

Micah Morrison

LOSING THE WEST BANK WAR

As war embroils Gaza and the West Bank, Israelis rally to a grim consensus on national security and PLO intentions.

On several important fronts, Israel has lost the West Bank War. The losses, and the continuing battles, are absorbing the attention of Israel's many friends and many enemies, as well they should: a new phase has begun.

The fighting is a different kind of conflict for the citizen-soldiers of Israel, one to which they are particularly ill-suited. The Palestinians in the territories are not "the enemy" in the unambiguous way Arab soldiers across the borders of the small nation are the enemy; there is no well-defined order of battle for Jerusalem's troops in this fight, no clear concept of battlefield victory. Twenty years of relatively benign occupation bred an intimacy of ruler and ruled now revealed in the contempt with which Palestinian kids with rocks face Israeli kids with rifles. The rifles win. At this point, the rifles cannot afford to lose. In the cold logic of rifle and rock, of ruler and ruled, the fighting can go on for many more months, even years. An earlier Jewish-Arab war, in the distant world of British-ruled Palestine, sputtered murderously from 1936 to 1939.

In a narrow military sense, the territories will be "contained"—that part of the war Israel will not lose. On other fronts, things have fallen apart and Jerusalem will soon have to begin picking up the pieces. The forces in the maelstrom of Mideast politics are shifting, but Israel will face the same old dilemma: resolving the necessity of providing a secure existence for the state with the desire to move forward in the search for peace.

The losses have made prospects for peace more remote, at least in the short term. Israel has lost the moral high ground in its battle for survival. It has lost the undivided support of the American Jewish community. It has

lost the sympathy of some in Congress and the general public. It has lost influence with the always-weak moderate and pro-Jordan Palestinians in the territories and with Arab governments inclined to take a less belligerent approach to the Jews. The erosion of its qualitative military superiority has accelerated. And it is losing, bit by bit, the fragile skein of diplomatic agreements draped with great effort around Arab-Israeli relations.

The *intifadah*, the "uprising," as it is known in Arabic, began in early December, in Gaza. Political unrest has a peculiar chemistry, and students of this episode will cite a confluence of events in November and early December as contributing to the explosion. There was the extraordinary sight of an Arab summit meeting relegating the Palestinian issue to the bottom of its

list of priorities. Traditional days of November protest, marking the Balfour Declaration, the U.N. partition resolution, the founding of Yasser Arafat's Al Fatah (the dominant group in the PLO), and Sadat's visit to Jerusalem all stirred Palestinian feelings, as did an Israeli decision to deport one of the leaders of the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad in Gaza. News of a bold terrorist attack by hang-glider on a military base in northern Israel swept through the crowded refugee camps of Gaza, raising passions and pride: the latest in a series of demonstrations that the Israeli army was not invincible. In early December, an Israeli salesman was murdered. An element of Fatah, "Force 17," took credit. Two days later, four Gaza residents were killed in a truck accident. Rumors spread that it was a deliberate Israeli reprisal for the death of the salesman. The rioting began. From Gaza, the tur-

moil caught hold in the West Bank.

The initial Israeli response was to shrug it off. Nothing unusual. It would pass in a few days, a few weeks, next month. Day by day the Palestinian death toll mounted. The old methods of quelling disturbances were not working. On December 21, some of Israel's 700,000 Arab citizens mounted protests to express solidarity with Palestinians in the territories, a move that sent shock waves through the Israeli public.

International criticism of Israel's handling of the uprising grew louder, and many American Jews prominent in public affairs and the media joined the condemnations. Sensitive to the slow, daily climb of deaths and stung by world rebukes, Israel's blunt-speaking defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, announced that a new policy of "force and beatings" would replace the use of live ammunition in responding to clashes with the protesters. In theory, the new policy made sense: better to send a kid to the hospital with a broken hand than send him to the grave. In practice, however, the policy was a disaster. The media had blanketed the area and were sending out dramatic footage of well-armed Israeli soldiers beating unarmed Palestinians. International criticism grew to a storm. Many of Israel's friends in the U.S., Jews and non-Jews, viewed the new policy as brutally unfair. In private, Israeli soldiers were expressing deep resentment at the new policy. They saw themselves as professional fighters thrust into the unwelcome role of policemen; some found themselves incapable of striking a woman or a child; others were caught in a bind of absolute loyalty to the army and adamant opposition to retaining the disputed territories.

In Palestinian eyes, the uprising was an astounding success. The world was watching them and condemning Israel. They had captured the moral high ground. No amount of patient explication by Israel's supporters of Palestin-



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ian rejectionism and terrorism, of the deep historical roots of the problem, of Arab hostility and geo-strategic realities seemed capable of overwhelming the powerful impact of nightly clips showing Israelis clubbing Palestinians and firing at groups of cocky stone-throwers called, simply, "the guys"—in Arabic, the *shabab*.

The *shabab* are the new generation of Palestinians. They grew up under Israeli rule and have little or no real memory—and thus little or no real fear—of the awesome military force that rolled back the combined might of the Arab world in 1967. The reality of the *shabab* has been the endless talk of Israel's Jewish and democratic culture, the exposure to and denial of those democratic rights, and the endless talk of Arab leaders, including the PLO, about how any day now they were going to "liberate Palestine." As the *shabab* came of age they saw the expansion of Jewish settlement in the territories; the complete power of the Israeli authorities over their lives; Egypt's separate peace with Jerusalem—to Palestinians, a bitter betrayal; a war in Lebanon that divided Jews; the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut and years of violent feuding in that organization; successful Arab attacks against Israeli troops in southern Lebanon; and the rise of the fundamentalist impulse in both Jewish and Islamic contexts. Apparently, the idea that action would have to come from "inside" was all the time gaining strength with the younger generation. Vigorous organizing efforts had brought them into a variety of groups quietly linked to various PLO,

Communist, and Islamic factions. One of the largest of the groups was the al-Shabiba youth outfit, ostensibly created for the purposes of charitable works. According to most reports from the region, these organizations played key roles in laying the foundation for the *intifadah*.

Palestinians have never been unified, but divisions increased in the eighties, with several PLO factions in outright rebellion against Arafat and others

newspaper *al-Hamishmar*, writes that cooperation in the territories between pro-Arafat *shabab*, supporters of radical factions to the left of Arafat, and supporters of the radical-right Islamic Jihad "is exactly the format of the Syria-Libya-Iran coalition." This emerging coalition, Inbari notes, "aims to entrench Iran and Syria firmly in the territories."

The PLO has been playing catch-up, with some success, since the *shabab*

coordinating with the external factions. "At the top are the spokesmen," writes Gilat, "the famous personalities, those who are exposed to the media. Today, more than ever before, the top of the pyramid must be sensitive to the power and desires of the base, otherwise they will begin to totter."

The most famous personality of them all is Chairman Arafat. The uprising has brought pluses and minuses for him. The Palestinians are once again spotlighted on the world stage, but Arafat is in an uneasy alliance with the fundamentalists, who distrust his secularism, and the far left radicals who view him as a capitulationist. The youth of the territories are tired of his promises, yet still look to him as a symbol of Palestinian aspirations. The Syrian-led "rejectionists" within and outside the PLO will attempt to prevent him from joining any negotiating process, although he himself has shown little real interest in negotiating, unless one is referring to negotiating the demise of the Jewish state. While the violence continues and international criticism of Israel persists, Arafat may be content to continue his classic course of just holding the PLO together. The danger of this tactic, for Arafat, is that he may be unseated by a more radical Syrian-led coalition, or by a new internal Palestinian leadership emerging from the uprising, or by some combination of the two. Arafat has faced (and eliminated) potential challenges from the territories before, but never one with the power of the *shabab*.

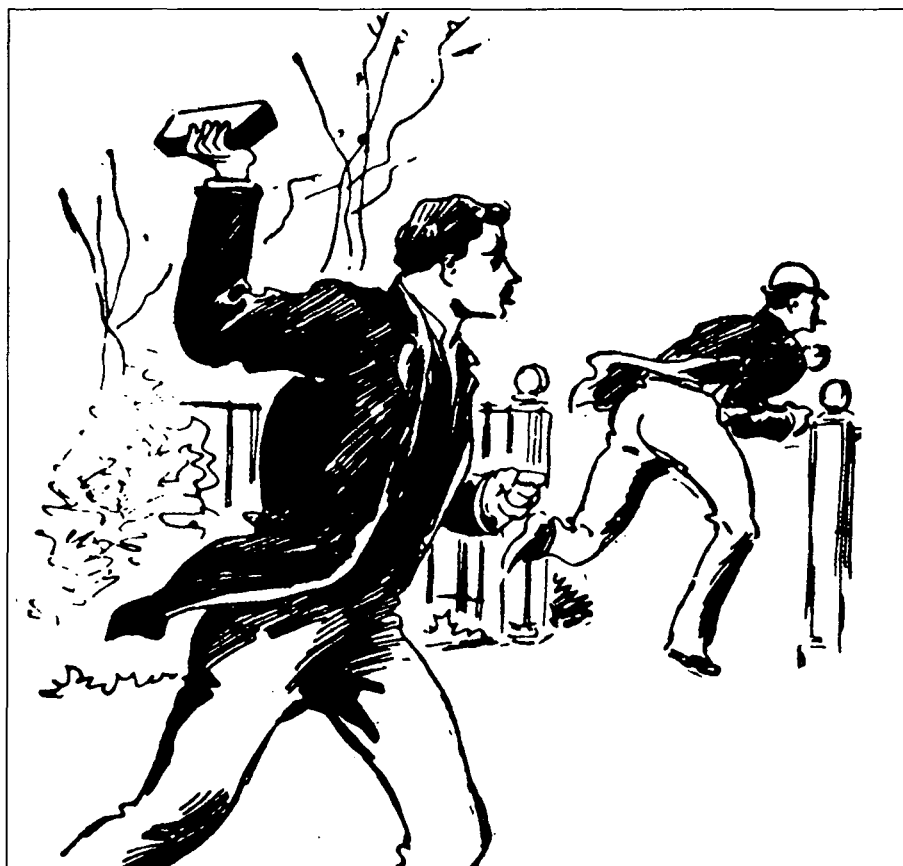
Israel's divisions over the territories continue to be imperfectly reflected by its "national unity" coalition government. The left-leaning Labor half of the government, led by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, presses for some sort of international conference as a prelude to direct negotiations with Jordan and non-PLO Palestinians. The right-tending Likud half views the international conference as a trap and favors the Camp David route of direct negotiations with Jordan. The Likud is widely believed to be ideologically bent on retaining the territories as part of the Biblical Greater Israel. These positions have been shaken by the uprising, although no widespread change in attitudes is yet apparent. The mood has shifted somewhat to the right, as Israeli resolve stiffens to support soldiers in the field. At the same time, it is clear to all Israelis that the cost of the occupation has risen dramatically. Labor and Likud leaders, army brass, the Jewish settlers in the territories, the average citizen—all have been forced to look again, to re-evaluate, to think about what may come next and what can be done. National elections,

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keeping their distance from him. In the territories, some support for Fatah broke away, drifting to Marxist terror factions on the left and Islamic fundamentalists on the right. Indeed, the fundamentalist factions are the new wild cards in the array of anti-Israel forces. Most of their strength is thought to be in Gaza, more traditional than many parts of the West Bank and more closely tied to Egypt and its centers of Islamic learning. The Islamic Jihad group is thought by many analysts to have been especially active in fomenting the uprising. Jihad, as the name implies, calls for immediate "holy war" against Israel; journalists in the area report that pamphlets seized in January were full of viciously anti-Semitic statements deriding the Jews as "apes" and calling the elimination of Israel "a Koranic inevitability." In a chilling analysis, Pinhas Inbari, a commentator for the left-leaning Israeli

and fundamentalist activists sparked the uprising. Within weeks, if not days, underground networks were activated, and detailed instructions on everything from shop closings to the use of firearms began to flow from radio stations beyond Israel's borders. Pamphlets appeared on the streets, signed by "The United National Command of the Uprising." Although there is much speculation about the make-up of the command, scant evidence has surfaced. And while massive arrests and limited expulsions have taken a toll on the uprising, Israel's internal security service, the Shin Bet, apparently has had little success in capturing the leaders of the turmoil—if indeed there are any key commanders. Most of the speculation centers around a twelve- or fifteen-member group representing the prominent powers: Arafat's Fatah; George Habash's Popular Front, further to the left of Arafat; the anti-Arafat groups divorced from the PLO; the Communists; and the religious. But such a group sounds like a fractious and unwieldy beast, and thus an easy target for the Shin Bet. The "National Command" may turn out to be either a fiction, with power much more decentralized, in town and regional groupings; or a front, established to draw attention away from a much smaller leadership unit.

Below the leadership is a wider body of political activists and former prisoners. "It is from this group," writes Tzvi Gilat in the Tel Aviv daily *Hada-shot*, "that the shadow people emerge, those who make things happen, who pull the strings, who motivate forces, who direct the street, who pass the riots from one camp to another." Gilat and others describe the current power structure as a kind of pyramid. At the base of the pyramid are "the people." Above them are the activists and former prisoners—the street lieutenants. Above the lieutenants are the new leaders, the as yet unidentified Palestinians calling the shots from inside the territories and



scheduled for November, will be the first solid indication of Israeli attitudes toward the uprising and future courses of action.

Israel still sees the problem as one of having nobody to deal with: public-opinion polls continue to show overwhelming rejection of the PLO—quite a sensible position, since the PLO is still calling for and working toward the destruction of the state. Many of the Israelis who in the past spoke in favor of mutual simultaneous recognition between the PLO and Jerusalem appear to have been shocked into silence by the sheer vehemence of the Palestinians. When Secretary of State George Shultz came through the region with his carefully blended plan of an international conference, Camp David-style autonomy talks, and negotiations on the final status of the territories, Arafat refused to allow Palestinians to meet with him and blasted the plan over Baghdad's Voice of the PLO radio as "a new form of slavery on our people. . . ." The uprising will continue, the Chairman said, "one phase after another and through distinguished qualitative leaps until the hateful Zionist occupation is ended." The reference to "phases" was not lost on Palestinians or Israelis: it refers to the PLO strategy of a phased victory, the first phase being the takeover of the West Bank and Gaza, the next phase being the rest of Israel. Arafat's radio stations, not to mention those of more radical PLO elements, make no mention of living in peace with Israel. The airwaves are full of the worst sort of hateful invective and ceaselessly urge residents of the territories to "valiant revolution," "genuine holy war," and "the higher objective of seeing Palestine liberated and of seeing Jerusalem, the capital of our free and independent state, liberated."¹

But Israelis do not have to listen to Radio PLO to gauge Palestinian attitudes. The kids on the street are sending the message loud and clear: Jews out. Out not only from the West Bank and Gaza, but out of Jerusalem, out of Haifa, out of Tel Aviv, out of "Palestine." In a recent article for the *New York Times Magazine*, writer Ze'ev Chafets relates the story of a left-wing Israeli activist who went to a demonstration of *Israeli Arabs* in Jaffa and was shocked to hear them chanting *in baladna, yahud kalabna*—"this is our country, and the Jews are our dogs."

¹These from a March 9 broadcast from Baghdad. Noteworthy also in the broadcasts are the sharp increase in the use of Koranic verses and the apparent elimination of the PLO's long-established practice of referring to a "democratic, secular state" in Palestine—two indications of Arafat's growing problem with the fundamentalists.

Meanwhile, back in the jungle of American Jewish affairs, support for Israel was coming apart at the seams. The troubling television images had something to do with it, of course, but the fact is that Jewish America has been parting company with Israel for quite some time. Menachem Begin's brash policies, Jewish settlement in the territories, the war in Lebanon, the Pollard spy affair: all tarnished the image American Jews hold of Israel, a country the majority of them have never set foot in.

As Americans grew more and more disturbed by the nightly reports, a number of liberal and left-wing Jewish intellectuals and organizations began to hammer Prime Minister Yitzhak

benign Uncle Yasser. In a lengthy statement by the Fatah central committee attacking "U.S. imperialism" and the Shultz plan, it took a moment to offer the sort of praise that should give pause to journalists. The central committee hailed "the brave position of all forms of international media, which made a great effort to portray a true picture of the Zionist entity's fascist and Nazi practices and to acquaint world public opinion with the real situation without any lies or tricks. Through its credibility, the Western press has ended the myth of Zionist control of the world's media. Human conscience will never allow the new Nazism and fascism to spread their hegemony."

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Shamir, calling for, among other things, implementation of the Peres-inspired international conference, territorial compromise, and recognition of the PLO. The U.S. media, in turn, gave wide play to dissent in the Jewish camp. The PLO was slow to pick up on the useful role played by the media. As late as January, Baghdad radio was following its usual practice and calling for "silencing . . . all the drunken pens who are hindering the uprising of our sons." But that would soon change.

One particular pen, that of Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times*, led the Jewish charge against Jerusalem. In an unending stream of columns, Lewis, loudly declaring that he was "devoted" to Israel and its "best friend," repeatedly called for pressure on the Shamir government and put the best possible face on Arafat and his bloody henchmen. "True friends," Lewis intoned in February, should not "remain silent." And silent he did not remain. He even left the confines of his Boston garret to fly to Tunis and meet with Arafat. Once again the PLO chief refused to give clear-cut recognition of Israel's right to exist, hemming all reference to U.N. Resolution 242 with ambiguous and evasive remarks, as Lewis glumly noted in his March 13 column. Two weeks later, however, Lewis was putting ambiguities aside and saying that Arafat "reiterated recently that he accepts Resolution 242, with its call for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory to 'secure and recognized' borders."

A view of PLO attitudes toward the now-useful media (and toward Israel) emerges from Baghdad radio during the week of Lewis's chat with the

"the democratic Jewish forces" that "have caused a Jewish uprising against the Zionist entity's rulers. . . ." Jewish divisions were playing into the hands of the PLO. One example of the divisive Jewish debate in the U.S. came on the day after Lewis's report of his Tunis meeting appeared, the day when, not coincidentally, Prime Minister Shamir arrived in Washington to discuss the crisis. Rita Hauser, founder of the International Center for Peace in the Middle East, debated Morris Amitay, the former director of the powerful Israel lobby, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), on "The

MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour." Hauser repeatedly slammed Prime Minister Shamir, saying he was "always in the wrong" and that "the central issue [blocking negotiations] remains the ideological commitment of the Likud bloc" to claiming all the land. Amitay replied that the central issue was that the majority of Arab nations refused to recognize Israel and remained committed to wiping it off the map. He then offered a remark which upset Hauser and pointed directly at the problem with American Jewry's argument over Israel. "I feel very strange," Amitay said, "as an American, living comfortably in the suburbs, giving advice to my Israeli friends who send their sons to the army, who are the victims of terrorist attacks, as to what decisions they should make in terms of territory. I don't think it's my province to do so." Hauser bridled, calling that notion "very much a false [sic] canard" and adding that "if all Jews the world over are united by the concept that we are one and that Israel is vital to us, we not only have a right to speak out in objection to the course Mr. Shamir has taken, we have a *duty*. . . ."

The Hauser/Amitay exchange indicates the problem for American Jews in the debate over Israeli security: Do American Jews, who claim a special affinity with Israel because of shared religious and cultural values, have the right to press Jerusalem into actions which may result in war and the death of Israelis? "When the going is good," wrote Israeli professor Shlomo Avineri during the Pollard spy affair in an article that ignited an earlier Jewish American freakout, "when being Jewish and supporting Israel go together



with waving the American flag—who would be as stupid as not to wish to have the best of both worlds?” But when the going gets bad, American Jews are far from the killing fields.

The argument over Israeli policy raised many questions and left a lot of bad feelings, yet one thing is clear: it provided a political opening for criticism of Israel, and Congress, seeing that support was not solid, moved into the opening with a letter criticizing Prime Minister Shamir and suggesting he was an obstacle to peace. The letter, signed by thirty U.S. senators, supposedly was in response to a Shamir statement that “this expression ‘territory for peace’ is not accepted by me.” American opinion-makers thrashed this into a frenzy of accusations that Israel was backing away from Resolution 242. According to a widely circulated story, what actually happened was that the letter was engineered by Tom Dine, the executive director of AIPAC, to pressure Shamir. Dine is close to Labor’s Shimon Peres. Dine’s office called the story “totally untrue.” True or not, the senatorial letter, and the wide suspicion that AIPAC sided against the elected leader of Israel, indicate a weakening of U.S. support for Jerusalem.

Israel’s losses are not irrecoverable. The troubles of recent months have produced shifts in the strengths and weaknesses of the players, while leaving the basic situation unchanged.

The biggest shift, and potentially the most significant, concerns the Palestinians in the territories. The generation of the *shabab* apparently have eclipsed

their elders, and may eclipse the PLO. Although it is not solely the work of the younger generation, the Palestinians are showing increasing political sophistication. A major question from the *intifadah*: Who are the leaders? What degree of control comes from inside the territories and how centralized is it? What degree of control comes from PLO headquarters in Tunis, from Damascus, from the mosques of Tehran and Cairo? In short, will a

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strong leadership emerge from the uprising? Will they deal with Israel or seek to destroy it? Beyond the reach of the media, and possibly beyond the reach of the Shin Bet, a battle for the hearts and minds of the *shabab* is being waged. The outcome of that battle will shape the next stage of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The Syrians appear to have benefited most from the uprising. Damascus-tied PLO factions are broadcasting from southern Syria and are said to be picking up support in the territories. Syria’s drive for strategic parity with Israel is well under way. The next war against Israel, most observers believe, will be led by the Syrians. As for Jordan, its influence in the territories has been blown out the door, and it will be a while before King Hussein starts look-

ing for a way back in. The Egyptians, aided by George Shultz, have stopped mentioning Camp David—the one plan that worked. Ehud Ya’ari, Mideast correspondent for Israel TV, recently warned in a *Washington Post* article that Cairo, while “trying to be helpful” in the peace process, is also staging military maneuvers in the Sinai Peninsula that allow it to prepare “for the possibility of a future war with Israel.” Further afield in the Arab world, each

Those concerned with the fate of the region should recognize that everyone has moved a few steps closer to the brink of a major war.

But despair—or worse, apathy—is not in order. Solutions exist. Ways can be found to defuse the situation and allow Israelis and Palestinians to live with security and justice. By the end of 1988 there will be new governments in Washington and Jerusalem. The Palestinians in the territories will have had time to absorb their victory and experience Israeli intentions not to give ground in the face of violence; an internal Palestinian leadership could emerge and establish a relationship with the PLO acceptable to Israel and Jordan. A door might be swinging open.

A new report from the Brookings Institution, for example, mentions “confederal arrangements that would reflect distinctive national identities.” A Palestinian intellectual writes of enclaves of “scattered sovereignty.” Others speak of a constitutionally backed tripartite condominium with trapjaw demilitarized zones. Enormous obstacles remain, of course, and that’s why the search must be sustained and serious, with the realization that Israel is fully able to hold out for decades if its security is not assured. Yet the moment should not be allowed to pass. A high-level, creative approach is needed for 1989.

One man had a suggestion. “He’ll kill me for suggesting it,” Richard Nixon told the *Washington Times* recently. “There’s only one candidate for the job, and whether it’s the Republicans or the Democrats in the White House next January, Henry Kissinger should be immediately drafted.”

Peace does not rest with a single man, as Anwar Sadat often said. But Kissinger has the genius, the track record, the Mideast knowhow, and the grudging respect of all concerned parties.

Washington’s power, however, is limited. Even the most severe U.S. pressure—a cut-off of all American aid—could not force Jerusalem to accept a hostile PLO state in the heart of the country, and it would be a monumental miscalculation to place too much weight on the “aid weapon.” Jerusalem, for its part, should recognize that in U.S. circles talk of the aid weapon and widening contacts with the PLO has gained ground. So while the ancient feud between Arab and Jew continues, and a solution continues to prove elusive, the U.S.-Israeli alliance has been shaken as never before. Bad news for American alliances abroad, worse news for Jerusalem. For Israel, advance notice may have been served of a new and lonely stage in its struggle for security. □



country is calculating how the uprising—that means the Palestinians—can best be put to use, and at the same time keeping an anxious eye on the vast carnage of the Iran-Iraq War.

Israeli leaders are watching all these developments, of course, and are preparing for the upcoming election. The continuing troubles, combined with an absence of credible Palestinian statements about living in peace with the Jewish state, is swinging the electorate to the right. The Likud is headed for a win in an angry race. In Israel’s system, the Likud will probably not win an outright majority of sixty-one parliament seats, and will be in the position of needing to build a governing coalition by turning to parties on its right or back toward Labor for another “national unity” situation. Recent polls of the Likud show that 75 percent of the party favor a turn to Labor over entering into a coalition with rightist extremists such as Meir Kahane. But Western observers, especially the television media, often overstate the divisions and the power of the marginal wackos in Israeli society, neglecting the remarkable degree of cohesiveness on matters of national security. Left or right, the next government of Israel will not rush into a deal on the West Bank.

Beyond electoral politics, Israeli planners are looking at a strategic map in accelerating evolution. Military analysts will be calculating that additional tens of thousands of troops will be needed to clamp a lid on the territories if full-scale war breaks out. In a time of heightened tension, Ya’ari suggests, the Egyptians could move from cold peace to cold war, drawing away additional Israeli troops. The Saudis are buying new missiles. Iran and Iraq are trading chemical attacks. Syria presents major problems with both chemical capabilities and missiles.

Benjamin J. Stein

LOVE STINKS

Today love means never having to say you're happy.

A usual evening sitting by the pool, wondering where those little brown spots come from. They seem to appear when acorns or twigs or something fall onto the light blue pool bottom. Then when the pool man comes, the spots go away again. "You're soaking in it," I was thinking when I heard the dogs yelping at the front door. My wife was at that little park in Beverly Hills near Coldwater and Beverly and the housekeeper won't answer the door anymore, so I went upstairs to check it out.

It was my pal Michael. He was steaming. I mean truly on fire. He also looked tired. He sort of looked like he had been crying even. Or maybe he had lost a friend. Mike is the kind of guy who works out for two hours a day and pushes people around and jams their gears at Warner Brothers for the rest of the day. He is forty years old and generally looks like he is a mixture of poured concrete and steel-eyed determination. Today, he looked like he had been run over by a multi-front end combination thresher and mower.

"Lemme tell you something, pal," he said. "You are lucky you're married. You're so incredibly lucky. So very damn lucky. That way you don't ever have to fall in love in the eighties."

Oh, God, I thought. It's starting. Love again. Oh God, talk to me about the Crash. Talk to me about Epstein-Barr virus. But don't talk to me about love.

"It's Dorothy again," Michael said. "You know Dorothy Destiny. That tall dark girl you met with me at Matteo's. The one with the little sassy haircut. The short, sassy girl's cut. Those blue eyes that look like they're made from sapphires. Great teeth, even if they are

a little big. Nice legs, even though she is a little pigeon toed."

I cut him off. "I remember her well," I said. "She asked me if I could help her get a job."

"She asks everybody if he can get her a job. I took her out to Matteo's and we were sitting across from Denny Simpkins, the hottest producer at Warner Brothers, and he comes over to say hello, and all she can say afterwards is, 'Why don't you get me a date with him? He's so important, he could get me a really important job in Hollywood.' How do you think that made me feel? She's out on a date with me at Matteo's and she's asking me to fix her up with Denny Simpkins. How do you think that made me feel?"

"She sounds a little strange," I said.

"It's not that she's strange," he said.

"I'm the one who's strange for putting up with it. We go out to La Scala and she gets totally blitzed on something called a 'Seabreeze' and she starts to tell me about all the other guys in her life that she's been in love with, and all the guys who 'send her into orbit,' and she doesn't even mention me."

"I'd seriously consider shooting her," I suggested.

"That's the problem," he said. "I know I should shoot her. She deserves shooting. Definitely. But there's something about her that's incredibly appealing. 'Cause sometimes when we're together she tells me she's madly in love with me, or anyway that she

loves me, and that if I ever left L.A. she'd be heartbroken. And then she puts her head on my shoulder and sighs, and I feel like I'm going to live forever."

"I think I studied that in college psychology," I said. "It's called 'intermittent reinforcement.' It's like when they take rats and feed them a really rich diet, but only intermittently. It makes the rats crazy. They get totally addicted."

"That's it. Addicted to Dorothy Destiny. Benjy, I have five girls who follow me around and tell me they worship the ground I walk on and that I'm the greatest thing since sliced bread. They're great, and I love 'em, but Dorothy is the one I think about all the time. Dorothy's the one that I think about when I wake up at three in the morning. Dorothy's the one I'm trying to get a car for."

"You're buying that little demon a car?"

"Well, I'm actually just giving her the down payment, but that's still a few thousand bucks. I mean really. I want her to have a safe car."

"Why? Why do you want her to have a safe car?"

"I don't know. I really don't know. That's a good question. Listen, the whole thing is a good question. I feel like a stupid teenager going berserk about someone who's so nutty. But I can tell you this. It stinks. It hurts. I wish I were living in 'Ozzie and Harriet' where this kind of thing never happens. I wish a flying saucer would take Dorothy Destiny away to another planet so I could get on with dealing with people who have more sense. Some day soon I'm going to wake up and I won't even remember Dorothy Destiny. I mean, this has happened before, with a little real estate saleswoman, and a stewardess, and a college girl who was a Filipino-American, and a big tall girl from the Madeira School in Washington, D.C.



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