

17 Adar 5762 Friday March 1, 2002

Conquer or capitulate

Martin Sherman

(March 1) - Even the most cursory glance at the basic arithmetic of the Israeli-Arab conflict and its history, should be sufficient to underscore the total futility of the Israeli government's current policy towards the Palestinian violence.

During Israel's War of Independence, the newly-founded Jewish nation, infused with a resolute sense of purpose, was not swayed from its aspiration to achieve political sovereignty, despite the tremendous casualties the pursuit of this aspiration demanded of it. In spite of the fact that the Jewish population numbered barely 600,000, even the terrible loss of 6,000 dead did not diminish Jewish determination to achieve national independence.

Accordingly, under the eminently plausible assumption that the Jewish sensitivity to loss of life then was not less than Palestinian sensitivity is today, there is little reason to suppose that the Palestinians, similarly infused with a resolute sense of purpose, will abandon the endeavor to attain their national goal - even at the cost of great suffering.

Indeed, if the Palestinians are prepared to endure the same rate of casualties that Israelis were prepared to sustain in the 1940s, then even inflicting losses of the order of 30,000 on them will not bring them to give up their armed struggle against Israel. So, were the IDF to exact costs 10 times heavier than those imposed by the present government policy, the chances are that it would still be ineffectual in quelling Palestinian violence.

This comparison underscores the utter futility of limited Israeli military measures of any kind. It shows quite unequivocally that targeted assassinations, demolition of a few dozen houses, and temporary invasions of Palestinian administered territories will never induce the Palestinian to lay down their arms even if Israel were to escalate these types of measures to levels presently undreamed of.

This, however, does not mean that Israel has no option but to go back to the negotiating table, and to chase after the illusory mirage of a political solution. After all, since October 2000, following Palestinian rejection of the far-reaching and reckless concessionary offers made by the Barak government, after the uncompromising insistence on the Palestinian right of return, it has become undeniably clear to the Israeli public (apart from some eccentric and fanatical left-wing fringe groups) that what fuels the fires of the Arab-Israeli conflict is not the lack of Palestinian self-determination but the existence of Jewish self-determination no matter what the territorial frontiers may be.

Accordingly, if on the one hand the Palestinians cannot be induced to give up their violence by any reasonably conceivable concessions, and on the other hand they cannot be induced to do so by the threat of any reasonably conceivable punitive measures, there appear to be only two ways to bring the fighting to an end. The one involves total capitulation to Palestinian demands and unmitigated acceptance of all their claims. The significance of this option is the complete renunciation of the Zionist ideal of a sovereign Jewish state for the People of Israel in the Land of Israel. For it is virtually indisputable that the adoption of this course would result in a state that would very quickly find itself swallowed up in the social, economic and political environment that prevails in the region, and would soon become indistinguishable from any other of the surrounding states in the precinct.

The second alternative involves acknowledging the fact that Israel has no acceptable way of diminishing the Palestinian will to attack it, and thus must eliminate Palestinian ability to do so by speedy and decisive conquest of the areas transferred to Palestinian control, the dismantling of all the political and military organizations and infrastructures established since the Oslo Accords, and the reinstatement of effective Israeli sovereign rule from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. This is undoubtedly a course of action fraught with many hazards. Its implementation requires meeting many daunting challenges and overcoming many serious obstacles that cannot be lightly dismissed. It will call for huge diplomatic and political efforts, and place the national leadership under the most stringent of tests. But if Israel still desires to preserve its national independence and the political sovereignty of the Jewish nation-state, there is no other feasible alternative.

This then is the cruel choice on the national agenda: The Jews can either capitulate to the Palestinian national movement - or conquer it. It is a choice that must be made urgently. Any belief in a more moderate, less radical option is no more than misguided self-delusion.

(The writer is a senior research fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya.)