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### *"A Different War of Attrition"*

By Kenneth W. Stein

Israel and the Palestinians are in a horrendous war of attrition. Since 1967 Israel has endured five of them, but this one contains unique and unparalleled aspects. How it ends will shape Zionism's borders and Palestinian nationalism's geographic limits.

This time, the Arab side is not merely fighting to force an Israeli withdrawal from land that Arabs believe to be theirs. This was the case with Egypt in 1969-70; Syria, 1974; Lebanon after Israel's 1982 invasion; and twice with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This time, the Arab side is struggling for its own territorial independence and national definition, the unfulfilled and unfinished quest for Palestinian liberation.

Thus, the Palestinians' commitment to their cause is far greater than previous Arab efforts to dislodge Israel from the Sinai peninsula, the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. Unlike previous wars of attrition, the fighting is occurring not on their geographic peripheries, but in their population centers. And Palestinian actions against Israelis are up close and personal; sniper attacks, suicide bombings at restaurants, discotheques, in malls, at military checkpoints, and in so many public places-- not from long-range artillery bursts or rocket attacks.

The Oslo agreements did not work for many reasons. One of the primary impediments was that neither Palestinian nor Israeli leaders had prepared their constituents to discuss or resolve the hard political issues-- refugees, settlements, borders, Jerusalem-- because no clear consensus for them existed.

Israeli history in the 1990s showed that if a secular Israeli political leader decided to concede the outlines of the Jewish state as less than assigned in the Bible, he would either lose his life (Yitzhak Rabin) or be driven from office (Benjamin Netanyahu). On the Palestinian side, meanwhile, Yasser Arafat did not accept significant compromise on these issues because neither he nor his constituents-- nor significant portions of the Arab world-- were ready to do so.

Israelis won't build a fence (there is no assumption it would reduce the

violence) around the West Bank and Gaza because to do so acknowledges that the areas fenced out would be considered non-Israeli territory.

But the stark facts remain: The Palestinian quest for self-determination cannot be physically destroyed, and Israel can not absorb 3 million Palestinians and still be a majority Jewish state.

A solution between the two nationalisms can only be found through some form of division, partition, separation or disengagement of people and land in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Saudi Prince Abdullah's suggestion for a two-state solution can work only if ideology gives way to pragmatic realities. This war of attrition will not end if one side vanquishes or punishes the other mercilessly. It will only abate when Israelis and Palestinians define what it is they do not want and are willing to relinquish; it will only diminish when they stop hurling hateful language at each other. It will slowly conclude when Israel once and for all defines the borders of the Jewish state.

Palestinians and other Arabs must unequivocally decide that a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem is sufficient, and not just sufficient for the moment.

Without dreams and myths discarded, horrendous loss of life continues. You cannot blame just the leaders; the blame rests with the followers and their supporters, too.

Kenneth W. Stein teaches Middle Eastern History and Politics at Emory University; he is the author of *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*, Routledge, 1999.