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September 1, 2003 Edition 33 Palestinian-Israeli
crossfire

The American role in the current crisis

.Three pieces of advice by Ghassan Khatib

It is still possible to reinstate the ceasefire, provided that this cessation of violence is mutual.

.New American priorities by Yossi Alpher

In the Israeli-Palestinian arena, the US will avoid high profile involvement and spin or cut its losses.

.Meddling and mismanagement by Hisham Ahmed

The US role, meddling as it is in Palestinian affairs, has not put an end to any single aspect of the Israeli occupation.

.Not yet time to fold the roadmap by Zalman Shoval

The equation between stopping terror and freezing settlements looks to most Israelis as disingenuous.

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A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Three pieces of advice

by Ghassan Khatib

The deterioration in Palestinian-Israeli relations that has put us back into the vicious circle of violence and ended the

severe electoral setback in 2004, and where the fallout from failure is strategically more critical, insofar as it could negatively influence global terrorism, WMD proliferation, vital energy resources and friendly regional regimes, including Israel. Nor have we even mentioned the rest of the "axis of evil": the administration has to be ready to deal with escalating nuclear challenges from Iran and North Korea, possibly in the coming months.

The financial side of this choice is staggering: the US is already spending in one month in Iraq alone considerably more than it spends in aid to Israel and the PA in a year; it is spending annually in Iraq about twice the sum that President Clinton contemplated spending on Israeli-Palestinian peace (refugee resettlement, desalination, additional security for Israel) over ten years.

Given these American priorities, it is hard to understand the pronouncement of Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Yaalon that "everything [concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] depends on Bush." At the daily, tactical level of financial and diplomatic pressures this might be true. But at the broader strategic level very little currently depends on Bush, because Bush does not really intend to risk very much here. -Published 1/9/03@bitterlemons.org

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A PALESTINIAN VIEW

Meddling and mismanagement

by Hisham Ahmed

The troubled circumstances of Palestinians in the occupied territories today most aptly demonstrate the extent and depth of the fascism of the Israeli occupation. Systematic acts of assassination are at their height. More and more Palestinian mothers and families have their hearts broken at the hands of what I call the "slaughter of Sharon." This is taking place to deafening Arab silence and in the midst of international ineptitude. The curfews continue and Israeli jails continue to fill with Palestinian prisoners in intolerable conditions. In addition, the new Berlin wall, a wall of isolation, continues to snake through Palestinian land. In other words, one might say that, for Palestinians, the roadmap has been turned into a path of blood, anguish and suffering.

At the same time, and I write this with deep regret and sorrow, we have a Palestinian cabinet headed by Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) that continues to engage in political mismanagement. In my view, this mismanagement is negatively affecting Palestinian national interests tremendously. Incongruently, and despite the dramatic state of affairs I have just described, Abu Mazen's government has not called for suspending talks with the Israeli occupation institution, but has instead called for cutting off talks with Palestinian resistance groups. Instead of directing its anger and its energies at pressuring the Israeli government to end its violations, we find this government almost across the board doing its best to weaken the struggle against the occupation.

Several statements by cabinet ministers damning the Palestinian resistance have contributed to the recent escalation of tensions within Palestinian society. The assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Abu Shanab by Israeli warplanes interrupted the beginnings of a serious Palestinian feud. A cabinet whose ministers consider Palestinian resistance--not the tenacity and belligerence of the Israeli occupation--damaging to Palestinian national interests does not express the feelings of the Palestinian street and does not represent Palestinian ambitions. (It must be said that not every minister in this government bears the same culpability, and some statements of sanity have made their way through the fog.)

Who is it that defines Palestinian national interests more so than the active and the functional political forces on the ground? These are forces that emanate out of Palestinian suffering--deep suffering--and it is these forces that work diligently to put an end to Palestinian suffering, not this or that cabinet minister.

Today, the Palestinian situation is in a precarious position and it is time for wisdom and rationality to dominate over conspiratorial tactics. The symbol of Palestinian nationalism, Yasser Arafat, deserves this; the difficult struggle endured by the Palestinian people merits this; and the retention of Palestinian rights, which are in my view more sacred than the land itself and all its holy sites, make this imperative. The sanctity of our rights demands the semblance of stability.

The United States, for its part, seems to be terribly pleased that it has found domestic tools that will work diligently to achieve its objectives in Palestinian society. These objectives, which are bound to fail, mean to weaken the Palestinian struggle, to marginalize Yasser Arafat and to work in a calculated way to assassinate him politically and morally in the eyes of Palestinian society, which he loves and which loves him. The role of the

United States, which centers on meddling in Palestinian politics to strengthen and maintain some members of the Abbas government, does not take into account Palestinian interests nor has it put an end to any single aspect of the Israeli occupation. The larger objective of the United States is to make the Palestinian struggle unacceptable to Palestinians themselves; finding Palestinian tools to achieve this has been a most gratifying development for the Bush administration. Let me give just one example. Why, instead of exerting pressure on the Palestinian government to freeze the accounts of Islamic charitable organizations, did not the Bush administration and the Palestinian government itself work first to find a substitute for the thousands of needy families that rely on those organizations for their daily bread? Freezing these accounts and providing no alternative only strengthened the Islamic movements, as they have now been handed a new mobilization tool through which to shore up their backing in Palestinian society.

It is time for the Abbas government to save face and apologize to the Palestinian people--a people that has contributed thousands of martyrs and wounded to this struggle--for the recent comments of its ministers. Indeed, it may be time for this government to courageously resign of its own volition: first, because it is no longer acceptable to Palestinian society, but more so because it is no longer accepted by Fateh, the forefront of the Palestinian struggle.

This government can no longer shift the Palestinian people from one political catastrophe to another. It is not acceptable for the Palestinian government to move the Palestinian people further towards fragmentation and dispersal. The situation that we find ourselves in has no room for added experimentation with Palestinian lives and the destiny of the Palestinian cause. -

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AN ISRAELI VIEW

Not yet time to fold the roadmap

by Zalman Shoval

"Is the roadmap dead?" Before addressing this question, one may remember that many observers, including myself, maintained all along that in its present form there were too many "holes" in it to make it work. It suffices to mention the unworkable timetables or the absence of what Israel sees as an