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PALESTINIANS CHALLENGE THE INTIFADA

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Conventional wisdom has it that the Palestinians are in despair as a result of the defeat of their would-be champion Saddam Hussein. There is now a considerable body of evidence to support this thesis. There are even signs that this frustration is creating the climate for some reassessment, both among the grassroots and the leadership in the territories.

More Internal Killings, Fewer Strikes

Their despair and frustration can be seen by the increasing numbers of Palestinians being murdered by Palestinians. In April alone, 31 such killings occurred, setting a new monthly record. Many of these murders are no longer even attributed to nationalist reasons. Although all such murders in the past have generally been labeled punishment of collaborators, it is now readily admitted that a good many of these are simply criminal acts and settling of

personal accounts. If so, this marks an unraveling of the social order established with the onset of the intifada, which replaced the traditional clan hierarchy with the authority of the central command of the PLO in the territories.

Further evidence of this breakdown is that for the first time since the beginning of the intifada, restaurant owners have spontaneously begun opening their establishments after 1:00 p.m., when the daily commercial strike is supposed to begin. In East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Jericho, restaurants are now open until the late afternoon and even until evening. This unilateral action was neither announced nor sanctioned by the national unified command. This in and of itself reflects a weakening of their power, although there is at least passive permission by allowing the restaurant owners to remain open.

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There is also evidence of a weakening of resolve and determination within the national command itself. Severe disputes have broken out among the member bodies in the national command regarding future direction. An example of this disunity was the boycott of the meetings with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker by three out of the four factions which make up the national command. Further evidence was their recent bulletin which dealt mainly with appeals and attempts to stabilize life in the territories. It radically decreased the number of strike days to only one full strike day per month. Moreover, strikes to protest the killing of a local resident by the IDF are to be restricted to the neighborhood of the victim rather than to the entire city or town. Local wildcat strikes are also being discouraged. For instance, earlier this month, Faisal el-Husseini met with the residents of the West Bank village of Beit Sahur to ask that they strike only on those days sanctioned by the national command and by Hamas. The PLO's central stream has termed such efforts at normalization currently being undertaken by the PLO-sanctioned leadership in the territories "the intifada against the intifada."

Shifts in Palestinian Public Opinion

A recent public opinion poll published in April in the daily Palestinian newspaper al-Nahar indicates some interesting shifts in opinion, outlook and attitude following the Gulf War, among a representative sample of residents of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Even before the war, only some 15 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank considered the intifada to be "effective and influential." The majority in all three locales believed that Palestinian political activity was "unsatisfactory and requires a more determined effort." After the war, the percentage of West Bank residents polled who felt Palestinian political activity to be effective dropped to 9 percent. But the big change was with those who no longer believe in a "more determined ef-

fort." Whereas before the war some 57 percent of the West Bank residents thought that political activity was unsatisfactory and required a more determined effort, after the war a majority said that Palestinian political activity was "not capable of extracting advantages from the achievements of the uprising."

Given this disillusionment with the Palestinian political leadership, it is not surprising that the great majority of residents of all three areas said that the "plan of action for the uprising is weak and alternative methods should be sought." This was the majority opinion before the war, and it became stronger in each of the locales in the aftermath of the war. Nevertheless, over 50 percent of the West Bank residents polled, and 71 percent of Gazans, view the intifada favorably, either that "it will continue so as to realize a just and comprehensive peace" or at least "as a means of pressure in favor of the Palestinian side." East Jerusalemites have a different view, however, with over 60 percent answering that "there is a lack of balance between the sacrifices/investments and the accomplishments" of the intifada.

Even more telling is the shift in their aspirations and dreams. Prior to the war, some 87 percent of West Bank and Gaza residents thought the solution to the Palestinian problem lay in either a Palestinian state on all Palestinian lands, or an independent Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. This figure dropped in the West Bank to 30 percent after the war with the majority, some 55 percent, opting for a confederation with Jordan as their ideal solution. The more radical Gaza Strip residents continued to prefer a Palestinian state, with 76 percent choosing one of the "independent state" options presented.

As already indicated, the poll documented some dramatic differences in perception and opinion between residents of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Even before the war, statistics showed residents of Gaza to be more radical than either residents of the West Bank or East

Jerusalem. These differences became more pronounced with the war. While the failure of Saddam Hussein to be the Palestinian redeemer had little if any impact on attitudes and opinions of Gaza residents, residents of East Jerusalem seemed most affected. Gazans still continue to support the intifada as the means to achieve their national aspirations, in higher percentages than other Palestinian groups. East Jerusalemites are much less enamored of the intifada, with the percentage of those unhappy with the prospects for achievement via the intifada jumping from 41 percent before the war to 61 percent after the war. Similarly, before the war Gazans preferred either internationalization of Jerusalem or Arab sovereignty over the entire city as the preferred solution for Jerusalem, choices that remained constant after the war. East Jerusalemites, who had favored internationalization (45 percent) before the war, shifted their vote to repartition (55 percent) after the war.

The results of this public opinion poll may not be entirely reliable. There seems to be a certain lack of clarity and even ambiguity in the wording of the questions that casts some doubt on its scientific methodology. Moreover, the poll may have been, at least in part, politically motivated. Al-Nahar, published by Osman Halak, is known for its pro-Jordanian political sentiments. But even if the numbers are off somewhat, the reported trends confirm what the changes in behavior indicate: since the Gulf War there have been shifts in Palestinian opinion.

Signs of Pragmatism in an Arab Peace Plan

Recently there were several possible indications that the local Palestinian leadership is now trying to get out in front of the public. Ziad abu Ziad, a lawyer and journalist who was released not long ago after six months in administrative detention, called for Palestinian leaders both here and abroad to try to put to an end the nearly daily killing of Palestinians suspected of working with the authorities.

More impressive was the publication of a "Peace Plan to Solve the Palestinian Question," prominently published by the East Jerusalem daily, al-Fajr, in both its Arabic and English editions.

A truism often repeated about the Israeli-Palestinian problem is that there is "no one to talk to," and that there has never been a Palestinian peace plan that seriously began to address Israeli concerns. Peace proposals have been the favorite game of Israelis for many years. From the Allon Plan to the recent Toledano peace plan there have been a multitude of themes and variations offered by Israeli political leaders and private individuals as to the nature, context, and structure of a process and its possible results. This made the recent publication of Palestinian lawyer and journalist Talal As-Safi's peace proposal all the more remarkable. Al-Fajr's editorial board, on its front page, declared that it was publishing the plan as part of an effort to foster discussion about the peace process. The plan itself was spread across two center pages, treatment usually reserved for an important address by a head of state. In similar fashion, the text itself was released in advance, issued in booklet form in both English and Arabic.

The plan reflects the usual gap between Palestinian expectations and Israeli needs. Nevertheless, it is at least a departure from the traditional, simplistic Palestinian formulations which range from a Palestinian-dominated state in the entire area west of the Jordan River to a Palestinian state immediately alongside the State of Israel.

Briefly, the plan calls for a step-by-step approach, in three stages. The first stage would last one year and would be divided into two periods of six months each. The initial six month period is described as "a goodwill period," during which the PLO and Israel would initiate a series of steps to "prove their good intentions and to build a bridge of confidence between them." The second phase of the first stage would be elections to choose a 200-member Palestinian Administrative

Council (PAC), 120 members from the West Bank and 80 from Gaza. For the purposes of the elections, the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be divided into five constituencies designated by a central city and surroundings: Nablus, Hebron, Gaza City, Khan Yunis, and either Jerusalem or Ramallah. The PAC would elect ten of its members to constitute the body to negotiate with Israel.

The second stage is termed the "Interim Transitory Period," to last three years. Initially, the 10-person delegation would negotiate with Israel in Cairo, under the supervision of international observers from the U.S., USSR, Egypt and the EC troika, regarding the terms governing the transitory period of "expanded self-authority for the Palestinians," which seems to be a Palestinian interpretation of Begin's and Shamir's autonomy plan. The PAC will constitute the "expanded self-authority" during the transition, with authority over areas ranging from the local police force to control of natural resources, freedom for intellectual and political activity, as well as for import and export, radio and TV. In addition, the plan establishes a timetable during the transition period for discussion of such issues as Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons, the return of Palestinians "rendered homeless since 1948," and a referendum on amending the Palestinian National Charter "so that it might be consistent with the new circumstances of the Palestine cause."

The third stage is entitled "A Just, Comprehensive and Lasting Solution," and constitutes the final negotiation process. As-Safi envisions participation of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation formed by the PLO and the Jordanian government, as well as Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, in an international conference "to establish a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestine cause and the Arab-Israeli conflict." The plan calls for the establishment of an independent state which would be demilitarized and confederated with Jordan. "The peace agreement should be followed by mutual recognition, the es-

tablishment of diplomatic, economic and trade relations, as well as neighborly relations between the concerned parties." The issues of East Jerusalem and the Israeli settlements in the territories would be discussed at this stage.

There are imbalances in the plan, to say the least. For example, he describes steps to be taken by the Israelis during the initial confidence building stage in minute fashion: a halt to all settlement activity, land confiscation, demolition of houses, deportations, administrative detention, the release of all detainees, the re-opening of all educational, cultural, labor, social and sports institutions. For the Palestinians, it suffices for him to set forth a vague guideline: "In the spirit of the new circumstances, the PLO will see to it that proper conditions are created before, during and after elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." One may appreciate the implication that all terrorist activity would cease, but the author's hesitation or disinclination to clearly delineate these points indicates his own personal fears and anxieties in setting forth such a plan. Similarly, while recognizing that a Palestinian National Charter calling for Israel's destruction is inconsistent with reaching a lasting plan for coexistence, he cannot bring himself to spell out the necessary changes to the PLO charter.

Nevertheless, the plan contains a number of elements that indicate some sensitivity to the Israeli point of view. For instance, while calling for a Palestinian state, it does not insist upon its immediate implementation and leaves open the delineation of its exact future borders. Indeed, the plan does not even call for a prior Israeli commitment to a Palestinian state. Regarding Palestinian refugees, the plan does not demand the right of return. Rather, it calls for the two sides to "agree on the formation of a joint committee to discuss the return of the Palestinians rendered homeless or deported since 1948." Nor does it call for immediate dissolution of the settlements, but rather "in view of the sensitivity of the issues of

East Jerusalem and the Israeli settlements, the discussion of these two issues would be put off until the final negotiation stage."

On the three sensitive issues of settlements, the right of return and Jerusalem, As-Safi has some interesting and even moderate ideas. First, he only calls for evacuation of settlements "close to Palestinian population centers." Secondly, he suggests that the solution to the Palestinian refugee problem could lie in compensation for lost property. Finally, on the issue of Jerusalem, he limits himself to only East Jerusalem, thereby conceding up front that West Jerusalem is Israeli and not on the table for bargaining purposes. As for East Jerusalem, he offers two proposals to solve the issue: 1) East Jerusalem to be under Palestinian control with free access to all parties; 2) East Jerusalem to be under UN control with free access to all parties. Islamic and Christian holy places will be placed under a Palestinian civil authority, and the Jewish holy places under Israeli civil authority.

Moreover, while As-Safi remains loyal to the PLO, his plan limits the involvement of Palestinians outside the territories to the third stage, and then only as part of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, with the Palestinians in this delegation consisting of an equal number from abroad and from the territories. This means in effect that only a quarter of the delegation would be PLO from abroad. Conversely, he envisions greater local Palestinian influence on PLO affairs by calling for the 200 PAC members elected from the territories to become members of the PLO's legislature, the Palestine National Council. If nothing else, the plan asserts an increased local Palestinian role in any peace process.

These elements of the plan indicate a degree of pragmatic realism heretofore not readily visible. Indeed, the lengthy preamble to the plan reveals a readiness to acknowledge some hard facts. For example, he writes, "The Gulf War and its after-effects have had repercussions on the Palestinian cause and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

We the Palestinians should be aware of the changes and their implications....There is no doubt that the balance of power after the Gulf War is tilted in favor of Israel." In a major departure from the usual rhetoric, As-Safi acknowledges Palestinian responsibility for having rejected various plans in the past, ranging from the 1947 partition plan to UN resolution 242, and even the Rogers plan of 1970. "We the Palestinians should take the initiative and be bold enough to take practical steps to boost our cause," writes As-Safi in the preamble.

Talal As-Safi's plan is noteworthy, not only because its content shows a degree of pragmatic reality, but because As-Safi himself supposedly has credibility within the Palestinian community. According to an article in a local Israeli weekend newspaper, As-Safi's plan is attracting considerable popular support among the Palestinian population, although left-wing Palestinian factions such as the Democratic Front and the Popular Front oppose the plan. His own personal history lends credence to his plan. Now 38 years old, a lawyer and journalist for al-Fajr, As-Safi was arrested in 1988 by the Israeli security services as the suspected head of Fatah in Jerusalem and sentenced to two years' imprisonment by a military court. He was also detained on a number of occasions for suspected Fatah activities.

In an interview published in Hebrew, As-Safi was asked to whom his plan was directed. "Primarily to Israeli public opinion," he answered. "This is a gesture to Israel." Though widely reported in Israeli newspapers, it perhaps would have more impact had the English-Arabic booklet version of the plan been printed in Hebrew as well. Nevertheless, the fact that it appeared in Arabic in the major Palestinian daily al-Fajr, whose editor is the PLO-sanctioned Hanna Siniora, is significant.

Arab Backlash Against Arab Violence

Two additional recent reports in al-Fajr, one by Palestinian journalist Adnan

Damiri, and an interview with Faisel el-Husseini and several other leaders, expressed the view that the violence in the streets of the villages, towns and refugee camps has undermined the intifada, and that unless this energy is redirected, the Palestinians will move farther from their goal of political independence.

Damiri is considered an authentic Palestinian leader of the intifada, linked to Fatah. He has served eight years in Israeli prisons, including two years of administrative detention. In the most dramatic expression of the frustration being voiced by Palestinian leaders, Damiri charged that the masked street leaders have "turned the intifada from a dream into a nightmare." The residents of the territories, he claims, are today more frightened of the masked "shabab" than they are of Israeli soldiers. "This fear touches everyone: this author, the felahin, the clerk, the day laborer, the academic. This is a fear that envelops all levels of Palestinian society. Why? Because we are afraid of ourselves and from ourselves; of our dream which has become a nightmare."

Faisel el-Husseini and two of his colleagues have called for the redirection of the intifada. Husseini warned against the militarization of the intifada and called for a restructuring of the Palestinian economy and society. In Husseini's view, stabilizing the economy and the society will allow the intifada to continue. Zahira Kamal, head of the women's action committees in the West Bank and thought to be affiliated with the Democratic Front, agreed. She was quoted as saying that since the "shabab" -- masked youths who control the streets -- have become gangs of muggers, the intifada has gone into retreat. Dr. Riyad el-Malchi, considered to be affiliated with the Popular Front, called for a reassessment of the intifada in order to continue the struggle against Israeli oppression. In addition, a well-known Moslem preacher from a mosque in the Nablus casbah publicly condemned the daily inter-cine killings among Palestinians.

For some time now, various Israeli

leaders and commentators have criticized Palestinian leaders who have not had the courage or conviction to address the escalating brutal murders of Palestinians by Palestinians. The failure to speak out has now changed. In his al-Fajr article, Damiri indeed went further, condemning the attempt in the past to justify the murders by the "shabab" as being legitimate. "We tried to find logical explanations for the so-called execution of collaborators, especially when we were speaking to the Israeli or foreign media. However, the situation has become so frightening and widespread that it has become a nail in the coffin of our Palestinian national dream." He expects to be accused of "hanging out dirty linen in public," but he concludes saying "those who refuse to listen to these facts and fears simply do not qualify to be citizens in a free democratic state."

Damiri also pointed out in his article that blackmail and exploitation by the intifada leadership plague Palestinian life in the territories. He cited the many cases of storekeepers and merchants who have been intimidated into paying kickbacks, extortion and blackmail to the masked Palestinian street gangs. Ironically, the murders, as well as an upswing in the rate of theft and robbery, have led many Palestinians to call for the intifada leadership to permit former Arab policemen to return to work. Early in the intifada Arab policemen, who worked under Israeli authority, were asked and then forced to leave their jobs. In the three and a half years of the intifada, the only law and order has been that imposed by the intifada leadership. The short-lived social order created by the intifada, which supplanted the traditional mukhtar and clan elders leadership that was reinforced by local police, has now itself unravelled along with the rest of the intifada.

Economic Decline the Key Factor

But the major factor undermining the intifada is the appalling state of the Palestinian economy. The Gulf War added

insult to the injury of strikes and high unemployment. Because the PLO and the Palestinians backed Iraq, their traditional sources of funding from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have now been cut off. The sums coming from friendly Arab governments, either directly or via the PLO, had amounted to approximately \$100-200 million per year. This was in addition to the \$25 million per month which Saudi Arabia had been providing the PLO. Moreover, local Palestinians are no longer receiving the salary remittances from Palestinians working in the Gulf, which had amounted to some \$250-300 million per annum. Those Palestinians working abroad have been fired or expelled, and they are now even more desperate than their relatives in the territories. According to Brig. Gen. Dani Rothschild, the new head of the Israeli Civil Administration in the territories, there is a role reversal, with West Bank Palestinians sending remittances to their relatives in Jordan and the Gulf area. He also cited the drastic drop in the number of summer visitors who are expected to come across the bridges to visit their families here. The requests for visas, usually some 1,000 per day, are currently no more than 100 per day, which he attributes to the lack of money for travel.

The Limited Appeal of Hamas

With the decline of the secular intifada leadership, there has been much talk about the rising influence of Islamic fundamentalism in the territories, particularly that of the Hamas Islamic Resistance Movement. Indeed, some observers had put support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip as high as 70-80 percent of the population. However, according to Rothschild, the unexpected reality is that Hamas is actually less respected and powerful than previously thought. This is apparently due, at least in part, to economic woes.

Hamas is trying to increase its power as the secular Palestinian leadership declines, but the tactics being used are force, intimidation, and violence. Ehud Ya'ari reported in the Jerusalem Report that this reflects a change in the move-

ment, as its young leadership "is showing a degree of independence from the organization's veteran leaders and espousing a more radical line of its own." These tactics have been less than successful so far. The slogans and the violence remind the people of Saddam Hussein, and despite their prior support for Saddam, they recall only too well the tragedy that befell the Iraqi people. Moreover, Hamas is closely identified with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states which allied themselves to the United States, both highly unpopular countries among Palestinians today.

Hamas' limited appeal is another sign of just how tired and discouraged the Palestinian populace feels at this point. In an interview featured in Ma'ariy, the former head of the Civil Administration in the territories, Shmuel Goren, noted that after three and a half years of intifada, Palestinians do not see any results. This has brought a change in the thinking of the Palestinians and as a result we are seeing less demonstrations, less terror, and more residents simply wanting to go about their business and work in Israel.

Assessing the Future

As the new Coordinator of the Civil Administration, Rothschild assesses the situation of the territories similarly, confirming that the intifada had slowed considerably. He came to this post after serving as deputy head of military intelligence in the IDF. In a lengthy private meeting with him, he gave a detailed outline and analysis of recent developments as well as outlining the policies he hopes to initiate.

According to Rothschild, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are still in shock over the downfall of Saddam Hussein. There is extreme bitterness which goes beyond their traditional hatred of Israel. It is directed against those forces of evil that vanquished their would-be savior, namely the United States and Egypt. They hate the United States for its double standard, defending Kuwait but studiously ignoring the Palestinians. They hate the Egyptians for having aligned themselves

with the Americans. An example, Rothschild reported, is the attitude of students studying at a local teachers college in the Gaza Strip, with whom he recently met. These young women, aged 20-23, did not ask, as usual, for funds for programming and equipment for their classrooms, but unanimously petitioned the head of the Civil Administration to get rid of the Egyptian curriculum which is taught in the Gaza schools.

Rothschild realized the importance of access to employment within Israel, as well as the need to develop the economy in the territories. Prior to the Gulf War there were approximately 110-120,000 Palestinian laborers entering Israel every day. The war brought their employment within the Green Line to an abrupt halt, and even after the war, authorization to work in Israel was slow in coming. One of Rothschild's first acts in his new position was to allow the Palestinian workers to reenter Israel with proper documentation and supervision. This also included registration with the labor offices to ensure that Israeli employers pay all the social benefits required by law, as well as to be able to prevent abuse of what is commonly known as the "slave market" -- the exploitation of Arab day-laborers. Rothschild reported that the figure is now back up to around 80,000 permits.

Create Jobs and Rehabilitate Refugee Camps

In the long run, however, both aliya and security considerations will limit Palestinian work opportunities in Israel. Therefore, Rothschild's priority is to create jobs within the territories. The Civil Administration has already issued close to 100 permits for new industries and businesses. During the first week of May alone, 31 permits were issued for the establishment of factories in the territories, including ten factories in the construction sector, six in the raw materials sector, textile and pharmaceutical plants. The civil administration is also encouraging investments through tax exemptions. Regulations allowing money to come into the

area have also been eased, and industrial zones are being created.

Palestinian cooperation with this economic development program is another sign that the intifada is undergoing a change in direction. As an example, Rothschild cited the change in attitude towards an initiative to rehabilitate the Gaza refugee camps, which would both improve the standard of living and create jobs for Palestinians. Four years ago, a similar proposal was ignored by the Palestinian leadership because it was politically unacceptable. Today, many more people are prepared to move out of the refugee camps to new housing. Another example is an initiative to convert citrus groves, a water-intensive crop, to flower production, which uses drip irrigation in hot houses. So far, 81 citrus growers are waiting in line to join the 60 who have already converted from citrus to flowers. In short, the influence of economic need cannot be underestimated.

The incentive of economic need is evident in other ways as well. Rothschild cited that there are some 20,000 Palestinian laborers currently employed in the building of Jewish settlements in the territories. Similarly, more and more day-laborers with permits to work in Israel are ignoring strike days and going to work, the latest figures showing 17,000 out of 35,000 Gazans with permits reporting for work in Israel on the latest monthly strike day. In addition, the local boycott of Israeli products is virtually non-existent today. Local Palestinian dairy products are rejected in favor of Israeli Tnuva products. As for the United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency, Rothschild regards their presence as a political evil rather than a humanitarian agency. He claims that much of the relief food supplies are being sold in stores throughout the Gaza Strip.

In order to encourage the slowdown of the intifada, Rothschild has tried to ease the restrictions and offer relief to the Palestinians from some of the more objectionable and even humiliating security checks. For example, he has stopped the night-time incursions into people's homes

by the IDF together with tax inspectors and has cut down drastically the number of roadblocks.

On the sensitive and public issue of the universities, Rothschild wants to open all of them as soon as possible. Indeed, An-Najah and Bir Zeit are the only West Bank universities awaiting permission to reopen, and An-Najah has already been given the green light to prepare for reopening. The only condition that the Civil Administration is placing on university openings is that students not have a say in the running of the university. Even with permission, however, some of the universities have been unable to reopen. They no longer have the budgets to operate. Up to 80 percent of their funds came from Arab countries and the PLO, and, as outlined above, these funds are no longer available.

The Changing Palestinian Leadership

Rothschild's analysis of the Palestinian leadership is somewhat different than the usual conception. The Palestinians have their "princes" much as is the case in Israel. Like Israelis, their reference to the "princes" is to those leading personalities who are the sons of well-known personalities, such as Sari Nusseibeh and Faisal el-Husseini. These "princes," of the over-50 generation, are leaders mainly by virtue of the PLO backing they enjoy rather than popular support. Today, more authentic leadership is vested in those activists who came out of the refugee camps and have served lengthy terms in prison and detention camps. These activists, generally under 40 years of age, are seen as closest to the public pulse and being more of the people. Leaders such as Abu-Ayash who heads the journalists association, Talal As-Safi who authored a Palestinian peace plan, and the outspokenly critical journalist Damiri, hail from this group. These activists are usually graduates of the refugee camps and Ketziot prison and have local constituencies to support them, while the constituency of the "princes" is strictly the PLO abroad. The activists are the ones in the safest position to issue the calls that are being heard now to cool the violence

of the intifada. Indeed, the "princes" need the activists, who have credibility with the public. It seems that both of these groups have come to see the need to control the younger "children of the intifada" generation, who have neither education nor jobs, and who have become the masked vigilantes of the intifada.

Rothschild strongly believes that it is vital for a stable, local Palestinian leadership to emerge, and that such leadership requires popular support. Local leadership, he believes, must be built on the basis of economic power, namely, those who can provide jobs will emerge as the future elders rather than those who are acting as vigilantes. This theory is already being proven, as local Chamber of Commerce elections have taken on the importance of political elections, in the absence of municipal or "peace process" elections. In Hebron, for example, three parties are running candidates for the Chamber of Commerce leadership: a PLO-approved party, Hamas, and an independent merchants party. These elections are closely contested and their results closely watched.

The process of allowing and assisting a merchant-class leadership to arise will take some time. Rothschild's policies require money and time in order for a stable local leadership to take back the streets. When questioned as to how much time, he believes that no more than 8-10 months would be necessary if he had adequate funding. He is frankly concerned that the U.S., by moving too fast and raising expectations, may ultimately spoil the chances for this leadership to evolve. He also doubts whether Israel can provide or solicit Western nations or Japan to provide the capital investment required.

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