

War in the Middle East Can it happen? How can it be avoided?

The Arab uprising in Israel, the "Al Aksa Intifada", has now been going on since September of last year. Hundreds have died and thousands have been wounded. What is happening has all the earmarks of a civil war. But it isn't just the Palestinians that Israel is confronted with. All of the Arab world and Iran are backing the Palestinians and are goading them on. Any spark could trigger a full-fledged war -- which, in all likelihood, would result in all of the Arab states and Iran lined up against Israel.

What are the facts?

Israeli forbearance. Under the guidance of former president Clinton, and in order to put an end to the long struggle with the Palestinians, former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak made breakthrough offers to Yasser Arafat -- he offered him the moon, "concessions" that would not have been conceivable at any time before. But Arafat, primarily interested in "armed struggle," rejected those unprecedented offers out of hand, and instead instructed his people to engage Israel in violent conflict. Israel, in the face of this violence, has shown remarkable restraint, despite our Secretary of State's unbelievable remark that Israel was using "excessive force." "Excessive force"? What would we Americans do if, say, Mexican insurgents, with the support of their government, lobbed mortar rounds into San Diego or El Paso, or dispatched suicide bombers into our major cities causing hundreds of casualties? You know the answer!

The last time America faced a threat from a neighboring nation was in 1916, when an incursion by Pancho Villa killed seventeen Americans. The U.S. promptly sent an army of 6,000 men into Mexico to capture Villa. Can Israel be expected to be patient with Arafat much longer, before he is subjected to the treatment meted out to Pancho Villa?

The sham of the Oslo Agreement. Even the most sanguine can no longer doubt that the heralded "Oslo Peace Process," sealed by a handshake between the late Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, is one of the great failures of recent world history. And it failed because the Palestinians, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, have broken vir-

tually every clause of the Oslo Accord -- from forming a standing army of at least 45,000 men, to smuggling heavy weapons into their arsenals, to releasing and failing to arrest terrorists who have committed murderous outrages against innocent Israeli citizens. And the Palestinians are not at all interested in a Palestinian state alongside Israel. They are only interested in a Palestinian state instead and in place of Israel -- Palestine, as they put it, "from the River to the Sea." That goal, at least for now, cannot be attained by conventional military means. So the strategy is to attempt to destroy Israel by a low-level war of attrition, by insisting on the "right

of return" of the (by now swollen to almost four million) "refugees," and (the great hope) by ultimately sparking a general war, in which the Arabs and the Iranians would finally be able to drive the hated Jews

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into the sea and into final oblivion -- the same goal with which Abdel Nasser of Egypt provoked the 1967 Six-Day War.

How can such an outcome, such a war, be prevented? For the longest time, Israel has tried to appease the Arabs and also "world opinion," which is almost totally critical of Israel. Israel has voluntarily withdrawn from Lebanon and has turned virtually all of the Gaza Strip and most of the "West Bank" over to the Palestinians. But the Palestinians, and it seems the entire Arab world, see these accommodations by Israel, these endless concessions, not for what they are meant to be, namely way stations on the road to final peace, but as indecision, loss of will, and weakness. Smelling blood, the Arabs, just as Nasser did in 1967, are dreaming of a final assault against a weak and demoralized Israel.

Accommodations and concessions did not work and they will not work in promoting peace. On the contrary, Israel's perceived weakness will goad the Arabs into embarking on full-scale war. In order to avoid such a war, Israel needs to reassume its previous stance of deterrence. Specifically, Ariel Sharon, whom the Israeli people chose for his proven strength and decisiveness, should initiate policies by which, among other actions, suicide bombers would be buried in potter's fields, rather than being returned to their relatives, who turn their funerals into frenzied demonstrations; freeze the financial assets of the Palestinian Authority, of Arafat, and of the PLO; prevent P.A. officials (including Arafat) from returning to the territory now controlled by the P.A.; permit no transportation of people or goods beyond basic necessities; shut off utilities to the P.A. Then he should implement the death penalty against murderers and seize weapons from the P.A., making sure that no more weapons reach it. He should reoccupy areas from which gunfire or missiles are shot; seize the P.A.'s illegal offices in Jerusalem and its infrastructure and villages from which attacks are launched; capture or otherwise dispose of P.A. leadership. The stakes are high, but the road is clear. Unless Israel takes steps to deter its enemies, and unless it reasserts its position of strength, today's intifada, today's war of attrition with the Palestinians, is going to lead to full-scale war in the region.

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