

# Arabs and Muslims on the Middle East; Conflict is not inevitable, nor is peace impossible

Chicago Tribune, 12 December 2001

Contrary to popular belief, this is not an ancient conflict, nor is it rooted in ethnicity or religion. It is, however, a political and human conflict, in which two groups of people claim the same land. One of them having military supremacy, Israel, with the support of the United States, has been able to take over most of that country from its indigenous non-Jewish population.

As the latter resist with whatever means they have at their disposal, the former reacts with overwhelming power and destructive capacity.

The killing of innocent Israelis by suicide bombers is abhorrent terrorism, but the killing of innocent Palestinians, by F-16s, Apache helicopter gun ships, M-4 tanks, artillery and infantry ordinance, even when clearly disproportionate or apparently unjustified, seldom raises concerns.

How much more, and for how long, can the Palestinians withstand the brutal punishment inflicted upon them? Before 1947, Palestine was under British mandate on the way to becoming a Palestinian state. Eighty percent of the population was Arab (Christian and Muslim) and 20 percent was Jewish, while 90 percent of the land was in the hands of the Palestinian Arabs. By the end of '47, the UN's partition plan, for which the U.S. lobbied hard, gave the prospective state of Israel more than half the territory, while establishing Jerusalem as an open international city to accommodate the three major monotheistic faiths. As the Palestinians and their Arab supporters rejected that plan, a war ensued and by the end of '49, the new state of Israel had 23 percent more of the Palestinian land than what the partition plan had allocated to it. This lasted until '67. Since then, Israel has taken over the rest of what was Palestine, and proceeded to expand its occupation of these territories, unilaterally declaring Jerusalem as its own. Today, the territories under

Palestinian control are about a third of what they were in 1947.

Peace can be achieved if the same rules could be applied to each side. The first step toward peace is human reconciliation, and that occurs when both sides demonstrate respect for the lives and well-being of others.

The establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza with some territorial adjustments, as was discussed at Camp David in July 2000, is feasible. But without all of the security limitations on Palestinian sovereignty that plan contained.

The U.S. can bring that about with the support of European countries.