



BOB GALE

# CAN THE MIDEAST STALEMATE BE RESOLVED?

BY DAVID A. HOROWITZ

Now that news headlines have temporarily strayed from the deadly casualties of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, a persistent stalemate remains, paralyzing hopes for both a stable peace and a creditable U.S. posture in the region. The resolution recently passed by Israel's Likud party, which rejected eventual acceptance of a Palestinian state, implies an Israel intent to maintain virtual dominance over the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza. Although Prime Minister Ariel Sharon argued against the measure, his insistence that a limited Palestinian state be formed only after ten to twenty years of peaceful coexistence is not much different in spirit.

As housing minister in the 1980s, Sharon devised the use of Jewish settlements as a guarantee that Israel would never cede authority to a West Bank state with continuous territory. Positioning himself as the foremost opponent of the Oslo Peace Process, he used the occasion of his election in 2001 to declare that he would seek only interim agreements with the Palestinian Authority. Sharon carefully pointed out that the great bulk of the settlements (comprising well over 200,000 people) and the status of East Jerusalem *never* would be negotiated. Once President Bush initiated the war against terrorism, the former general sought to frame Israel military actions within the rhetoric emanating from Washington.

Intent on scoring political points with Republican nationalists, white southern evangelicals, and some Jewish voters, and seeking a strategic consistency to the War on Terrorism, the Bush White House has been unable to extricate itself from the rhetorical trap which Sharon set for it. Therefore, despite Washington's interest in placating Arab allies in the oil-rich Mideast, thereby reducing opposition to its proposed war on Iraq, Bush has not had the political will to effectively restrain Israel's use of force in the occupied territories or to press the Israelis to engage in a meaningful political track in negotiations. He and Secretary of State Colin Powell have preferred instead to lecture Yasser Arafat and regional Arab nations on the need to denounce Palestinian terrorism and violence.

The implications of the Bush/Sharon Axis have been utterly disastrous for the Palestinian people and their national movement. The Occupation's mass arrests, employment of lethal force against demonstrators, targeted assassinations, house demolitions and restrictions on everyday movement have now been surpassed by outright assaults on Palestinian villages, town and refugee camps. 'Operation Defensive Shield' not only wrought physical destruction upon schools, mosques, factories, media outlets and government facilities, but systematically eradicated the vital data banks of nearly every private and public institution in Palestinian society. Despite outcry from the Arab and Islamic street, Europe, and the international community, there appears to be little movement toward a political settlement.

Ironically, the "Saudi" two-state solution already has been endorsed in resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, the European Union and the Arab League. Even President Bush, as well as 52% of the Israeli public, have demonstrated support for the plan's basic framework. Yet the Palestinian national movement has no viable strategy for implementing the two-state fix. Certainly there is *no* chance of a military outcome imposed by regional Arab and Islamic states or by guerrilla warfare from within, and only a remote although potentially effective chance the Saudis and others would resort to the "oil weapon." Therefore, a negotiated peace likely would require Israel and Palestinian agreement to terms set by the United States.

Yet there are two serious impediments to such a deal. First, nothing will compel the Israelis to make peace with those who appear to be striking at the very existence of their state through suicide bombings against civilians inside the Green Line. However Sharon exploits the situation, Israeli soldiers insist they are defending "their home" when they strike at the "terrorist infrastructure" in the occupied territories. An Israeli public sensitive to the Holocaust's legacy of anti-Semitic violence strongly supports them on this account. Second, the Bush administration will not desert the logic of the War on Terrorism by allowing the Israelis to face the kind of civilian atrocities against which the entire weight of U.S. foreign policy is now deployed, a position the American public and media strongly support for understandable reasons.

If the Palestinian cause is to achieve its goal of a viable state, it must take control of a narrative that focuses on the illegal and oppressive occupation of its lands by an Israeli state wedded to the defense of Jewish settlements. Indiscriminate (and ineffective) use of weaponry plays into Israel's hands by providing justification for a response in which the dominant power sets the terms of engagement. If Sharon has hijacked George Bush's War on Terrorism, the Palestinian national movement has been lost to extremist Islamists and suicide bombers adamantly opposed to Israel's existence and to any negotiations with the Jewish state.

In tactical terms, the Palestinian resistance must abandon attacks on Israeli civilians, even in the settlements, and focus on the unjust Occupation through a people's mass movement relying on nonviolent protest. Only then can the powerful United States be forced to honor its commitments to universal human rights and self-determination by persuading its Israeli ally and benefactor to serve regional stability by recognizing a Palestinian state committed to secure and safe borders with its neighbor.

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## AT WAR WITH OURSELVES

When President Bush gave the order to attack Iraq in 1991, many of us suffered. I was at Plum Village giving a lecture, and in the middle of a sentence I suddenly said, "I don't think I will go to America this spring. I really don't want to go there now." That afternoon, a number of students from North America told me that because I felt that way, I should go. They reminded me that many Americans also suffered when the President gave the order to attack.

I understood that President Bush was trying in his way to serve his people. Early in the conflict he instituted an embargo but he became impatient and suddenly was inevitable. When he ordered the ground attack and said, "God Bless America," I knew he needed our help.

We have to find a way to tell the President that God cannot bless one country against another. He must learn to pray better than that. But we should not think that by electing another President, the situation will be transformed. If we want a better government, we have to begin by transforming the greed and violence in ourselves and working to transform society.

Look at the 500,000 men and women from America and the West and the one million Iraqi soldiers who spent months waiting for the land offensive to begin. They had to practice killing day and night in order to prepare. They wore helmets, jumped and yelled, and plunged their bayonets into sandbags representing enemy soldiers. They had to become inhuman to learn to kill. During the night they did the same in their dreams. This is the practice of war — one and a half million men and women practicing fear and violence for many months.

Then the war came. The actual killing was massive, and we called it a victory. When the 500,000 troops returned home, they were deeply wounded from practicing so much violence. For several generations, millions of their children and grandchildren will inherit those seeds of suffering. How can we call that a victory?

Eighty percent of the American people supported the Gulf War and called it clean and moral. They do not understand the true nature of war. The Gulf War was not clean or moral for the people of Iraq, nor for the people of the United States. After a war many people, especially young people, see violence as the way to solve problems. The next time there is a conflict

somewhere in the world they will be tempted to support another military solution, another quick war.

The death of one Iraqi soldier means that one family is suffering — and more than 100,000 Iraqi soldiers and civilians were killed. After any war the suffering continues on both sides for several generations. Look at the suffering of the Vietnam veterans in America and the suffering of the Vietnamese people. We need to be there for those who need us, to let them know that we share their suffering. When someone feels understood, his/her suffering is diminished. Please don't forget this.

We who have touched war have a duty to bring the truth about war to those who have not had a direct experience of it. We are the light at the tip of the candle. It is very hot, but it has the power to illuminate. We who were born from the war know what it is. The war is in us; but it is also in everyone.

Violence has become the substance of our lives. The Vietnam veterans, the Gulf War veterans, and the millions who absorb violence every day are being trained to be exactly like those who manifest the hatred and violence that pervade our society. We water the seeds of violence in ourselves by watching violent television programs and movies that are poisoning us. If we do not transform all of this violence and misunderstanding, one day it will be our own child who is beaten or killed, or who does the beating. This is very much our affair.

~Thich Nhat Hahn

Martin Luther King said Thich Nhat Hahn should receive the Nobel Peace Prize. A Vietnamese Buddhist monk whose brother was a member of the Viet Cong and killed by U.S. troops, Nhat Hahn led the Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Talks in 1969. He has spent his long life devoted to peace, often touring the USA speaking out against war and violence. Exiled from Vietnam for his antiwar activities, he lives at Plum Village, a French community near Bordeaux. Among his activities on behalf of peace, he was chaplain of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. 'At War With Ourselves' has been excerpted from his book, *Touching Peace: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living*, which was published in 1992.



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