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Palestinian-Israeli crossfire

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■ Occupation, occupation, occupation by Ghassan Khatib

This cycle of violence took place, and continues to take place, in the context of an illegal, military and belligerent Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

■ Israeli failure, Palestinian mistake by Galia Golan

The underlying reasons were connected with the deep Palestinian disappointment with the Oslo process.

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an interview with Hisham Ahmed

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AN ISRAELI VIEW

Arafat was wrong about violence

by Yossi Alpher

Yasser Arafat's departure from the scene is an appropriate time to revisit the question of who started the current conflict. Simply stated, had Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) been leader of the PLO in late September-early October 2000, I doubt very much the conflict would have broken out. If it had broken out, it would not have become entrenched over the past four years.

Undoubtedly, Ehud Barak was at fault, too, as were his predecessors, Netanyahu, Peres and Rabin. All contributed to the Palestinians' list of grievances, many legitimate, in what was a nuanced patchwork of cause and effect. But it was Arafat who believed that violence "works" with Israelis (and with fellow Arabs as well), and who ignored opportunities to exercise his leadership and stop the

> violent intimidation. This gives too much credit to Arafat as master
 >
 > strategist. In fact, to understand his ultimate failure in this intifada
 as
 >
 > well as in the peace process as a whole, we have to recognize that
 concerning
 >
 > the conflict with Israel he was more a follower than a leader, more a
 >
 > tactician than a strategist.<P>
 >
 > Would the conflict have erupted had Ariel Sharon rather than Ehud Barak
 been
 >
 > prime minister in September 2000? Undoubtedly. But Sharon was not prime
 >
 > minister at that time precisely because Israelis had elected Barak to take
 >
 > daring steps for peace--at which he proved a failure--and to withdraw from
 >
 > Lebanon. It was only when confronted with the new conflict in all its
 >
 > ferocity, and convinced that Arafat was the protagonist, that Israelis
 then
 >
 > elected Sharon to fight the war.- <i>Published 27/12/2004 (c)
 >
 > bitterlemons.org</i><P>
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 >
 > international.org. He is former director of the Jaffee Center for
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 >
 > Studies at Tel Aviv University and a former senior adviser to PM Ehud
 Barak.
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 > A PALESTINIAN VIEW
 > Violence is unavoidable for as long as the occupation continues
 >
 > an interview with Hisham Ahmed
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 > bitterlemons: Who started the intifada?<P>
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 > Ahmed: However you wish to twist and turn it, the fact that there is an
 >
 > Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is sufficient to understand why
 there
 >
 > is violence between Palestinians and Israelis. The Israeli occupation has
 >
 > become more and more entrenched in the Palestinian territories and a
 variety
 >
 > of atrocities have been committed against Palestinians. Thousands of
 >
 > Palestinians have been imprisoned; Palestinian infrastructure, whether

>
> official or private, has been destroyed; over the years tens of thousands
> of
>
> Palestinians have been killed; and even more have been injured.<P>
>
> During the seven years of the Oslo process there were two conflicting
>
> tendencies within Palestinian society. On the one hand, Palestinians were
>
> thirsty for some peace and calm and for getting the occupation off their
>
> backs. On the other hand, people witnessed that even during times of
>
> negotiations, settlement building continued, indeed skyrocketed;
Palestinian
>
> land continued to be confiscated; checkpoints, meant to hamper Palestinian
>
> lives and livelihoods, were erected; and the measures of successive
Israeli
>
> governments only tightened the noose further around the necks of
Palestinians
>
> economically, socially and psychologically. <P>
>
> Given these tendencies, Palestinians were hoping that the Camp David talks
in
>
> July 2000 would resolve the conflict once and for all. In their minds, the
>
> late President Yasser Arafat, the symbol of the Palestinian struggle, went
to
>
> Camp David with a genuine desire to resolve the conflict with Ehud Barak
and
>
> in the presence of Bill Clinton. However, both the American administration
>
> and the Israeli government were tenacious in their attempts to impose a
>
> variety of pressures and conditions on the Palestinian leadership. Arafat
did
>
> not yield. <P>
>
> bitterlemons: So the failure of Camp David was the principal catalyst?<P>
>
> Following the failure and the collapse of the talks there was a
transitional
>
> period of sorts in Palestinian society. That transitional phase was
>
> characterized by a rise in the degree of accumulated frustration in the
>
> Palestinian psyche vis-a-vis the practices of the Israeli occupation. That
>
> is, Palestinians felt and saw Camp David as evidence that the Israelis

were

>
> not interested in a settlement to the conflict based on negotiations.<P>
>
> It was in this tense atmosphere that Sharon, with his violation of the
>
> sanctity of the Aqsa Mosque on September 28, 2000, became the straw that
>
> broke the camel's back. Palestinians felt there was no other way to
react--
>
> negotiations had failed, the occupation continued unabated as did Israeli
>
> assaults on Palestinian land and holy places--than to take to the streets.
>
> The outbreak of the Aqsa intifada is a byproduct of years of failed
>
> negotiations and accumulating frustrations within Palestinian society due
to
>
> the ongoing atrocities and brutalities by the Israeli occupation under
cover
>
> of the peace process. It was, if you will, an almost inevitable outcome
given
>
> the fact that the political process did not work, and the Israeli
occupation
>
> showed no signs of ending.<P>
>
> bitterlemons: There is a suggestion that perhaps the demonstrations could
>
> have been reigned in early in time for the Clinton proposals and the Taba
>
> negotiations.<P>
>
> Ahmed: At the start of the intifada, two schools of thought evolved. The
>
> first saw the intifada as a tool for moving negotiations forward.
Certainly,
>
> among Israelis, Barak saw the intifada in this context. He looked back to
>
> what happened during Netanyahu's time when the tunnel upheavals only
>
> signified a pause. Barak perhaps calculated that after some violence, the
>
> Palestinians would come back to the negotiating table and everything would
>
> return to normal in time for the Israeli elections. Clinton certainly
wanted
>
> developments to go that way, in his quest to go down in history as the
>
> peacemaker between Israelis and Palestinians. Some Palestinians also
adopted
>
> these views and looked at the intifada as only a means to move the

political
>
> process forward. <P>
>
> The second school of thought, however, really viewed the intifada as a
>
> process of national liberation to end the occupation. For the first few
>
> months, at least six months, Palestinians were concentrating their efforts
on
>
> peaceful resistance to the occupation, in a replica of the first intifada.
>
> However, the ferocity of the Israeli response, the killing of so many
>
> Palestinians, not only in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, but
>
> also within the 1948 areas, was a signal to Palestinians that perhaps some
>
> fundamental and profound changes would have to be made in the way the
>
> occupation should be resisted. Therefore there was a gradual progression
in
>
> the means and tools utilized.<P>
>
> In the longer view it was like this: first there were negotiations
followed
>
> by stone throwing protests. These didn't work, indeed, only more and more
>
> Palestinians were killed. Had the Israeli occupation dealt with these
>
> demonstrations in a "civilized" way--as civilized as is possible for a
>
> belligerent military occupying power--Palestinians would have continued to
>
> rely on such means. But the Israeli presence in occupied territory had
>
> changed in nature and policy, and having to seek out checkpoints and go to
>
> them was very costly in terms of lives. So we saw a gradual progression
from
>
> random shootings at settlements, to bombings, to suicide bombings, to
>
> homemade rockets and, more recently, the tunnel attacks. Such a
progression,
>
> I believe, was really unavoidable. And, resorting to a military
resistance,
>
> even with the modest means available to them, Palestinians have
compensated
>
> the gross inequity in the military balance of power with a strategic
balance
>
> of terror. <P>

>
 > bitterlemons: How important is resolving the debate over who started the
 >
 > intifada?<P>
 >
 > Ahmed: It is important for academic reasons, of course, but, quite
 frankly,
 >
 > any observer who follows the conflict is bound to realize that given the
 fact
 >
 > that there is occupation and the resulting brutal atrocities against
 >
 > Palestinians, it is only natural that there are intifadas, that there is
 >
 > violence, and that there are acts of violence. The occupation is the
 >
 > incubator of violence. The only way out is to work diligently to end the
 >
 > occupation. This is not only useful for Palestinians, it is useful for
 >
 > Israelis, because it will rid them of this inhuman stigma that has
 attached
 >
 > itself to their institutions. It will also be good for humanity at large,
 >
 > because in the 21st century to have a military occupation by one people
 over
 >
 > another people is a most barbaric and backward way of conducting your
 >
 > affairs.- <i>Published 27/12/2004 (c) bitterlemons.org</i><P>
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 > Hisham Ahmed is a professor of political science at Birzeit University.<P>
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 > AN ISRAELI VIEW
 > Israeli failure, Palestinian mistake
 >
 > by Galia Golan
 > =====
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 > In looking for the immediate causes of the present conflict between Israel
 >
 > and the Palestinians, we might point to the failure of the Camp David
 talks.
 >
 > This was to a large degree the responsibility of Israel, specifically Ehud
 >
 > Barak, primarily because of his insistence upon forcing a summit for which
 >
 > the Palestinians had clearly declared themselves both opposed and
 unprepared.
 >
 > However well-intended and far-reaching the proposals offered by Barak (and
 >
 > they were indeed well-intended and far-reaching in my opinion), they fell
 >
 > significantly short of the Palestinian need for full sovereignty over the
 >