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MASSACRE IN JERUSALEM: ISRAELI ARMY KILLS 24 ARABS AT AL-AQSA MOSQUE

PALESTINIANS SLAIN WHILE PREVENTING EXTREMIST JEWISH GROUP FROM LAYING CORNERSTONE OF THIRD TEMPLE

By Basem Tawfeeq

Special to The Arab American News

JERUSALEM — October 8, 1990, will go down in Palestinian history as the Massacre at Al-Aqsa Mosque. That Monday morning, Palestinians were killed and more than 150 were wounded when Israeli police fired indiscriminately for minutes on the premises of Islam's third holiest site. Three Palestinians were killed in subsequent protests.

The bloodshed was the worst in occupied Palestine since 1967, when Israel conquered the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and delivered the strongest signal yet that Israel's repression and Palestinian resistance are radicalizing. Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock are in the same compound, Haram al-Sharif, within

the walled Old City, in East Jerusalem.

From the Friday before the massacre, word spread that members of the militant settler group Temple Mount Faithful had proclaimed their intention to enter the mosque grounds to lay the cornerstone of the Biblical third Jewish temple of Jerusalem. Some 3,000-5,000 Palestinians came to the site on Monday morning to pray and defend the shrines. Leaders strove to ensure discipline and calm.

According to eyewitness accounts, the shooting started at 10:45 am, when Israeli police teargassed a group of 300 Palestinian women near the Dome of the Rock. Enraged by the resulting cries, other Palestinians began stoning 15-20 border guards

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COMMENTARY

U.S. attempts to manage U.N. response deceitful

By Mark Bruzonsky

WASHINGTON, D.C. — American maneuvering all week at the United Nations to protect Israel from the growing wrath of the international community was an exercise in blatant hypocrisy.

While Washington tries to portray itself as a champion of human rights and a trustworthy interlocutor in the Middle East, the underlying reality is that the strategic alliance with Israel continues to be further enhanced even while American forces in the Gulf prepare for an assault on the strongest Arab power with the help of very frightened lesser Arab powers.

October 8th's unprecedented massacre of Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem — the worst daily death-

toll since the beginning of the occupation in June, 1967 — is of course not an isolated incident.

The Israeli army's carnage that resulted in at least 21 deaths and hundreds of serious injuries is tragically indicative of the dangerously deteriorating relations between Jews and Palestinians in the Holy Land. As this deterioration continues it contains within it the potential to lead us all to a cataclysmic result.

Consider this eyewitness report from an Arab American who lives in Washington and was visiting Jerusalem that fateful Monday morning:

"I was witness to a large group of Jews dancing in front of the Wailing Wall chanting in Hebrew and

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A Palestinian woman kisses a handprint of human blood October 10 placed, along with nine others, on a wall of the Dome of the Rock after the massacre in which 21 Palestinians were killed. All the handprints are in Palestinian blood.

U.S. hypocrisy...

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English: "Let us in! We want to kill more Arabs!" This was immediately following the massacre of some 21 innocent people! After leaving the (Dome of the Rock) I began to walk through the Old City to return home. On my way a group of five or six Jewish settlers pointed towards me and shouted in Hebrew "Arabs!" They then fired a burst of machine gun fire in my direction. The bullets hit the wall behind me, mere inches away from my head. I began to run when an elderly Palestinian man grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me into his home. He hid me in his bathroom and locked the door. After about five minutes the old man let me out and said that the coast was clear. I thanked him and left in shock."

Beyond any doubt, except in the minds of many naive Americans who continue to believe the distortions and deceptions Washington has become so crafty at presenting, the U.S. is very clearly a complicitous party to Israeli actions.

By encouraging and condoning Israel's brutal repression of the Palestinians for so long, by continuing to look the other way as Israeli settlement of the occupied territories and the Arab sections of Jerusalem has escalated, by providing Israel with more and more American aid, Washington is actually more than complicitous, the U.S. is actually Israel's partner in all that has taken place.

Occasional rhetorical protestations of concern and sorrow from the American administration are hardly sufficient to mask this complicity and partnership. Simply said, American actions and American money belie all the soothing American words.

When the Palestinian intifada erupted nearly three years ago, it was already an explosion of deeply pent-up emotions. The young generation of Palestinians has known little else but Israeli military rule for the past 23 years. They simply decided they were going to have to fight for their freedom; and they have done so with great courage and considerable resourcefulness.

For a variety of historical and political reasons the U.S. has not only accepted Israel's occupation of the Palestinians and repression of the intifada but funded and nurtured both even though, year after year, the United Nations has repeatedly condemned Israeli policies.

Indeed, not a single nation has recognized either the occupation of the West Bank or Gaza Strip nor Israel's illegal annexation of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

How ironic, of course, that in recent months, in a show of what

must be viewed as rather blatant hypocrisy, the U.S. is suddenly, after ~~it has been~~ legitimacy and planning to go to war because of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

The double standard involved here is so obvious to so many in the Middle East that the U.S. is risking a horrendous explosion of emotions and hatreds if in fact Washington goes through with the anticipated assault against Iraq.

The October 8th massacre was prefaced by considerable Israeli taunting of the Palestinians. The immediate provocation was the plan by Israeli zealots, with covert support from some members of the current Israeli government, to pursue plans for rebuilding the Jewish Temple of Biblical days on the current site of one of Islam's holiest shrines.

Indeed, the aspirations of the Israelis are not simply fantasies of fanatics. All one has to do is venture a few hundred feet into the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem to find a scale-model drawing of the new temple many Israelis have in mind.

Furthermore, during the nearly three years of the intifada there has been a steady pattern of pogroms, killings, house demolitions, and sometimes, as on Monday October 8th, what can only be called massacres. In Palestinian towns, cities and refugee camps — with names such as Nablus, Za'atra Nahalin, Deheisha and Beit Sahur — monuments to such past crimes are today evident.

Each time the Israelis have made up various excuses to deflect world public criticism. And occasionally, when the pressure became too great, there have been mock Commissions of Inquiry — of the kind Prime Minister Shamir has now established in this case — sometimes leading to a few wrist slaps to those army or police officials then said to be responsible for using "excessive force."

For a very long time now the ongoing Palestinian quest for their own dignified self-determination has been met only with Israeli violence and intransigence.

In recent days preceding the massacre Prime Minister Shamir and Foreign Minister David Levy gloated about the increase of American aid because of the Gulf crisis as well as the new commitment of another \$400 million in U.S. funds for settlement of tens of thousands of Soviet Jews throughout Israel.

And just two days before the massacre, clearly thumbing his nose at both the Palestinians and Washington, Prime Minister Shamir personally announced a new Jewish development area within the boundaries of Arab East Jerusalem

— even though Israel had guaranteed Washington that the American funds were not to be used beyond the old 1967 boundaries, the so-called "Green Line."

True to the past, there will be much more said in coming days attempting to try to justify Israel's actions. And there are sure to be future explosions of Palestinian outrage and further Israeli brutality. But ask this simple question: How would Israel react, and how would the world react, if dozens of Syrian Jews were shot dead on the streets of Damascus, hundreds injured, and ambulances were prevented from coming to get the wounded?

Of course there are growing voices in the U.S. insisting that the time has come to finally, once and for all, come to grips with the basic issue. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have their own very different but no less legitimate national movements — and the U.S. should be supporting both, rather than simply siding with Israel.

This should be recognized to be all the more necessary, some of these voices are understandably suggesting, now that U.S. forces are for the first time involved in the Middle East and might soon be engaged in a major war taking sides in what increasingly has the

characteristics of an Arab civil war.

With Washington now having taken such a powerful position against occupation and in favor of U.N. legitimacy, the opportunity is indeed at hand for America finally to apply consistent principles and standards to our involvement in the increasingly volatile Middle East.

The idea of an international peace conference to resolve Middle East problems that have their roots in past colonial years and previous steps taken by both the League of Nations and the United Nations is not Saddam Hussein's. Rather it is a long-standing United Nations position and in fact it was the U.S. position back in 1973, at the end of the October War, and again in 1977 when both Washington and Moscow issued a joint statement which was to lead to just such a development.

It's not too late for Washington to decide that diplomacy is far less risky than war, that the Palestinians no less than the Kuwaitis or the Israelis for that matter are entitled to their own self-determination, and that the U.S. should finally stand for real justice and democracy rather than short term self-interest.