

VIEWPOINT

By Mark A. Bruzonsky

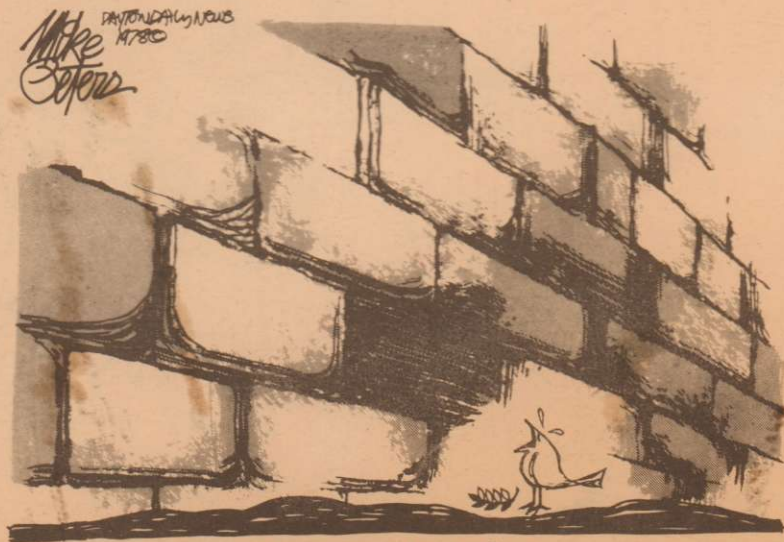
MONDAY'S UNPRECEDENTED MASSACRE OF Palestinians at the Al Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem—the worst daily death toll since the beginning of the occupation in June 1967—should not be thought of as an isolated incident.

Rather, 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.

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

"I was witness to a large group of Jews dancing in front of the Wailing Wall chanting in Hebrew and English: 'Let us in! We want to kill more! Death to the 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 toward 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."

Protestations cannot mask U.S. complicity with Israel



THE WAILING WALL

The U.S. is clearly complicit in these developments. By encouraging Israel's oppression 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 has made itself Israel's partner in all that has taken place. Occasional protestations of concern and sorrow from Washington cannot mask this complicity.

Nearly three years ago the Palestinians' frustration exploded into the intifada. Young Palestinians, who have known little else but Israeli military rule for the past 23 years, simply decided that they were going to fight for their freedom. 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 repression of the Palestinians but has funded and nurtured it, 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 and Gaza Strip or the illegality of Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

How ironic, of course, that in recent months, in a show of what many understandably consider rather blatant hypocrisy, the Bush administration is suddenly endorsing U.N. legitimacy and is ready to go to war because of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. This double standard is obvious to most people in the Mideast. Resentment about it will cause a horrendous explosion of emotions and hatreds if Bush goes through with an assault against Iraq.

Monday's 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 rebuild the Jewish Temple of biblical days on the current site of one of Islam's holiest shrines.

But this is only one incident in a three-year pattern of pogroms, killings, house demolitions and occasional 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 evident.

Each time, the Israelis have made up various excuses to deflect world public opinion. And occasionally, when the pressure became too great, there have been commissions of inquiry leading to the slapping of a few army or border police officials' wrists for using "excessive force."

Crisis beneficiaries: In recent days, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister David Levy have gloated about the increase of American aid because of the Persian Gulf crisis, as well as the new com-

mitment of another \$400 million in U.S. funds for settlement of more tens of thousands of Soviet Jews throughout Israel.

Just a few days ago, thumbing his nose at both the Palestinians and Washington, Shamir announced a new Jewish development area within the boundaries of Arab East Jerusalem—even though, supposedly, Israel had guaranteed Washington that the American funds were not to be used beyond the old 1967 boundaries, the so-called "Green Line."

There will be much said in coming days attempting to justify Israel's actions. And there are likely to be future explosions of Palestinian outrage and further Israeli brutality. But consider 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?

It's time to 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 has become all the more true now that U.S. forces are again involved in the Middle East and might soon be taking sides in 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 at hand to force the Bush administration to apply consistent principles and standards to our involvement in an increasingly volatile Middle East.

The idea of an international peace conference to resolve Middle East problems that have their roots in the colonial period and steps taken by both the League of Nations and the United Nations did not originate with Saddam Hussein. It is the longstanding United Nations position and was the U.S. position at the end of the October War in 1973 and again in 1977 when both Washington and Moscow issued a joint statement calling for such a development.

It's not too late for Washington to decide that diplomacy is 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 justice and democracy rather than short-term self-interest.

Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem have issued an urgent impassioned statement: "We repeat our earlier plea for international intervention. We do not understand how oil in the Gulf can be valued more highly than Palestinian blood and Moslem rights and shrines. We do not understand how the Security Council can ignore our plea for protection when it is prepared to send troops to fight in a war in the Gulf region."

"Once again, we issue a plea to the civilized world: come to our protection before it is too late. Put an end to this process of annihilation. Protect us against Israeli soldiers, settlers and armed religious zealots."

These pleas should no longer be ignored.

Mark A. Bruzonsky is former Washington representative of the World Jewish Congress and chairman of the Jewish Committee on the Middle East, an organization of American Jews, including professors at more than 140 universities.

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