

Mideast imperative: Live together

By Mark A. Bruzonsky

Not since 1936 has there been such a widespread, uncontrollable revolt by the Palestinians against their situation. Then it was against the British. Today it is against the Israelis and their American benefactors.

Jew and Arab live more separated today than they did in 1936. Back then the two communities were far more integrated. Jews lived next to Arabs. Arabs had Jewish friends. Talk of a binational pluralistic state shared by two ethnic groups was not only acceptable but was championed by major personalities. Neither Jew nor Arab was demonized by the other. Extremists were isolated by both communities.

But 50 years and six wars later, the separation is far more severe. An entire generation has matured with the mentality of conqueror and oppressed. The cultural and psychological divisions are far more pronounced. Few Arabs or Jews have real friends on the other side. Few Arabs or Jews ever cross over, except in uniform. The world of the camps, just commuting distance from Israeli cities, is unknown and deeply threatening to Israelis. And the life of the Jews is impenetrably different for Arabs who are required by law to leave Jewish areas come sundown.

Whatever happens in the coming weeks, this modern revolt of Palestinians really means that both the Israelis and the Arabs of Palestine have reached another historic moment of decision. Unless both sides soon find the political wisdom to turn toward each other, they are likely to grow still further apart. In such further separation both parties will continue to radicalize and grow away from the ideas of compromise, which have dominated political thinking during the last two decades, toward aspirations of eventual triumph and revenge.

For the Jews, expulsion is a quietly whispered reaction to the fear of being swamped by the exploding Arab birth rate and the violence of mass uprising. For the Arabs, the failure of "moderate" approaches has led to interest in the more uncompromising approach of "Islamic revolution," to rekindled dreams that one day the Jews, like the Romans, the Crusaders, the Ottomans and the British before them, will depart and Palestine will be once more.

The Israelis are more and more led by uncompromising zealots for whom the gun is more potent than true dialogue. The Palestinians unquestionably look to the fragmented PLO but are burdened with a cult leader who has become increasingly embarrassing in his international diplomatic dealings, especially with the West.

Only the United States has the leverage to bring the parties together; yet for nearly a decade now the U.S. has lacked the understanding and vision to even attempt this task. Moreover, American politics has evolved in such a way that those who stray into the area of peacemaking against Israeli designs are subject to severe financial and political pressures.

So the stalemate prevails, the cancer expands, the world watches daily in seeming impotence. But even these realities do not sufficiently express the dangers.

For there are now hundreds of battlefield nuclear weapons on one side and a growing force of ballistic missiles with chemical and biological warheads on the other. Unpleasant in the extreme to contemplate, this is the true *Realpolitik* situation within which the protagonists prepare for renewed international conflict.

Unlike the Middle East of earlier times, today's regimes are arming for the first time with weapons of mass destruction in an area of compressed geography. And they are doing just when political and emotional tensions are rising to a boil.

These tensions must be relieved. Palestine and Greater Israel are one and the same. A true political settlement has to devise a way to integrate both people's national aspirations for identity and equality within the geographical and economic realities under which they both must continue to exist, or both perish. A way to live together, not apart, is what is required—and this necessitates political imagination, ideological flexibility, cultural understanding and moral courage.

It will likely take bold new leadership on both sides if the march toward further separation and eventual destruction is to be overcome. There are men like Ezer Weizman in Israel and Philip Klutznick among American Jewry who have the requisite understanding and vision. There are many capable Palestinians as well, including such people as Edward Said in the U.S. and Nabil Shaath in Cairo, who possess the insights required to reverse this tragic course.

But so long as the elected leaders in Washington, Jerusalem and the Arab capitals avoid an honest and urgent search for a basic cure, the Palestinian cancer will continue to defy us all. In this case it will continue to spread, further infecting the entire region with untold future ramifications bound to be both revolutionary and destructive.



Mark A. Bruzonsky is the former Washington associate of the World Jewish Congress and the co-editor of "Security in the Middle East: Regional Change and Great Power Strategies," jointly published last September by the Smithsonian's Woodrow Wilson