

Israel's moral dilemma

Whenever I've suggested that Israel should negotiate with the PLO, I am flooded with letters from Jewish readers. These range from well-reasoned and often valid objections to wild, angry accusations and even a few threats.

Why should I keep courting trouble when even Prime Minister Brian Mulroney has been busy ducking this issue for fear of riling up Jewish voters? Because, quite simply, I care about Israel's future; he cares only about votes.

But at last I have some company, and pretty powerful company at that. This week, a report leaked out in Israel that has shaken the nation and made its crusty leader, Yitzhak Shamir, look ever more isolated and extreme. The secret report was prepared for cabinet by a combined analysis team of Mossad, the intelligence agency, Shin Beth, Israel's tough internal security service, and military intelligence.

If anyone knows what's going on inside Israel, they do. All three have been at the forefront of putting down the Palestinian uprising. Shin Beth maintains an elaborate and effective net of informers and agents among West Bank and Gaza Palestinians while Mossad has thoroughly infiltrated the PLO outside Israeli-occupied territory.

The report says: 1) the Palestinian uprising cannot soon be brought to an end; 2) a political solution is only possible by negotiating directly with the PLO; 3) the PLO is the sole credible Palestinian leadership; 4) mainstream elements of the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, have truly renounced terrorism and genuinely want a peace settlement.

For most people, all this may seem fairly obvious. But for Israel's right wing and its ardent North American backers—the ones ready to fight to the last Israeli for the West Bank, the report is a shocker. Particularly since it was leaked just when 1,500 Jewish leaders from around the world gathered in Israel for a major show of support.

In public, they expressed continued support for Shamir's policies. Jews, they say, are being pushed to wall by a hostile, uncaring world—just as in the 1930s. Behind the scenes, however, public boosterism gave way to sharp criticism. Leaders of a major U.S. Jewish organization strongly rebuked Shamir for condoning brutality, unnecessary killing and destruction of Arab homes in the occupied territories. Find a political solution, Shamir was told.

At the same time, there is growing resentment inside the Israeli army over Shamir's iron-fisted policies. Many reservists have long objected to occupation duty in the West Bank and Gaza. Now regular soldiers and officers—many in Israel's elite units—are joining them.

Israel's army is, I believe, the world's best, and a model for what other armies should be. It sickens me—and many army officers, I am told—to see Israel's superb soldiers shooting down 11-year old children in the streets, or beating women with clubs. For what?

The intelligence report concludes that inevitably the Israeli Goliath will be bested by the Palestin-

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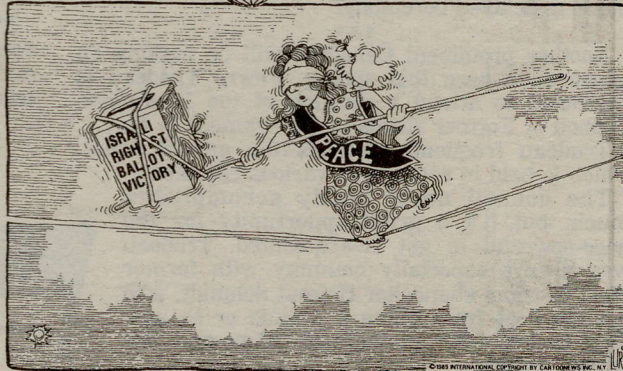


ian Davids—it's only a matter of time and hundreds or thousands more lives. Or before the Israeli army, the nation's key organ, becomes brutalized and corrupted into something resembling the Syrian army.

Polls show that over half of Israelis favor some form of direct talks with the PLO. Just this week the No. 2 man in the Labor party stated that Israel would have to deal directly with the PLO. Labor leader Shimon Peres may soon say this too if he can shake off his Mulroneyesque timidity.

A lot of Israelis are fed up with the intransigence and we-speak-to-God arrogance of Shamir and his Likud bloc. In fact, things are getting so nasty that a recent Israeli press report claimed the violent underground group of which Shamir was a leader made overtures to the Nazis in Germany. The bitter historical feud between Israel's

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left and right, which almost erupted into a mini-civil war in 1947-48, is heating up again.

So back, now, to our angry letter writers. This week, please direct your protests to the Mossad, Shin Beth and military intelligence, c/o the main post office, Jerusalem. Accuse them of being anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, or pro-terrorist for urging talks with the PLO. Slay the messenger!

As for Shamir, Israel's Mr. Nyet, he has painted himself into a corner. He and his fellow extremists are doing Israel and the Diaspora a massive disservice by their stubborn refusal to face reality. The writing is on the wall—now in bigger letters than ever. Sadly, Shamir's only answer is to paper over the wall with Likud slogans saying, "Not one inch." And what about the intelligence report? "Lies," retorts Shamir, "all lies."

Paranoia has now become state policy.