

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT
(AVP 5, January 1988)
3845 Buffalo Rd., Auburn, CA 95602-7901

TWO WEEKS OF BLOODSHED IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Elias H. Tuma

Unrest in the Occupied Territories can hardly be considered news. However, the intensity of the disturbances, its apparently spontaneous character, its ability to gain sympathy among the Palestinian Arabs within Israel, and around the world, and the usually harsh reaction of the Israeli occupation authorities, including the use of live ammunition have made this episode rather unusual. There has been rock throwing by the Palestinians and counter actions by the authorities ever since the occupation started twenty years ago. However, the continuity of these disturbances and the killing of more than twenty five Palestinians, the injury of more than 200, and the arrest of a thousand people in that short period must suggest new developments in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians or the Arabs at large. Several new actions have may be pointed out. Israel has resorted to shooting more quickly and more frequently than before. Israeli authorities have also been reported to have "tied blindfolded Palestinian boys to the hoods of their jeeps and 'used them as a shield'...against stone-throwing in the camps". The Arabs in Israel conducted a highly successful general strike whose impact was felt in the Israeli economy. Egypt, the only Arab country at peace with Israel, placed strong protests against the Israeli harsh behavior. The Security Council of the United Nations condemned the Israeli action and for the first time the United States did not block the resolution with its veto power. And for the first time, the United States has taken a major step by publicly

criticizing the use of live ammunition by Israel and its generally harsh treatment of the demonstrators. The United States has also gone on record to condemn the Israeli policy of deporting some Palestinians as punishment for their participation or leadership in the demonstrations. And for the first time, a newspaper in the United States has published a partial map of the Middle East with Israel renamed SOUTH AFRICA. Finally, the Palestine Liberation Organization, (PLO) has announced, quite belatedly, that it is considering the establishment of a Government in Exile "to lay claim to the Israeli Occupied West Bank and Gaza strip".

After two bloody weeks the Occupied Territories seem calm. At the same time, the Israeli military has doubled or tripled its force in the Territories, and has embarked on its military court action against those who have been arrested. In the meantime, the Arab countries, except Egypt, have continued to pronounce their condemnation of Israel, but their main preoccupation has continued to be the Gulf war and the oil prices. If one follows the course of events between Israel and the Palestinians, one might easily reach the conclusion that they are back to normal, namely to the protracted conflict with the periodic seasoning of harsh action and counteraction by one party or the other. But there ought to be some lessons that we may learn from the two bloody weeks of December 1987:

1. A period of calm in the Occupied Territories can easily be misleading. Dissatisfaction, frustration, and the outburst into violence are dormant characteristics of the relationship between the occupied and the occupiers. These are symptoms of the underlying deep conflict regarding the national identity of the Palestinians, their rights in the territory of Palestine, and their claim to sovereignty in a state of their own. Whatever Israel and the outside

world do to restore to prevent an outburst or to restore calm are measure that deal only with the symptoms; the roots of the problem are rather hardened by the focus on the symptoms and by the passage of time which make the problem more chronic and its roots more difficult to pull out. Hence, a viable solution must address the basic conflict so that the symptoms may go away.

2. Resolution of the problem must come from within. The Arab countries and the outside world can help, but only the Palestinians and the Israelis can deal with their chronic antagonism and mutually exclusive claims to the disputed territory. The outside world also can help, not by condemnation and rhetoric, but by withholding military aid and the sale of weapons to the combatting parties in order to induce them to resort to political and non-violent approaches to the resolution of the conflict. In the meantime, the Arab countries have raised protests and called for condemnation of the Israeli behavior, but in actuality their major preoccupation has continued to be Gulf War and the oil prices. Therefore, it should be evident by now that neither the Arab countries nor the rest of the world are ready to take such actions and will continue to maintain alliances and provide the resources that will sustain the conflict and feed the protracted war until the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves say NO MORE.

3. The two bloody weeks of December have brought no gains to either the Palestinians or the Israelis, but they have brought losses to both, even though there are groups on both sides which claim gainst as a result. On the Palestinian side, there are claims of unity, new initiatives, and more sympathy from the outside world. These are important gains, but not important enough or substantive enough to make a difference as far as the basic issues are concerned. On the other hand, they alone stand to suffer the losses in human life, the injuries

and maiming of those who suffered casualties, the destruction of property, the loss of incomes, and the evidently heavy sentences imposed on those arrested and detained. Some have even raised the issue of a new conflict within the Palestinian ranks as a result. The argument is that the emergence of unity and new leadership in the Occupied Territories may have been a threat to the leadership of the PLO, which may explain their serious consideration of establishing a government in exile at this time.

On the Israeli side, they have gained little if any, other than to emphasize once again that they cannot be pushed out of the Occupied Territories by force. Certain groups, however, may have gained, namely the settlers in the Occupied Territories who now can feel more secure because the Israeli army contingent placed in the Territories has been enlarged to their satisfaction. However, these "gains" are not costless. Israel has had to deploy more of its standing army, further depressing its economy, has had to face work interruptions, and has had to explain to its citizens the suffering of injuries by its army personnel. Thus, while the country suffers, the settlers and extremists celebrate the gains they have achieved by default.

4. The Palestinians will not go away, nor will the Israelis, nor will the conflict which keeps them at each other's throat. Their coexistence is a reality, but the conditions of this coexistence are what needs to be worked on to make it equal, secure, and peaceful for both of them. There are few options for a final solution that satisfy the conditions for equal, secure, and peaceful coexistence. Mutual recognition, and equal but separate sovereignties established through direct negotiations are the only stable and permanent solution. While these conditions require time and patience, certain steps may be taken at this time to help pave the way for those more crucial steps that should follow. A measure of good will would go a long way

toward meaningful negotiations. Israel, for instance would make a major contribution toward peace by declaring an amnesty to all those arrested or sentenced as a result of the December disturbances. Israel would make another major contribution by offering to help the families of those killed in these disturbances. On their part, the Palestinians would gain much and help to smooth the way toward negotiations by declaring a moratorium on demonstrations, rock throwing or other violent action for six months ((or more) in return for amnesty. In the meantime, both parties would designate leaders on both sides to explore ways of initiating direct negotiations based on mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence.