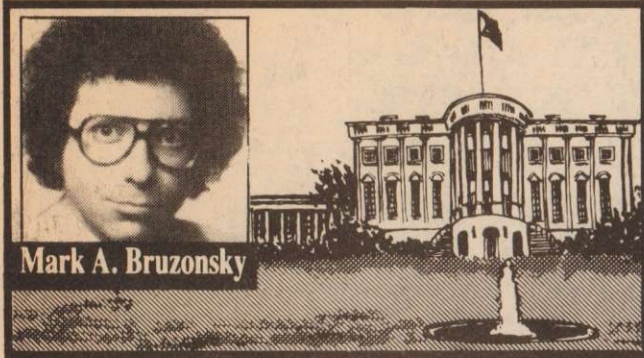


From



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Washington

RECENT scenes on TV around the world of elite Army officers directly challenging Prime Minister Shamir at a meeting outside the West Bank's most nationalist town, Nablus, tell but part of the story. A few days later, possibly still shaken though at the time, commenting on European talks with Yasser Arafat, Shamir was heard to wonder out loud, "What's happening to our world?"

Even with the camera's rolling, the Army officers at the Nablus meeting bluntly told the Prime Minister that they were deeply anguished at being forced to brutalise the Palestinians, morally bewildered that Israel's Defence forces were reduced to beating women and children.

More and more voices are being raised inside Israel that "the problem" has to be solved politically and that entering into talks with the PLO has become necessity not choice. Ezer Weizmann, the man who ran Menachem Begin's campaign and is generally credited with getting him elected, now a Labour Party Minister, has expressed these very views in recent days.

And more and more, Jewish voices around the world are also being raised, louder and louder, against Israel's course. "The Israel that I knew and appreciated all the years of my life has suddenly changed to a merciless monster," a Jewish British doctor told Israel's *Hadashot* newspaper after spending a few

Angeles and son of Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, have come forward in recent months. They have not only called for a Palestinian State but have publicly run advertisements in leading American magazines stating that "The continual oppression and denial of Palestinians of their right to self-determination is an injustice which has become intolerable" and calling for "a complete re-evaluation of what has become since 1967 the American sponsorship of Israel" and a "radical reduction" of American aid to Israel.

How there tensions and intellectual expressions will translate into political change is of course the key question; but a question very difficult to answer with any specifics. Nevertheless, the build-up of dissent and bewilderment is bound to have a growing impact.

Here's another very compelling example of the tension still building among Jews. Just read the following "Letter From Israel" from a young American woman who emigrated there a few years ago and is now a nursing student there, and you can quite literally feel the pain, the inner turmoil, that is currently resonating among many Jews both in Israel and the US.

REHOVOT, Israel — The Zionist dream captured me young. At 15 I was already imagining my future here; by 20 I had left my comfortable life as an American college

Growing disillusionment among Jews

Like many American Jews, I used to judge Israel by a wholly different standard than other nations. US aggression in Central America was unforgivable; Israeli aggression against its neighbours and its own displaced Palestinian population was another matter altogether.

aggression against its neighbours and its own displaced Palestinian population was another matter altogether. Almost by definition, Israel was not an aggressor. Virtually any action it took was a justifiable response to "terrorism," part of a "heroic" struggle for existence in the face of overwhelming odds and hostile neighbours. So obvious was it to me that Israelis were the good guys that I left my friends and family.

Try to understand, then, what it was like to arrive in what I saw as my spiritual homeland, only to find it cast in the role of invader rather than defender. American Jews were defiant, defensive excusing Ariel Sharon's invasion, but some Israeli Jews were beginning for the first time in the country's history, to resist military service in Lebanon, to stage anti-war protests.

Apart from the moral status of the war, the tension in those days was unbearable. I listened to the names of those killed in the fighting in case one of them should be a friend. On television, I watched the funerals of boys younger than I — and I was pretty young. But soon it became clear that this was no three-day operation to the 48-kilometre line intended simply to make the border safe. This was an all-out war, initiated by Israel, against an enemy that wasn't clearly defined.

I remember working in the Kibbutz fields one day, hearing the planes overhead — too many planes, I thought. Later that afternoon came the news of the invasion of

defence but also about the larger issues of humanity and morality.

During and after that war, we watched the growth of the militant right, the movement of fundamentalist Jews. They built settlements in the occupied territories and became a powerful political force in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. I watched as money was poured into their settlements, highlighting the contrast with decaying Arab villages in the same Israeli-controlled territories.

Israeli soldiers were still in Lebanon when my draft notice arrived. I served most of my active duty in Shomron, just outside the Arab town of Genin. Although my service was relatively quiet, I felt the tension acutely and am still haunted by the hatred from Arab eyes when we drove through Genin. It hit me that I was part of an occupying force, and while I didn't actually see the beatings or the midnight arrests or the daily harassment by the other soldiers, I was close enough to know it was part of the occupation long before the Intifada.

That uprising was, of course, inevitable. As we neared the 20-year mark of occupying the land of another people, the Palestinians' sense of national identity was growing, as was the Israeli right-wing. Jewish terrorists received a wink and a nod from the government, and the rise of barbaric tactics — all justified in the name of fighting "terrorism," of course — was mirrored by a suffocating pathy on the part of Israeli Jews. The harsh economic climate kept most people busy trying to buy consumer goods before the shelves were depleted, not



paper after spending a few weeks in the Gaza Strip. The physician charged Israel with brutalising children, beating and torturing detainees, and using various kinds of lethal ammunition. She went on to note how Israeli soldiers tried to arrest a seriously injured patient the same day she operated on him in a Gaza hospital!

Within Israel a new group of Israeli and Palestinian doctors, the Association of Israeli-Palestinian Physicians, has recently organised "to monitor, report on, and protest unethical practices such as systematic delay in providing medical treatment, the intrusion of armed forces into hospitals, and the removal of the injured from medical facilities for interrogation."

In the US, a new group of American Jews, which includes Jewish professors at over a hundred Universities and a number of prominent Jewish personalities including long-time Zionist Professor Seymour Melman, and Yifal Arens, a Professor of Artificial Intelligence in Los

ange as an American college student to grow dates in the desert and think about rais-



ing sabras, Israeli-born children.

I arrived at the end of March 1982. Scarcely two months later Israel invaded Lebanon, and my assumptions about my adopted home, the country to which I had "moved up" (the literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase for emigrating to Israel) themselves came under attack.

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the news of the invasion of Beirut. The sleep I lost during those hot August nights

was not only from worry about my friends who were in uniform but from agonising over my feelings about this country — now My country — whose uniform they wore. It tore me apart inside to realise that Israel had killed more civilians in a single week than the PLO is claimed to have in 20 years.

Real danger existed, of course, the borders were close and Israel's security was, and remains, a genuine problem. But my friends were up there doing the killing now, and I began to think not only about safety and

consumer goods. The shekel's value declined yet again.

Much harsher, of course, was daily life for the Palestinians who lived under our boots. The journalist David Grossman, author of the *The Yellow Wind*, asked again and again how they had put up with the occupation for so long without rebelling. But I think not even he imagined that rebellion would come quite so soon.

It came on December 9, 1987, and for weeks afterward I heard the government struggle to convince us that this was an anomaly, a brief bout of restlessness orchestrated by outsiders. This denial of reality seemed to me part of the same mentality responsible for departing Mubarak Awad, the Palestinian advocate of peaceful resistance. Many others have been expelled, of course — all in violation of international law — but Awad in particular was obviously kicked out not in spite of his passionate commitment to nonviolence but precisely because of it. The legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle I came to realise, could not be admitted by Israelis without causing the whole ideological house of cards — the myth of a resolute Jewish people defending themselves against blood thirsty Arabs — to come tumbling down.

I have come to see Arabs as human beings with exactly the same rights as Jews and to believe that a Palestinian life is worth exactly the same as a Jewish life. This sounds uncontroversial, but apparently it is not. You do not crack the bones of innocent people to set an example unless you have first convinced yourself that they are less than fully human. You do not round up and blindfold thousands of people and, without trial, leave them to bake under the desert sun. You do not shoot children, blow up homes, and play the part of storm troopers unless you have mentally transformed your victims into animals. It struck me, too, that the same government I had heard over the past few years announcing the bombing of "terrorist" bases in Lebanon was using the words "Arab" and "terrorist" interchangeably.

My family tells me that these events are by now only news briefs in the US papers, part of the background noise of international clamour. Here, of course, they are not in the background and they are not abstractions. Reservists write letters home about 18-year-olds given guns and

sticks and told to do whatever is necessary to put down the riots. It is left to their discretion to determine when they are in a "life and death" situation that justifies lethal force. West Bank settlers have their own guns and make up a vigilante mob that operates with the army's blessing. In a few cases, the West Bank settlers who kill Palestinians are arrested but they never serve jail sentences. Likewise, when soldiers best people to death, the evening news assures us that "the army is looking into the incident," but that is the last we ever hear of the matter.

For a populace hardened after

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six wars in 40 years, the invocation of "national security" is sufficient to excuse anything, and that includes a flat rejection of self-determination for Palestinians. When someone in the territories tries to take the PLO up on its statements in favour of negotiation and mutual recognition, he is seized under the policy of administrative detention or expelled. Israeli peace activists are not permitted to meet with their Palestinian counterparts in the West Bank. When I and others try to protest, we find that the area has suddenly been declared off-limits by the army, something officers may now decide on their own authority. Then we are told by the government that there is no one with whom to negotiate.

It is illegal to hold a demonstration in the West Bank or Gaza. It is illegal to fly the Palestinian flag. It is illegal to associate with an organisation that the government has labelled "terrorist." The last law applies to Israelis, too, insuring that dialogue cannot take place. Indeed, it is not merely the Palestinians' schools and newspapers that are closed: the Hebrew newspaper *Derech Hanitzotz* which also appears in Arabic, was shut down recently, ending the small comfort that at least WE enjoy a free press. The editors are still on trial as I write.

When I speak of apathy on the part of other Israelis here, I do

not want to misrepresent the situation. Many follow the Intifada closely, but their reaction is anything but indifferent. It is impassioned in a way I find absolutely chilling. Israelis are known for their heated political discussion — the old joke has it

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that there are four million prime ministers here — but I haven't heard nearly enough heated arguments here.

What I hear, without much challenge, are inhuman sentiments — the sort that greets the shootings of Palestinian children with remarks like. "Too bad they didn't kill more of them." Even those who are not so cold-blooded reacted to last November's election with far more concern about policies that could have restricted their right to go to the movies on Saturday than those that may be catastrophic for the Palestinian people.

The few of us protesting actively are increasingly afraid that our democracy is disintegrating, that freedom of expression will be curtailed further. We know that some of our phones are tapped. We hear those on

the right talks about simply deporting the Palestinians now held in detention camps and then putting us into those camps. We see the policemen sent to protect us at rallies having coffee with the right-wings counter-demonstrators.

As a Jew and as a human being, I simply cannot bear to watch what is going on here. What Israelis use to justify the brutal suppression of the Intifada is the fear that Jews could be forced out of their homeland. What they do not allow themselves to see is that their fear is the Palestinians' reality — and it has happened because we did it. I want to shout at the Israelis here: Imagine it is your 12-year-old son they are dragging away while you clutch at him and they beat your hands to break your grip. Imagine it is your home they are destroying because of something your cousin did. Imagine it is 300 of your people who have been beaten or shot to death. Imagine it is your cry for freedom that is being strangled.

It shouldn't be so difficult for Jews to imagine that we are the victims, because it wasn't so long ago that we were. And nothing done to us in the past permits us to deny another people their rights. I may not have the solution to the problems here, but of that much I am sure.

It pains me also to learn what is happening — or, rather, what is not happening — in the US under the identical circumst-

ances any other country would undoubtedly be subject to boycotts, censure, a threatened cut-off of financial aid. I gather that there has not even been serious debate along these lines because many American Jews regard anything short of uncritical support for Israeli policies as disloyalty and even evidence of anti-semitism.

There are some Jews who come across a newspaper headline that says "Israeli Troops Kill Three-Year-Old Child" and what they see is: "Israel Protests Itself from Terrorism." Or else their first reaction is not shock and horror but concern about Israel's public image and how non-Jews will view this. I know this reaction because it used to be mine. Today I think about the three-year-old and his parents, about the moral implications of excusing the soldier who pulled the trigger.

Sitting on an El Al 747 nearly seven years ago, I was full of the same youthful idealism that others before me have felt. That the land I dreamed about would be planting Palestinians rather than trees, that we would become the victimisers, seemed inconceivable. I wish more than anything that I could reclaim that buoyant Zionist fervour now. I wish my letter from Israel could be more hopeful. All I can say is I will be fighting against what I see happening to this country for as long as I remain here.

