

Palestinian powderkeg

AMMAN, Jordan — "Our people have been persecuted and tortured for 40 years." A Palestinian leader here yelled at me, his face contorted with fury, frustration and hatred. "When will this stop? ... When will Israel and America stop slaughtering our people?"

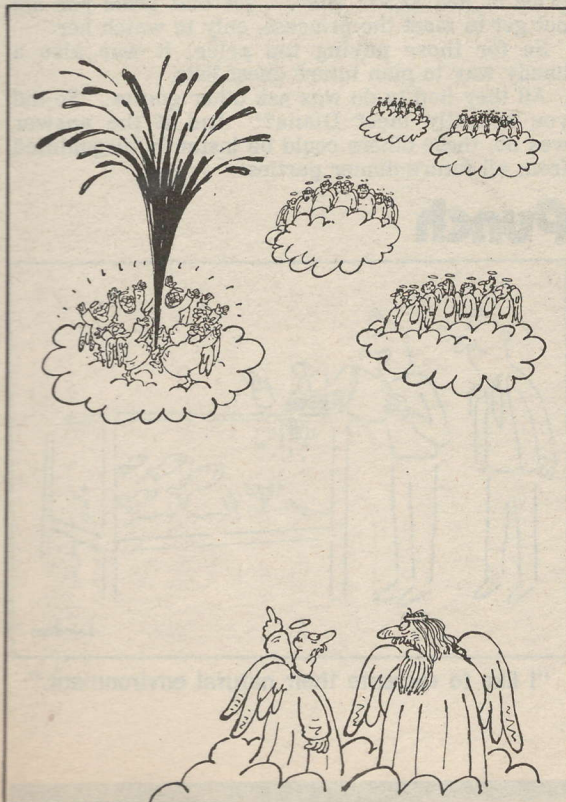
After Israeli troops shot to death at least 21 Palestinian demonstrators this week in Islam's third holiest shrine in East Jerusalem, a firestorm of rage is raging across the Muslim world.

Having narrowly escaped being attacked by a group of hysterical Palestinians here two nights ago, I tried to sort out in my own mind the rights and wrongs of this latest scourging of the Palestinian people.

First, Israel has been unquestionably brutal and a major violator of human rights in trying to suppress opposition to its military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The 1.7 million Palestinians under Israeli rule have been routinely shot, beaten, tortured, jailed en masse or collectively punished by Israeli security forces.

Israel is trying to use terror to break the will of the Palestinians. More than 30% of Palestinian males — some sources say 50% — have been jailed by Israel at one time or another. Israeli courts have condoned the use of torture against Palestinians. Only Israel's influence over the U.S. and its power with the media — along with murderous, idiotic acts of terrorism by Palestinian groups — have prevented the Palestinian cause from capturing the world's heart.

Punch



"The Americans have discovered what?"

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



Something must be done. And urgently. As France's President Francois Mitterrand stated this week, with appropriate Cartesian logic, the world cannot demand human rights for 280,000 uprooted Kuwaiti citizens while ignoring the denial of the same rights to millions of homeless Palestinians.

At the same time, the Arab regimes who are now flaying Israel for abusing human rights should have a good look at themselves.

Iraq, from where I have just returned, is a nightmarish police state. Two years ago, Saddam Hussein ordered cyanide gas to be used against rebellious Kurds, killing 5,000 in one day.

Syria is not any better. Its regime killed 10,000 people in putting down an Islamic fundamentalist uprising in the city of Hama.

Algeria gunned down 1,000 protesters earlier this year.

A strong, secure Israel will ensure that Jews never feel the tender mercies of Saddam Hussein or Syria's Hafez Assad. But Israel will never be truly secure until the Palestinian question, its national scarlet letter, is resolved in a way acceptable to both sides.

It's a tragedy that Israel, founded on western principles of decency and human values, is showing signs of becoming as brutish as some of its Arab neighbors. Or, in the words of the Jewish writer, Arthur Koestler, "a nasty little Sparta."

All of greater Israel has been made into a vast prison camp for Palestinians. Israeli right wingers are urging that these captive Palestinians be expelled at gunpoint into the deserts of Jordan, which can hardly support its own population today. Israel has already expropriated 75% of the Arab water and 50% of Arab land on the West Bank.

But, having said this, I'd still rather be a protester in Israeli occupied Gaza than one in Syria or Iraq. Having personally seen Palestinians slaughtered in Lebanon and Jordan by their Arab "brothers," I'm really not sure where these eternal refugees are worse off.

The arrival of up to two million Soviet Jews in Israel and the occupied territories is going to be the match that lights the Mideast powderkeg. The Israelis seem to be getting ready to expel most Palestinians from their ancestral lands to create living space for the Soviet Jews. This is the final straw for the long-suffering Palestinians. They are about to explode into an orgy of violence against Israel. Its patron, the U.S. and the entire world.

Putting the petro sheiks of Kuwait back on their gilded thrones is not going to solve the Mideast's problems. Something must be done to resolve the Palestinian question. Decency and common sense demand it.

Even though solving this question would be a near miracle, it would not make the Mideast a quiet, gentle place. But it will at least eliminate one of the world's worst and longest-lasting cases of injustice.