

The Al-Aqsa Intifada: Origins and Options

A Series by Joseph Alpher



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Whatever the status is of reaching an end to the conflict in the Middle East today or in the near future, there will still be issues at stake in the months and years ahead.

It is time for the American Jewish community to step back from the slogans and formulas we are used to hearing and using. The recent violence and setbacks give us an opportunity to reflect on these issues and more deeply understand their nuances and potential for solution.

This is the first installment in a series called "Expanding the Conversation," written by Joseph Alpher. We hope this series will broaden and expand the way we think about Israel, the Palestinians and the future for peace in the Middle East.

Joseph Alpher is a former Director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University. In July 2000, he was a Special Adviser to then Prime Minister Barak during the Camp David talks. Mr. Alpher also serves as an adviser to *SEEKING PEACE*, *PURSUING JUSTICE*. These remarks reflect Mr. Alpher's personal views alone.

INTRODUCTION

The violence that began in Israel and the Palestinian Authority in late September has claimed over 400 lives and thousands of wounded. Early on, it generated repeated emergency summit meetings – in Paris, Sharm al-Sheikh, Cairo and Washington, D.C. – as well as an international inquiry and UN deliberations. It was a key factor in the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister of Israel. While efforts to prevent the spread of conflict beyond the borders of Israel/Palestinian Territories have thus far succeeded, the violence has not ceased, and the peace process has been radically interrupted.

This Q & A with Joseph Alpher offers an analysis of the origins of the violence and an assessment of prospects for the near future.

EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

THE AL-AQSA INTIFADA: ORIGINS AND OPTIONS

An Interview with Joseph Alpher

Q: Why the violence? What were some of the factors that contributed to the explosion in late September of last year?

There are a number of factors that help explain the violence. Some have to do with errors made at Camp David, some with the growing frustration and militancy of young Palestinians in the territories, and others relate to core regional and global developments.

Q: Why don't we start with Camp David? You said there were errors made there. What were they?

The convening of the Camp David conference of July 2000 was not thought out properly; it was ill-prepared. Arafat was reluctant to accept Clinton's invitation to the summit, arguing that the process was not yet ripe enough. We now know that he was right – if only because he himself felt unable, and/or unwilling, to make the compromises that a successful deal required. Further, it appears as though the U.S. had not lined up in advance key Arab leaders in the region to help provide encouragement and political cover for needed compromises.



At Camp David, Ehud Barak offered Arafat effective control, though not full sovereignty, over Arab Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, at least 90 percent of the territories, adequate compensation and resettlement of refugees (including half a million in Palestine and a small number in Israel), along with an acknowledgement of Israel's concern for their suffering, and joint borders with the Arab world. He was even prepared to negotiate *additional* compromises with President Clinton's mediation. Arafat made significant concessions regarding territory and Jerusalem, thereby narrowing key gaps. But he refused to follow the path of further compromise offered by Clinton and Barak, and this produced stalemate. In particular, Arafat presented positions regarding Jerusalem and refugees that were perceived by most Israelis as reflecting a worrisome Palestinian denial of Israeli and Jewish fundamental needs and values.

Q: What were some of those compromises?

March 2001.

In particular, Arafat would not accept anything less than full, classic political sovereignty over all of Arab Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, whose Jewish origins and significance he refused to acknowledge. And he could not accept any compromise wording on his demand that Israel admit full responsibility for creation of the Palestinian refugee problem and acknowledge, at least in principle, the refugees' right of return to Israel – thereby implying that Israel was "born in sin" and must ultimately become a binational rather than a Jewish state.

In this sense, the entire Camp David summit may have been misconceived, and definitely could have been better prepared. Certainly Barak's demand for a Palestinian "end of conflict" pledge was impossible to accommodate under these circumstances, and left Arafat boxed into a corner.

It was central. In retrospect, it appears to have been a serious mistake for all three parties at Camp David to attempt to discuss and *solve* the Jerusalem issue in one sitting. Of all the final status issues, this, the most sensitive, had not been pre-negotiated at the official level prior to Camp David. The parties were not aware enough of one another's sensitivities. Palestinians had not familiarized themselves with the Jewish narrative regarding the essential importance of the Temple Mount. Israelis forgot that the Western Wall is also *al-Buraq*, a Muslim holy place. And Barak's suggestion that the PLO agree to the construction of a small synagogue on the northeast perimeter of the Temple Mount compound, which he apparently saw as a way of compensating religious Jews for his concession of *de facto* sovereignty to the Palestinians, backfired badly by rekindling Muslim suspicions regarding Israeli designs on the entire site.

Q: How important was the issue of Jerusalem in the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations?

Arafat experienced a sense of siege, which was compounded by two developments. First came Clinton's criticism of his lack of flexibility; Arafat thought he had explained to Clinton why he could not be flexible. Palestinians argue that their "flexibility" was exhausted when they agreed that Israel would retain the 77 percent of Mandatory Palestine that is encompassed in pre-'67 Israel inside the Green Line. In other words, they argue that their willingness to live alongside Israel is itself the great historic compromise, since that willingness means they are foregoing their original claim to the whole of the land and their secondary claim to the land awarded them in the original United Nations Partition Resolution. Israel, on the other hand, sees in UN Resolution 242 a formula that allows for additional, if minor, territorial compromises that would accommodate its security and historical-religious needs in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This key contradiction has never been resolved.

Q: What happened immediately following the collapse of Camp David?

Then, second, came the ensuing international campaign, managed by Clinton and Barak, to prevent Arafat from declaring independence

and oblige him to continue negotiating on the basis of Clinton's compromise proposals.

Q: Did the nature of the Oslo process have something to do with the outbreak of violence?



terrorist attack in Israel,

February 2001.

It is arguable that the prolongation of a gradual, step-by-step process has inevitably allowed for major episodes of violence; gradualism merely extends the vulnerability of the process as a target for the extremists on both sides. Note, in this case, Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount. But note also Palestinian determination to fight over isolated Israeli settlement sites like Netzarim, settlements that Israel had effectively signaled it would remove under agreed final status terms but felt unable to remove during the interim period. While this does not mean that a phased process could have been avoided – after all, Barak's attempt to abandon the interim process and go for a single comprehensive final status agreement also failed – it is important to note that Oslo, as a gradual process, failed entirely to create trust and confidence between the parties.

There were other Palestinian frustrations in regard to the implementation of Oslo that need to be factored in. One, quite simply, was the Palestinians' perception of Israel's failure to honor its obligations under Oslo: too many delays, too much settlement building, too many broken commitments regarding interim obligations, too long a wait for statehood. Among the most vexing of these failures was Israel's refusal to release veteran Fatah prisoners "with blood on their hands," and the ongoing construction of dwellings for Jews deep inside Arab areas of Jerusalem, for example, at *Ras al-Amud*.

It's important to note that these Israeli violations are balanced by Palestinian violations, particularly failures to reduce incitement and to collect arms that are painfully evident today. Most distressing perhaps were the anti-peace radio and TV broadcasts and the summer training camps where young children learned violent anti-Israeli diatribes. That Barak eventually offered to bypass this entire logjam of interim process violations with a set of final status proposals was brushed aside; notably, the Palestinian media has largely failed to report the full extent of Barak's compromise suggestions regarding settlements, Jerusalem, and refugees. And we can't rule out the issue of Barak's credibility in the eyes of the Palestinians, given the frenetic pace of settlement expansion under his administration.

That is also correct. Arafat's sense, shared by Palestinian negotiators, was that Barak's attitude toward the Palestinians was condescending. This began with a long delay in final status negotiations (they did not begin in earnest until April 2000, due largely to Barak's preoccupation with Syria) and was multiplied by Barak's apparent lack – clearly visible on the Israeli domestic scene – of personal political skills. Barak's failure to cultivate a close personal relationship with Arafat dovetailed with his reliance on heavy American mediation – though U.S. involvement was a goal of Arafat's as well.

Q: What about Arafat's relationship with Barak? That has been noted as rocky even at the best of times.

Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount, followed the next day by the deaths of five Palestinian violent protesters who threatened both Israeli security forces on the Mount and worshippers at the Wall. But it seems clear today that, had Sharon not made the visit, some other trigger would have activated the violence.

Q: What was the catalyst, then, for this violence?

In looking at these incidents, once again we encounter a worrisome ignorance of the way in which seemingly innocuous or relatively uncomplicated acts and decisions regarding this holy site can be misconstrued, monstrously exaggerated by rumor, and otherwise manipulated to cause a wide-scale eruption of violence. Even some Palestinian security officials, who were consulted in advance about Sharon's visit, reportedly underestimated the Palestinian reaction at the popular level. Here it is instructive to recall that the violent conflict of 1929 – a critical juncture in Israeli-Palestinian history – began "merely" over the Western Wall. Now the catalyst is the Temple Mount itself. Everyone should have learned lessons from history and been more cautious.

First, while the specific outbreak of violence was spontaneous, Arafat supported it because he saw advantages for himself. His popularity has soared: Palestinians have forgotten his regime's corruption, the economic stagnation and his failure to deliver territory. Many articulate Palestinians describe Arafat as being obliged to "follow" rather than lead the masses. This corresponds with his leadership style: intuitive, based on short-term tactical moves, but with his eyes always on the strategic goal of a Palestinian state.

Q: Let's talk about some of the other factors that led to the outbreak of violence in September.

Secondly, Arafat and the PLO frequently have had recourse to violence. Arafat is forever fond of saying (correctly) that "Israel has the upper hand." Since the start of the Oslo process in 1993, he has from time to time assessed that he has run out of diplomatic options, and has initiated low-level violence or given Hamas a "yellow" light to engage in murderous acts against Israeli civilians.

Specifically, in the past year, Arafat's Fatah Party built up and armed the *Tanzim*, an armed youth militia, in both the West Bank and Gaza.

Q: We keep hearing about the *Tanzim*. What role have they played in the current conflict?

There are three ways to view the *Tanzim*. The very existence of this armed militia is a blatant violation of the Oslo Accords. At the state-building level, the *Tanzim* are an expression of the minimal self-defense capability which Palestinians have said they would seek in an independent state. But in the present context, the *Tanzim* were honed for action against Israel in an uprising. Their first trial by fire was on May 15, 2000, the anniversary of the Palestinian *Nakba*, or disaster, of 1948, when *Tanzim* troops opened fire on IDF forces. More recently, units of Force 17, Arafat's personal security force, have been involved in attacks on Israelis.

Due to the growth of the *Tanzim*, Arafat and the PLO were predisposed to invoke a higher level of violence than, say, in the original *Intifada* – if and when Arafat felt that the political route was no longer leading toward his goal of a Palestinian state in all of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, Israeli acceptance of responsibility for the events of 1948 and the right of return.

Q: So we have a growing sense of militancy in the territories evidenced by the growth of the *Tanzim*. What are some other factors that came into play? There has been some discussion of the negative effect Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon has had. Can you elaborate on this?

Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in late May 2000 was seen, not only by *Hizballah* but also by many Palestinians, as an indication of Israeli weakness. If Israel could be "forced" to withdraw from a controversial military occupation in southern Lebanon by a relative handful of dedicated guerillas, why couldn't a similar approach work in the West Bank and Gaza? More recently, Israel's position has been worsened by the refusal of Syrian President Assad to constrain *Hizballah* and to encourage Lebanon to take responsibility for its border with Israel, and by the failure of the UN to live up to its commitments regarding Lebanon – after Israel carried out all UN demands to the letter.

Ehud Barak sought to open a new chapter in Israeli-UN relations by agreeing to let the UN delineate the border with Lebanon – to the extent of dismantling borderline buildings and severing the tomb of a sage with the border fence. In return, the UN undertook to "deliver" Lebanese government compliance with international legal requirements to patrol its own territory in the south and restrain *Hizballah*. But Lebanon has not complied, and the UN has not invoked sanctions against it to persuade it to fulfill its part of the deal.

To a certain extent, the Palestinian assessment makes sense. What Lebanon appears to show is that Israel's deterrent capacity is not effective enough against low-level warfare. That may not have been the primary cause of the current violence, but it was clearly a contributing factor. Israeli recognition of the inadequacy of its deterrence also explains in part the nature of the Israeli military response – the pinpoint concentration of disproportional force, with the aim of sending a new deterrent message within the context of overall restraint. At the same time, Israel's decision last October to withdraw under fire from Joseph's Tomb in Nablus – however unnecessary its presence there in the first place – tends to be understood by many Palestinians as a justification for the assessment that Israel can be persuaded by force to withdraw from controversial areas.

While this could conceivably turn out to be true regarding a few isolated settlements, in essence, Israelis address the West Bank very differently than southern Lebanon. Unlike southern Lebanon, the West Bank is part of the Land of Israel, and 200,000 Israelis live there. It contains vital water and security assets. *Hizballah* has always limited its territorial demands strictly to what it perceives to be Lebanese sovereign territory, but some Palestinians will interpret signs of Israeli weakness under fire in the West Bank (which, unlike southern Lebanon, has no sovereign status at all) as an invitation to demand territory from inside Israel proper.



An Israeli soldier aims at Palestinian stone-throwers during a riot in Hebron in the West Bank, March 2001

Q: In the previous *Intifada*, the Israeli Arab community did not participate. This time around, we saw a major shift, with Israeli Arabs taking part in the early phases of the struggle. Can you help explain this phenomenon?



Orly Zohar grieves during the funeral of her husband Major Amir Zohar. He was shot dead during a firefight with Palestinians near Jericho, November 2000.

Q: Do you believe that this conflict could lead to an all out war in the region?

We refer to this as the gradual "Palestinization" of the Israeli Arab community. Israeli Arabs are of course Palestinians – the remnant that were not displaced outside the bounds of Israel in 1948. And their justified grievances regarding second-class status have been fermenting for 50 years. But since the Oslo process commenced in 1993, Arabs in Israel have been witness to the gradual evolution of a Palestinian state for their brethren outside Israel. This process has merely accentuated their own sense of deprivation, while also cultivating an ever-stronger sense of identification with the Palestinian political cause. In parallel, parts of the community have been radicalized by the same wave of Islamic fundamentalism that has affected much of the Muslim world. All these developments rendered Israeli Arabs particularly sensitive to any perception that Israel was encroaching on Al-Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount), a holy site in Islam for the past 1400 years. But note that Israeli Arab violence was short-lived. A Commission of Inquiry has been established to determine the cause of the violence and to examine charges of excessive use of force by the Israeli police. And political leaders in various parties, including Prime Minister Sharon, have committed themselves to major efforts to alleviate legal and economic discrimination against Israeli Arabs. In other words, it's being dealt with within the Israeli system.

There are a number of worrisome regional factors that contribute to concern. In particular, Iran and Iraq – both radical states with a record of aggression against Israel – have broken out of "dual containment" and seek active, and aggressive, roles in the region. The religious dimension of this *Intifada* also has escalatory regional dimensions. And the Lebanese front could deteriorate into confrontation with Syria.

That events have not escalated this time into all-out war in the Middle East is due to a number of positive factors. One is the robustness of the peace process at its most fundamental and important level: Egypt and Jordan now have a vested interest in preventing regional deterioration. President Mubarak has been particularly outspoken in warning his fellow Arab leaders of the disastrous consequences of war. In this sense, Israel's strategic deterrent (as opposed to its problematic capacity to deter low-level conflict) remains sound. This is also a small but encouraging instance of "New World Order" economic development paying off: Egypt, in particular, has for the first time in

memory obtained a faster economic than demographic growth rate. It has too much to lose if things become destabilized. Prior to January 20, active U.S. intervention was also effective.

The prospect of a Palestinian unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) compounds this scenario to one of "bilateral unilateral separation." But just as UDI under current circumstances further damages stability and produces a non-viable Palestinian state composed of non-contiguous enclaves, so Israeli unilateral acts of separation can have only limited positive results. The Green Line border can be moved unilaterally to encompass the 80 percent of the settlers that Barak and Arafat agreed would be annexed to Israel – but the remaining 20 percent, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, guarantee an ongoing high level of security friction between the two sides. Their unilateral removal by Israel under threat of violence, rather than by dint of an agreement, would again damage Israel's deterrent profile and invite further Palestinian violence, and is in any case a huge political liability for any Israeli government. Nor are there adequate one-sided separation arrangements for Jerusalem or the Jordan Valley that in any way approximate Israel's security and political needs under final status. One thing most Israelis do not intend by separation is to inflict economic suffering on Palestinians. Unfortunately however, that is sometimes the consequence.

Q: What do you think of the idea of unilateral separation discussed by Barak and others in his government before he left office? What exactly does it mean?

One of Arafat's apparent general goals, which might be advanced by declaring independence unilaterally, is to internationalize the conflict. Widely recognized statehood status could enable him to present Israeli "aggression" in a different light internationally, and to invite the Arab League or the UN to intervene physically. Arafat has drawn encouragement from recent instances of international intervention in Kosovo and Iraq, ignoring the fact that there is an internationally sanctioned peace process designed specifically to solve the Palestinian problem. Currently Palestinian internationalization efforts focus on persuading the UN to send a force to "defend" Palestinians, and on persuading the Mitchell Commission to condemn Israel for causing the *Intifada*. While Israel rejects Arafat's attempts at internationalization, it would be generally receptive toward international involvement in monitoring a successful agreement.

Q: We hear about internationalization of the conflict. What does this entail?

11

Q. Why did Barak lose the February 6 election?

Barak's defeat by a huge margin was influenced by a number of factors. The collapse of the peace process and outbreak of the Intifada lead the list. Barak's decision to negotiate with the PLO up to the last minute, under fire, regarding crucial and sensitive issues like Jerusalem, lost him widespread support. Throughout his brief term of office, his painful lack of personal political skills generated continual loss of support. Paradoxically, the Israeli public that rejected him continues to support a far-reaching peace process. But by election time, personal security was uppermost in most people's minds: Barak was unable to supply this; Sharon's record was appealing. Finally, the system defeated Barak: the separate election of a prime minister and consequent fragmenting of the Knesset rendered Israel virtually ungovernable. Thankfully, that system has now been eliminated with regard to the next election.

Q: What are the ramifications of the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister and the formation of a national unity government? First, there will almost certainly be no further substantive final status talks with the Palestinians under Sharon. While he will strive for a far-reaching agreement with Syria, it is not at all certain whether Syrian President Assad will agree to reopen negotiations. In this sense, Sharon's first and perhaps greatest challenge – election promises aside – is to contain the current conflict and prevent escalation, in the North for example. Secondly, he will face the same challenge that his predecessors, Netanyahu and Barak, faced under the outgoing electoral system: maintaining a coherent coalition in the face of a relentless centrifugal political dynamic. Finally, in the course of more than 50 years in Israeli military and political life, Sharon has shown a dangerous inclination to engage in irresponsible tactical and strategic moves. The mature, experienced and cautious Sharon of 2001 still has to live down this reputation. Perhaps the moment of truth for Sharon's leadership will focus on the question of his readiness to dismantle a few outlying settlements in the interests of renewing a peace process. After all, he created most of these settlements during recent decades precisely in order to prevent an effective peace process.

Q: How does the new Bush Administration factor into all of this? The Bush Administration has already signaled that it intends to reduce direct U.S. involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and increase involvement in the campaign to contain Iraq. This means that it won't try to suggest to Sharon and Arafat, or Sharon and Assad, specific ways

of making peace, and will offer fewer good offices to facilitate the process. On the other hand, the need to galvanize Arab support against Iraq forces the administration to heed Arab demands to reduce violence and prevent escalation between Israelis and Palestinians. This could mean pressure on Israel (as well as the PLO). The contradiction implicit in these policies has yet to be confronted by the new administration.

Meanwhile, the Bush Administration's commitment to Israel's security appears to be as firm as ever. Ultimately, as with previous U.S. governments, it is the pace and nature of events in the Middle East, rather than early decisions in Washington, that will shape the content of U.S. policy regarding Israel.



As Sharon describes it, it means agreement on additional territorial compromise, security arrangements, and the emergence of a Palestinian state. A small number of outlying settlements would probably have to be removed, although Sharon won't acknowledge this at this juncture. Negotiations on Jerusalem, refugees, final status territorial and border arrangements, and an "end of conflict" declaration would be postponed according to an agreed timetable. This approach has the advantage of skirting the most difficult issues in favor of immediate momentum. But precisely because it would bypass the most critical issues that Palestinians are currently fighting for, they are not enthusiastic about the idea. Still, Sharon will almost certainly broach it once negotiations are renewed, by way of drawing lessons from the failure of Camp David. However, Sharon has pledged not to renew negotiations until the violence ends, and most Israelis support this position.

Q: Recently we hear talk of a new interim agreement. What would that look like?

As long as Arafat believes the violence serves his aim of advancing a Palestinian state through struggle, or is unable to control the violence, the confrontation will continue. The Palestinians have already escalated the violence to include suicide terrorist attacks. American targets, too, may be attacked directly by Palestinians. While severe economic constraints are beginning to be felt by Palestinians, popular morale appears to be high. There is also the temptation to pursue the *Intifada* as long as U.S. involvement and influence are likely to be minimal and international pressure on Israel can be generated, i.e., for several more months at least.

Q: Is there an end to the violence in sight?

13

We have noted the danger of the emergence of a "second front" of low-level warfare along Israel's northern border with Lebanon. And some collateral damage to the peace process is inevitable. Egypt has with-drawn, and Jordan withheld, their ambassadors to Israel; several Arab states have downgraded their already limited ties. But at least for now, escalation into all-out Israeli-Arab war remains a relatively low probability. Such a war has not taken place since 1973, for reasons closely linked with Arab assessments of Israel's strategic and conventional deterrent and the manifest benefits of even a cold peace process.

Q: Where do we go from here?

It's very possible that ultimately many will view this *Intifada* as yet another of Arafat's strategic miscalculations, after losing footholds in Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon in 1982-83, and following upon his abortive support for Saddam Hussein in 1990-91. Israel will return to serious negotiations when the violence and incitement stop or are radically reduced. While it will have to reassess Arafat as a peace partner, the old adage that there is no alternative Palestinian leader with whom to negotiate still appears to be true. Conceivably, as some argue, the current violence may turn out to be Arafat's last angry gesture of defiance before settling down to peaceful state building. But even in this event, it will take years before the two sides can reestablish the degree of trust that existed before September, which was producing not only joint patrols but also joint industrial zones and shopping malls. And it will be harder than ever for an Israeli government to obtain public approval for the kind of compromise agreement that was discussed at Camp David. Israel will draw some hard lessons from the violence that will affect its negotiating positions, particularly regarding security, incitement, and defensible borders. We have already noted that Prime Minister Sharon refuses to consider resuming final status talks, preferring to concentrate on more modest interim goals. It's not at all clear that Arafat will concur.

Q: In the short-term, how do we break the current downward spiral and move forward?

In the short-term, the way forward appears to comprise a stabilization package based on a reduction of violence, a thinning or removal of Israeli blockades on Palestinian cities and on the Gaza Strip, and some significant confidence-building measures, such as an Israeli freeze on settlement building balanced by a Palestinian ban on incitement. Some official Israeli acknowledgement of the painful price in human

suffering that the Palestinians have paid in this *Intifada* would be helpful. These would hopefully set the scene for renewed negotiations.

Currently the Israeli Right is scoring "I told you so" points in its critique of Palestinian behavior. But it has nothing constructive to offer by way of alternative solutions. Sharon himself agrees to talk with Arafat about a Palestinian state once the violence ends. The Right, with its advocacy of the settlements, insists on maintaining overall Israeli control over the fate of three million Palestinians. Ultimately, this policy will lead us to a choice between a binational state that spells the end of Jewish political independence, apartheid, which is not only politically and morally unacceptable, but is a recipe for continued violence into the future, or Kahane's proposal of ethnic cleansing, morally abhorrent and a policy that would make Israel an international pariah. And, it is the settlements, particularly those in the Samarian mountain heartland and in Gaza, that continue to constitute the greatest single impediment not only to peace, but even to an effective unilateral "separation" between Israelis and Palestinians. It's not surprising that they are the focus of Palestinian attacks.

We have noted that both Israelis and Palestinians have legitimate grievances. While Arafat and the PLO can be accused of breaking agreements and invoking violence, negotiating with them still offers a better prospect for peaceful coexistence than all the alternatives. Note that Arafat's own opposition, *Hamas* and Palestinian Marxists, promise only ethnic and religious warfare, and that Arafat's disappearance or total loss of control now would leave Israel facing an anarchic and extremely dangerous situation in the Palestinian Authority. These are the tough realities. Unfortunately, we can't pick our neighbors.

Thus the short-term prospects are bleak and problematic: more violence, perhaps talks on an interim agreement that is likely to solve little. Yet ultimately Israelis and Palestinians will have to talk again if they are to find a way of coexisting. In the long-term, the final status proposals that led to Camp David remain the most promising format for a compromise agreement. In the tense and possibly violent months ahead, we should not lose sight of them.

Q. But why negotiate? Haven't the Palestinians disqualified themselves?



Palestinian men hold machine guns during a rally in Gaza calling for the liberation of Palestine, March 2001.

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SUMMARY

- Oslo, as a gradual, step-by-step process, became a vulnerable target for extremists on both sides. It inevitably allowed for major episodes of violence and failed to create lasting trust and confidence between the parties.
- Both the Palestinian Authority and Israel failed to honor key obligations under the Oslo process.
- Palestinian violations include failures to reduce incitement, the creation of military training camps for young children, and the failure to collect arms. As well, the creation of the *Tanzim*, the armed militia of Fatah, is a blatant violation of the Oslo Accords.
- Israel's broken commitments include growth in settlement building and delays in redeployments from land in the West Bank and Gaza.
- While the outbreak of violence in September was originally uncoordinated, Arafat supports its use in achieving his goals. The Palestinians have already escalated the violence to include suicide terrorist attacks.
- In the short-term, significant confidence-building measures are needed to move things forward. These could include a Palestinian ban on incitement balanced by an Israeli freeze on settlement building.
- While Arafat and the Palestinian Authority are accused of breaking agreements and invoking violence, negotiating with them still offers a better prospect for peaceful coexistence than other alternatives.
- Israel's long-term security needs are best served by moving negotiations forward. A stable peace agreement is the only way to prevent such violence from occurring.