

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT  
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## ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS: TIME TO RETHINK THEIR STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

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Events of the last few weeks in Israel and Palestine have had tragic results, including loss of life, injuries, business and property destruction, and loss of confidence in the Israelis' and Palestinians' commitment to peace and cooperation. As expected under occupation, the occupied Palestinians have suffered most of the casualties. However, the bereaved Palestinian and Israeli families and the injured people are the victims of avoidable follies and wasteful tactics of the leaders on both sides. Those events have also brought into question the current strategies and tactics of Israelis and Palestinians alike. The intensity of actions and reactions displayed since Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount suggests that it is time to rethink those tactics if peace and security are truly their mutual objective.

Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount did not have to cause problems, were it not clad in demonstrably provocative symbolism. Since both Israelis and Palestinians have always declared commitment to keep the Holy Places accessible to all, Sharon should be like all others, free to visit. But Sharon did not have to have a gigantic police force to accompany him. He evidently wanted to assert Israel's dominance, provoke confrontation to obstruct the peace process, and promote his own political objectives. Though the Palestinian reaction was predictable, the Israeli government allowed that drama to take place and even provided the armed force for the role.

The Palestinians took Sharon's bait quickly, fell right into the trap, and let their emotions carry the day. They resorted to stone-throwing demonstrations, as if throwing stones at Israeli soldiers is a benign civic activity, intended only to tease the soldiers and protest certain government policies and action. Israel's reaction should also have been predictable. Israel has always reacted forcefully against stone throwers, and it did so this time. Of course Israel's "excessive" use of force was not called for since Israel's real security was not in jeopardy, but one should not expect organized armies to receive stones hurled at them with equanimity and humor. The obvious result has come true: the stone throwers suffer most the casualties.

The intensity of the flare-up was no doubt beyond the expectations of both sides, as were the reactions. For example, Israel did not have to use heavy equipment and live bullets against the demonstrators; nor did it have to use helicopter gun ships to demolish buildings or fire missiles at vehicles to assassinate Palestinian leaders. Nor should Israel have permitted the burning of a mosque in Tiberias. These acts were as horrible as the destruction of Joseph's Tomb in Hebron by Palestinian mobs and the killing of Israeli soldiers already in custody in Ramallah. All these actions could and should have been avoided, were it not for the laxity of the authorities on both sides in allowing provocateurs to enflame the situation. In spite of their military powers, the Israelis are nervous and scared, and the Palestinians' anger at Israel's failure to withdraw from the

occupied territories is deep, but these predicaments do not justify the abhorrent actions of both of them. All this leads to the conclusion that, given the strategy of a lasting peace, the current tactics are not working and rethinking the future by both sides is urgent and necessary.

To begin with, Israel need to remember that all liberation movements have been successful, though the costs to the conflicting parties have ranged widely. Israel would do well to try to minimize the costs and expedite the end of the occupation in accordance with the United Nations resolutions.

Israel should remember that the use of force beyond the minimum necessary to maintain law and order can be detrimental to its own cause. Its military went into Lebanon, under the guidance of Ariel Sharon, with full force. They came back twenty years later with not but casualties and a legacy of hatred towards them.

Israel needs to remember that armed settlers who act as vigilantes against Palestinians in their own land do undermine Israel's moral standing and its presumed search for peaceful coexistence with its neighbors. The vigilantes are even more destructive to the peace efforts than the so-called Palestinian terrorists who attack civilians indiscriminately. The Palestinians can claim that they are fighting for their freedom, not for expansionism into other peoples lands as the settlers do.

As for the Palestinians, it is equally important to remember that provocative elements are always on duty (Sharon, et al), and they should not fall in the trap so easily. They should remember also that stones can be lethal and no organized army will allow itself to be a non-responsive target.

The Palestinians should remember that the intensity of their anger does not justify mob rule, the desecration of holy places under their protection, or the killing of helpless opponents already in their custody. To allow such behaviors undermines their efforts to promote peace and create a civil society. It also undermines the authority of their own government.

The Palestinians should remember that their children and youth are the generations of the future who will need all the skills, wisdom, and maturity they are capable of to be able to build a healthy, viable Palestinian economy and society on the ruins of the past wars and years of occupation. To allow the young or to encourage them to go to the streets, throw stones, and be killed or maimed, when they should be in schools and in shelters away from the dangers of war, is an unjustified and unnecessary sacrifice. Guerrilla warfare and mass demonstrations are the business of grown-ups who make policy and should be responsible for it.

Both sides should remember that there are alternative ways to resolve the conflict, minimize the costs, and establish peace. First, Israel and Palestine know that the end of occupation is imminent and is the only permanent solution to the conflict. They both know that UN Resolutions 242 and 338 have set the limits for the boundaries between them. The Palestinians cannot accept less than provided by these resolutions and Israel cannot keep more than provided by them. If adjustments to these boundaries are necessary, they should be made by negotiation. In the meantime Israel can take the major step of mapping its withdrawal, with a specific published timetable, and the mechanism for implementation. Such a step will not only show commitment for peace, it will also reduce the costs to the Israeli economy and society, as well as gain moral international

backing. The Palestinians will then have little excuse to pursue violence in their efforts for liberation.

At the same time, Israel needs to put an end to the expansion of Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory, both to put an end to its threatening expansionism into Arab land, and to avoid conflict with the fourth Geneva Convention which prohibits alteration of occupied areas by the occupier.

Another essential step for Israel to take is to disarm its civilians, especially the settlers, who show no respect for law or order in dealing with the Palestinians. Creating security is a process of give and take, but carrying arms when not on active duty can become a self-perpetuating source of fear and insecurity for the armed persons and for their presumed enemies.

Finally, Israel should refrain from collective punishment of Palestinians, appropriating their land, and destroy their property arbitrarily. This tactic has only created hatred and sustained insecurity for the Palestinians and for themselves.

The Palestinians, on the other hand, should, first and foremost, begin to act like a state. For example, before embarking on violent demonstrations, they should try diplomacy, take up with the Israeli government any infringement by its forces, and appeal to the United Nations and the world community. And if they have to demonstrate, let the demonstrations be peaceful as becomes the citizens of a civil society. The Palestinians may, by such means, mobilize support of Israelis who oppose violence and honestly seek peace with them.

The Palestinians, like the Israelis, should at all costs avoid turning the conflict into a religious one: the conflict relates to territory and sovereignty, not to religion. Making it a religious conflict can only widen its scope, involve outsiders, and lead to disaster far beyond the Palestinians and Israelis living in the land of Palestine.

Finally, it is time for the Palestinians to stop playing victim, even though to a large extent they are victims. However, playing victim has brought them little more than barren support and rhetorical sympathy. Seeking justice as victims may work in a court of law, but in international affairs it is diplomacy, power politics, and viable alliances that count.

The Israelis and the Palestinians are deeply involved in the peace process. It may be difficult to reach a peaceful solution, but it is more difficult and wasteful to stand still or revert to the pre-peace –process situation. There is no turning back. Therefore, it is to the advantage of both to rethink their strategies and tactics, resolve to deal directly with each other, and continue on the road to peace, even if the process is painful and slow.

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