

The Peace is Dead



CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PAT PAYNE

The Middle East has exploded again. This latest war has been going on for almost two months, ever since a right-wing member of Israel's Knesset pushed his way into a Muslim holy site also revered by Israelis. Almost immediately, Israeli army troops faced rock-throwing Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank area and armed Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The violence here is, of course, nothing new. Both sides have committed untenable atrocities. Both sides have shot children who happened to be in the line of fire. Communities have been razed. In the Gaza Strip, three Israeli reservists were beaten to death in a police station. In full view of television cameras, their bodies were thrown out a window and their murderers waved bloody hands in triumph. It's time for the United States to step out of the blood and let the Israelis and Palestinians decide if they can ever end the killing.

The most recent violent eruption has brought an end to the latest round of peace talks. The main sticking point in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations is the city of Jerusalem. In a way, this isn't surprising. The city is the holy center of three major religions.

To the Jews, it holds the ruins of their most sacred temple and was the Torahic capital for King David. Christians revere it as the main city in which Joshua ben-Joseph, or Jesus Christ, gave his sermons and where he was crucified and resurrected. Muslims hold the city holy as the place in which the Prophet Mohammed ascended into Heaven at the Dome of the Rock.

Outside of religion, Jerusalem has rarely seen peace. In Biblical times, the city was a major axis of wars between the Jews and Philistines. Roman legions looted the city in 49 B.C. and razed it in A.D. 70. Crusaders brought a bloodbath in 1099, and World War I found the British fighting the Germans on the bloody soil.

After World War II, Great Britain and the United Nations created the state of Israel as a haven for Jewish refugees of the Holocaust. The Muslims almost immediately objected and attacked the nascent country in 1949, sparking the Six-Day War. Even national peace brought strife to Jerusalem, as in the 1980s and '90s, a wave of terror called the Intifadah began in the city, culminating in a wave of suicide bombings on bus routes.

The most sickening aspect of all of this conflict is that one of the sides fighting is a people who should have learned from its own bitter experience about the destruction of the Jewish. This is a people who has endured hateful racism from time immemorial, finally culminating in the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust.

The United States has been there for Israel and the Arab world since the Carter administration. We have given aid to both sides. We have brokered peace deals. We have done everything except forge both parties' signatures on a final peace document.

Unfortunately, this hand-holding has done nothing to end the cycle of violence. It can't end. The people don't want it to end. They have been urged on by political and religious

leaders, and every slight they or their people may have received by the other side is magnified into a massive insult. It's much easier to pick a fight with someone than build a trusting relationship, especially with such ill will permeating both sides.

As hard as it is to say, it's time we stepped back from the region. We shouldn't be in the business of aiding, even unintentionally, mutual genocide. Perhaps we should let them fight it out until both sides finally come to their senses, and with a clear voice they say, "No more blood should be shed. It's time we put down our weapons and finally begin to see one another as fellow humans, rather than as Arab and Jew."

Until that day, however, the United States can't make them see eye-to-eye. We aren't the world's parent. We can't give them both a "time out" and tell them to behave. We can't send troops to the region to keep them apart.

There is a more humane suggestion I can make, although the possibility is remote. The entire world must give up all claims to Jerusalem and declare it an open city. Too much blood has been pointlessly shed for religious ideology. Adding ironic insult to the carnage is the fact that the Muslim and Judaic religions come from the same root.

Mohammed thought of himself and Moses as bearers of the same message from arguably the same deity. Jews, Christians and Muslims are all considered "People of the Book" according to Muslim scholars. Israel and Palestine should manage Jerusalem in joint stewardship. It's only fitting that a city that has seen too much bloodshed in its time should be given a rest.

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WTO protesters still fighting the good fight

COMMENTARY

Bhumika Muchhala

Nov. 30 is the first anniversary of the "Battle in Seattle." As thousands of students joined with trade unionists, environmentalists and others to demonstrate against the World Trade Organization, a new era of protest was dawning.

Many in the media have tended to portray the student protesters as thrill-seekers with little understanding of the issues and a questionable level of long-term commitment. Interviews I've conducted with nearly 50 student activists from national and campus organizations suggest a different picture.

Over the past year, these new young leaders have remained committed to their causes and have begun a process of addressing some difficult challenges, such as the lack of racial inclusion in the protests and the absence of a unifying vision.

"What we've got going thrives on a diversity of visions," says Dale Weaver, a graduate student organizer with United Students Against Sweatshops at San Jose State University. "Having one vision could exclude potential allies."

Student groups that organize around sweatshops, the environment and corporate accountability are often stereotyped as "privileged white kids." Many students are acutely aware of this criticism and are making constructive efforts to be more inclusive, such as approaching national African-American organizations and giving informational talks at meetings of ethnic organizations on campus.

"At the protest against the World Bank and IMF, I was talking to two black deputy officers who said that if we were marching in the streets for urban poverty, they would be happy to march with us," says Jesse Dickerman, co-founder of Rice Students for Global Justice at Rice University. "For the movement to be inclusive, organizing on the community level needs to be done by the same people who show up at the protests."

What will the students who were protesting the World Trade Organization in Seattle do once they graduate? Cynics expect that their activist ideals will slip away as they grab the first job that offers stock options. By contrast, 36 out of 40 students I interviewed said they plan to join social justice, labor or environmental-rights organizations in the United States and abroad.

William Winters, a member of the Student Environmental Action Coalition at Louisiana State University, says, "Through organizing in minority communities my contribution will be getting people from different cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds involved in the movement."

Rachel Grad, a writer for Ruckus, a social-justice magazine at the University of Washington, says, "Through progressive journalism, I want to enable everybody to have an audible voice."

During the past year, these young veterans of the "Battle of Seattle" have demonstrated staying power and sophistication. They — and the movement against corporate globalization — are not going away anytime soon.

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