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“The Palestinian Problem”: Is *it* the cause for unrest in the Middle East?

There are those who think that the so-called “Palestinian problem” is the cause for unrest, turmoil, and slaughter in the Middle East. They believe that if this problem could be solved, peace and tranquility would prevail in this troubled area.

What are the facts?

■ Conflict is endemic in the Middle East. The Palestinian problem is only one of the many conflicts in the area. It is being kept alive by the PLO and others who, for their own political purposes, wish to keep this matter unresolved.

■ Virtually every Arab state has been in armed and bloody conflict with its Arab neighbors. Egypt occupied Yemen for eight years. Morocco and Algeria are constantly at each other. Libya has clashed with Egypt, Tunisia, and the Sudan. The two Yemens regularly war with each other. Saudi Arabia spreads largess in order to appease all potential enemies. Yet it presses territorial claims against the smaller states of the Gulf. Kuwait worries about Iraq, which claims it in its entirety.

■ In the heart of the Middle East, Syria constantly threatens Jordan. It tirelessly works to overthrow the regime in Baghdad. Its designs on Lebanon are well-known. Iraq is one of the most aggressive, and though at present much concerned with its war with Iran, spews subversion and terrorism against its Arab neighbors.

■ The record of aggression by Arabs against non-Arab states is as bloody. Libya has invaded Chad. It is involved in subversion and conspiracy on a global scale. Syria is in constant conflict with Turkey and has vowed to annex the Turkish region of Alesandretta, “as soon as we settle the score with the Zionist enemy”.

■ Iraq, of course, is a special case. It perceived post-revolutionary Iran as weak and ripe for plunder. The six-year war shows no sign of abating. It is one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent world history.

■ Domestic violence is a constant in the Arab world. Virtually every Arab leader has been the target of assassination. In Syria, an officer corps dominated by the minority Alawites suppresses dissent with mass murder. In February 1982, President Assad's forces killed up to 25,000 civilians in the city of Hama and, according to *The New York Times*, “turned half the town into a parking lot”.

■ And then, of course, there is Lebanon. Feuding sects in that unhappy country have battled each other for centuries. Since the outbreak of open civil war about ten years ago, as many as 200,000 people have died—with no end in sight.

■ But the Arabs reserve their most aggressive fury against the non-Arabs living among them. Arab violence against the Jews, inside and outside Israel, is common knowledge. But Berbers, Kurds, Copts, Circassians, Christians, and Blacks are mercilessly persecuted and, where possible, bloodily exterminated. Blacks are routinely kept as slaves in Saudi Arabia. The slaughter of the ancient Assyrian community in Iraq, the cruel fate of over 500,000 Blacks in Southern Sudan, and the forcible resettlement of over 200,000 Kurds are a few examples of this never-ending bloodshed.

None of these conflicts has anything to do with Israel. All of this fury would continue unabated if Israel did not exist. Violence is a fact of political life in the Arab world. The root causes of upheaval in the Arab world are the Arabs' radicalism, their religious fundamentalism, and their xenophobic hatreds. The “Palestinian problem” could have been solved almost 40 years ago. It's being kept alive by those whose political purposes it serves. It's not the *cause* of this violence. It's just one of its many manifestations.

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