government authorised minister without portfolio Moshe Arens on Sunday to visit South Africa within the next few days, sources close to the Prime Ministers office said here.

The government specified that Mr. Arens should meet only leaders of the Jewish community in South Africa, and no official representatives of the Pretoria government, the sources said.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres has criticised South Africa's racial policies on several occasions, but refused to impose sanctions against Pretoria because of a possible backlash against the 120,000 Jews in the country.-AFP

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