

## PEACEMAKING AND THE IMMORAL WAR ARABS AND JEWS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Elias H. Tuma

This was the title of a book I published in 1972. Then I wrote: "The Arab-Israeli war is immoral because it is based on ignorance of the issues; it is a war that no one can actually win; a war that penalizes innocent people who have little to do with conflict....Peacemaking seems futile because of the untruthfulness and hypocrisy on all sides of the conflict. The policy makers, if they say anything, do not say what they mean and rarely mean what they say, they hide discrepancies under the vague concept of diplomacy. Yet, the war goes on, hatred mounts...and meaningless talks about peace continue. We can only wonder whether either party really wants peace, and if so at what cost. It is not true that there is no solution...nor is it true that both sides are trying for a solution, although they talk about it constantly. It is apparent that each side has become so deeply immersed in this immoral war that it has almost become a way of life."

Several relationships have changed since then. Egypt and Jordan have signed peace agreements with Israel, although it seems that the result is only a "no war" situation, but not real peace. The Oslo Agreement has led to the creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBG). several A number of Arab countries have informal relations with Israel even though they formally maintain a state of war. As a result the focus of the conflict and peacemaking has centered on Palestinian-Israeli relations, as it should have long ago. However, the same indicators of immorality surrounding the conflict have persisted and are continuously being reinforced. As for the Arab countries, collectively and individually, they continue to pay lip service to the cause of Palestine. They provide little help, generate token international pressure to solve the conflict, and shower the Palestinians with empty rhetoric in support. While no one expects the Arab countries to wage a war against Israel, they have failed to provide adequate economic aid; they have failed to provide genuine diplomatic backing; and they have failed to use their oil and trade and finance cards in favor of a reasonable solution. Furthermore, they continue to hold to outdated and unrealistic resolutions regarding the Palestinian refugees and thus hinder their settlement as well as the making of peace. The Arab countries know that most of the refugees will not have a chance to go back to their original homes in Israel, and yet they refuse to acknowledge that situation and help to settle the refugees on a permanent basis.

The Palestinian leaders have fared even worse in terms of integrity, honesty, and truthfulness with their constituents. They acknowledge in intellectual and diplomatic circles that they do not expect more than a small percentage of the refugees to return to Israel, but they will not tell this to the Palestinian public. They let the refugees languish in false hopes of return and increasing hatred of Israel. The Palestinian leaders do not seem clear or forthcoming on the expected boundaries of a Palestinian state: whether they are willing to settle within the WBG and recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli state; whether they aim at the boundaries specified in the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, or whether they still target the whole of Mandate Palestine as a united democratic secular state for both Arabs and Jews. This uncertainty is being nourished by the various voices that speak in the name of Palestine. Why, for example do some non-governmental

organizations close to the PA circulate maps of the whole of Palestine? And why did the PA reject Ehud Barak's proposals for peace, which would have given them virtually the whole of the WBG, even though some details still had to be negotiated? On the other hand, although the Palestinian people are suffering under Israeli occupation and are fully justified in resisting occupation, how do they justify killing Israeli civilians in cold blood? How do they justify suicide bombing of restaurants, train stations, or shopping centers? The Palestinians claim to want a secular democratic state, but continue to steep their liberation movement as a struggle in the name of Islam and 'Uruba (Arabism). The Palestinians leaders claim to respect human life, family institutions, and the value of education. Yet they permit provocative acts against Israelis which result in loss of life. They permit children to go to the streets and throw stones at Israelis, which results in injury and more loss of life, disruption of family life, and loss of education for whole generations. Finally, the Palestinians claim to respect human rights, but the PA leaders are among the first violators of human rights of their own people by tolerating a low degree of law and order, paying little attention to due process, and harboring widespread corruption. Ethics and morality seem to be a luxury if they exist at all.

Unfortunately Israel is in even more deeply ingrained in hypocrisy and immorality, especially in their conflict with the Palestinians. From desiring a national home for the Jews, they have become an occupying state; from exploitation of United Nations resolutions to gain legitimacy as a state, Israel has totally disregarded most relevant United Nations resolutions to promote its own territorial and political ambitions. Israel seems to have created its own system of morality. It has reinterpreted the Fourth Geneva Convention which protects occupied peoples and territories to justify the establishment of Jewish settlements on occupied land, the appropriation of Arab land and property, and wholesale alteration of the landscape of the territories under their rule. And, like the Palestinians, the Israeli authorities will not announce their real objectives regarding state boundaries, future of the occupied territories, or their future relations with the Palestinians and other Arabs around them. They talk of peace with the PA but continue to display maps of a "Greater Israel." They memorialize their suffering as minorities and refugees, but they ignore the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and the discrimination against their own Arab citizens. They deny any responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem, even they systematically terrorized those Palestinians into fleeing the country and evacuated many of them forcibly. They keep reminding themselves and the world of the collective suffering and abuse they have experienced, but they do not hesitate in inflicting collective abuse and punishment on the Palestinians. Their jets bombard villages, destroy buildings, and assassinate individuals, all in the name of the vague concept of security. As to due process, the military acts as policeman, judge, jury, and executioner all in one. The Israeli authorities condemn people for presumed guilt by association; they demolish "innocent" homes; they uproot "helpless" orchards and olive groves; and they strangle the livelihood of innocent people by besieging them and turning their villages and towns into ghettos. They do all this while they talk of peace, presumably on their own terms which keep changing, become more demanding, and therefore more difficult to accept. When it comes to human rights, Israel has been condemned by its own citizens for mistreatment of Palestinians, both in the WBG and in Israel itself. Again the Israeli authorities, sometimes backed by the courts, try to justify such actions by invoking the vague concept of security.

Israelis claim that all they want is to live in a peaceful and secure state of their own. If so, the shortest route to peace and security is to end the occupation of the WBG, recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to a state of their own, as defined by the United Nations. Once these steps are implemented, all other matters can be negotiated.

The Palestinians claim that all they want is a Palestinian state of their own within the WBG as per Resolution 242. If so, they should say so clearly, resist the occupation by peaceful and diplomatic means, and put an end to violent and life wasting activities. They should also focus more resolutely on rehabilitation and stabilization of their economy and society, in spite of the burdens of occupation.

The Palestinians and the Israelis blame each other for failure of the peace process, but they rarely look into their own behavior to see what they have done that might choke the peace process instead of helping it. Both also blame other nations, Israel for interfering too much and the Palestinians for not interfering enough, even though they both know that the two of them are the only parties that can make peace a reality. The Israelis and the Palestinians are bound to reach a peace agreement, and they are bound to compromise to reach that agreement. The sooner they do so, the sooner they will restore morality and ethics to be a guiding light in the future of their two peoples.

AVP is a non-profit, non-partisan monthly published by Elias H. Tuma, Professor emeritus of economics, University of California, Davis, CA.

The views expressed above are those of the author and do not implicate the university in any way. On internet:

<http://www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/tuma/avpindex.html>