

Dear Family & Friends:

I want you all to know how much your expressions of concern and interest are appreciated. It is comforting to know that we are not alone out here. And it is comforting to know that our fellow Jews are doing the best they can to inform the American Government about the facts of the war. I use the word "war" advisedly, because that is exactly what we are in now. I have taken the liberty of enclosing a copy of a letter that was sent to the "Washington Post", and was reprinted last week in the "Jerusalem Post" entitled "Arafat's War". The author is Charles Krauthammer. This article expresses my opinion and that of many other Israelis.

Love, Barbara Silverman

October 14, 2000

Arafat's War
By Charles Krauthammer

Fighting has broken out in the Middle East, we read. This use of passive phrasing, almost universal in media reports on the violence in Israel, is a way of deliberately expressing agnosticism about the cause of the fighting. It is a scandal. It is akin to writing that on September 1, 1939, war "broke out" on the German-Polish frontier.

Few wars break out spontaneously. And certainly not this one. Does anyone believe that Ehud Barak, who went to Camp David and offered the Palestinians peace terms of breathtaking generosity, would be starting a war? Does anyone believe that the most dovish government in Israeli history, feeling itself just inches away from concluding a permanent peace, would initiate gun battles?

The plain fact is that Yasser Arafat, thrown on the diplomatic defensive by rejecting Barak's offer (to the astonishment and dismay of the American mediators), has done what he has always done: resort to violence to regain the initiative; and, most important, mint new underage martyrs (on world television) to regain the international sympathy he had forfeited by turning down peace at Camp David.

His pretext was that the September 28 visit to the Temple Mount by Israel's leader of the opposition so offended Islam that the faithful erupted in violence. The audacity of their claim is astonishing. Yes, the Temple Mount is the third holiest place in Islam. But it happens to be the single most holy place for the Jews. Why does the Moslem claim so trump all others that Jews may not set foot on their most sacred site, their Mecca? The war that followed was as spontaneous as a Havana demonstration. The preacher at al Aqsa mosque called Friday prayers to "eradicate the Jews from Palestine." Official Palestine television began playing over and over archival footage of the Palestinian intifada of 1987-1993 showing young Palestinians out in the streets throwing stones.

In case we still don't get the message, Voice of Palestine radio began playing patriotic war songs. Arafat then closed the schools and declared a general strike, causing everyone to go out into the street. With Arafat's chief political lieutenant on the West Bank orchestrating the militia, war then "broke out"

The doves are stunned. Abraham Burg, Speaker of the Israeli Parliament and one of the architects of the Labor Government's "bend over backward" peace proposals, writes perplexedly, pathetically: "Do we really understand what is going on? After everything was given, there are still demands on the other side. Suddenly we discovered that what we mean by peace (mutual reconciliation) is not being met by the other side."

"Suddenly?" Where has he been for seven years? Seven years during which Arafat built his "police force" into a 40,000-man army now unleashed on Israel. Seven years during which Arafat repeatedly said that the peace process was one option, and that if he did not get everything he wanted, there was another. Seven years during which his state-controlled television, radio, newspapers, and now children's textbooks inculcated in his people an anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism so virulent that it has succeeded in producing a new generation bred on reflexive hostility to Israel.

Seven years during which he repeatedly called for "jihad" for Jerusalem. Well, it has now arrived. That is the meaning of the current fighting. This is, as the Palestinians repeatedly call it, a war for Jerusalem. Not as the world press has reported endlessly and fatuously an expression of Palestinian "frustration". Frustration with what? Israeli occupation? It ended years ago. 99% of Palestinians live under the rule of Yasser Arafat. Over territory? Barak has conceded virtually the entire West Bank. Over political subordination? Barak offered full recognition of the first independent Palestinian State in history.

The Palestinians are less frustrated than emboldened. Emboldened by an Israeli government so desperate for peace it has given up "everything" as Burg admitted. Emboldened by the recklessness of Burg and his colleagues, so impervious for so long to empirical evidence of Palestinian implacability that, in this moment of supreme crisis, they admit openly to disorientation.

Emboldened by an American administration so craven that it refuses to condemn Arafat for cynically starting this war, indeed for repeatedly violating his single obligation to Oslo, the renunciation of violence. "After everything was given", laments Burg. Yes, everything except one last thing, the Temple Mount. Why, Barak went wobbly even on that. He offered to relinquish sovereignty over Judaism's holiest site and internationalize it under the UN Security Council.

Arafat refused. He demands ownership (the audacity is breathtaking) of Judaism's holy of holies. Hence this war.

It is not spontaneous. And it is not without direction. Arafat knows what he wants, and he is prepared to sacrifice as many of his own people as it takes to get it. Preferably on television.