

From



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## Washington

**T**HE Palestinian predicament has become even more unlikely of peaceful resolution because of two major historic developments that have simply come at the wrong time for the Palestinian cause.

Two other factors, though, offer more hope.

When Yasser Arafat began divising his diplomatic offensive in the mid-1980s, only one of these four developments was foreseeable.

Nor could such historic twists be foreseen late in 1987 when the young generation of Palestinians raised under Israeli occupation decided to launch, and then to sustain, the Intifada.

When Arafat publicly spoke the words Washington insisted upon in Geneva in December 1988 it was still too early to factor in these major historic developments about to explode into world headlines.

And even when the Palestine National Council early last year decided to endorse Arafat's historic shift towards peaceful coexistence with Israel, the impending events now changing our world were not subjects for discussion.

But now nearly half-way through 1990 these formerly unforeseen developments cast a huge shadow over the entire Palestinian diplomatic offensive.

First of all, the corrupted and discredited regimes of Eastern Europe quickly toppled, one after the other, once the boot of Soviet military coercion was lifted. And since the PLO had been firmly establishing itself precisely with those regimes, and just with those regimes — rather than ingratiating the Palestinian cause with the people themselves — so too fell the Eastern European barrier against political and economic relations with Israel. All this couldn't have come at a worse time for the Palestinian cause.

Secondly, pressed to the wall, the Kremlin decided to lift the lid on Soviet Jewry. We're not yet sure just what clandestine price Israel and wealthy, Jewish businessmen — in some cases co-ordinated by Edgar Bronfman's World Jewish Congress — might be paying for this. But we do know that large numbers of Soviet Jews are on the way to Israel, in many cases against their will as they clearly would prefer to go elsewhere if they could. All this couldn't have come at a worse time for the Palestinian cause.

The third major development, though, is the new situation in South Africa.

There, the African National Congress is, true enough, showing up the PLO. But still the very image of the ANC at the table with President de Klerk

# CAUSE AND EQUATION

## Factors working against Palestine

must be unnerving to many Israelis.

There a dignified and classy leader has emerged from prison after more than a quarter century. And though the contrast of Mandela versus Arafat cannot be missed, still there can be no doubt that Arafat aspires to play the same role and that these unforeseen events in South Africa are giving him a bit of a boost.

And yet the South Africa analogy is flawed. In South Africa, the ANC, while eager for negotiations, remains rock firm to its basic principles — negotiations with the ANC leadership, nothing less; negotiations strictly on the basis of equality and one-man one-vote, nothing less. Additionally the ANC insists upon the continuance of armed struggle, alongside diplomacy, as the only way to ensure that the other side will negotiate in good faith and feel the requisite pressure to acquiesce.

The contrast with the approach of the PLO is obvious.

Furthermore, in South Africa the White minority regime, realises that White power is diminishing and Black power growing. It is this basic power equation, coupled with the actual numbers of Whites versus Blacks, and the steadfast refusal of the Black leadership to contemplate "compromise" solutions that has brought about this

situation.

But the Jews of Israel are not ready for such an admission, and indeed may not objectively have to make such an assessment. Indeed, the Israelis are still attempting to "create more facts" increasing their power vis-a-vis the Palestinians. And they are at the same time still working day and night to maintain tensions and divisions within the Arab camp.

And finally, whereas in South Africa the parties are moving towards a single-country solution based on the principles of Western-style secular democracy; in the Mid-east the PLO has given up precisely this model and has now legitimised, after such a long struggle, not only the partition approach, but a partition that is grossly unfair to the Palestinians using any historic standard of measurement.

There is a fourth factor, and this is the only one that was foreseeable all along. It is the slow building of Arab military power including weapons of mass destruction, the gradual changing of the balance of power equation in the region. And this factor may yet prove to be the most significant of all for as the potential level of destruction escalates the big powers, most especially the dominant US, may find they cannot risk allowing a situation of no-war, no-peace to

continue.

So we have a situation in which some historic factors, the last two I've just discussed, are slowly buttressing the Palestinian cause; while other major new factors, the first two discussed above, are working against.

No doubt the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe means that the Palestinian cause has suffered a considerable diplomatic blow. It need not have been so, but the way the PLO conducted its diplomacy over the years made it so. And thus today, even as the Intifada rages, the new governments in these countries seem in a race to establish contact and working relations with Israel.

But most significant of all is the issue of the Soviet Jewry; for here lies the potential for a major strengthening, even a major transformation, of Israel over the next two to three years.

With such potential ahead, the Israelis are encouraged once again not to move toward a political settlement but rather to somehow play for more time — more time to, further strengthen Israel within the territories it currently controls; more time for more "unforeseen" developments to occur; more time for changes in the Arab World, especially in Jordan; and most of all more time to crush the Intifada and further demoralise and

divide the Palestinians.

When Arafat and the PNC moved as they did in the past few years it was with the understanding that the political situation was fast ripening; that a diplomatic initiative was likely to bear fruit; that playing the long-held "recognition" card meant a major breakthrough was immediately ahead.

That situation is now altered. The ripening process has been halted, if not reversed. Palestinian diplomacy was unable to turn its many concessions into swift and tangible progress. The anticipated big breakthrough has turned out to be marginal and tortured small steps.

A few years back when the Palestinian diplomatic offensive was conceived a major alteration in the very nature of the Israeli-Palestinian quagmire looked possible. Now it appears that the basics of that conflict remain; that the Israelis have managed to withstand the diplomatic offensive and are even beginning to push it back.

As for the future, both peace and war are serious options at this point. Both diplomatic progress and stalemate are real possibilities. History itself may be at something of a crossroads and dependent on the future course the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will take. But that course, and consequently history itself, is presently extremely unstable.