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## The "Intifada"

### Is Israel using excessive force to suppress it?

For over two years now, the "intifada," the uprising of the Arab population in the territories administered by Israel, has occupied the attention of print and broadcast media and has therefore been of concern to the public. Much of that concern has centered on the methods used by the Israelis to suppress this uprising. Television especially has left the impression that those methods are too harsh, that the Arabs in the administered territories are subject to human rights abuses on a grand scale and that their civil rights are routinely violated.

#### What are the facts?

■ As a result of their brilliant military exploits in the Six Day War, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have gained a reputation of prowess and professionalism. It is therefore difficult to understand why the competent Israeli military have until now been unable to squash this uprising. One inevitably compares it with the "efficiency" of, for instance, the Chinese, who, at a cost of perhaps 4,000 lives, took care of their uprising in a single day; by the Syrians, who "settled" their uprising in the City of Hama by killing an estimated 25,000 of their own people and by leveling the city; or with the Iraqis, who dealt with their restive Kurdish minority by summarily poison-gassing entire villages.

■ There is, of course, little question that the IDF could easily have handled the intifada in the same "efficient" manner. Had they done so at the very beginning, it would in all likelihood have been the end of the whole affair. There would not have been years of turmoil, of extensive television coverage, of countless agonizing editorials in the media of the world, and endless denunciation of Israel in international forums. But Israel is a western democracy and is, of course, unable to act in this manner. The reason that the "intifada" has been allowed to drag on for so long is the almost incredible restraint by the IDF and their scrupulous concern about the lives and the properties of the Arab population.

■ The "intifada's" goal is not the creation of an Arab mini-state. This uprising is the latest link in the chain of the never-ending war of the Arab nations against Israel, the unchanging goal of which is the total destruction

of the Jewish state. The "intifada" uses the techniques of street violence, by which Israeli soldiers and civilians find themselves under continuous assault, threatened daily by stones, Molotov cocktails and occasional gunfire. Faced with this never-ending provocation, the restraint of the IDF has to be admired. While every human life is precious, what is remarkable is the relatively small number of casualties—fewer than die during outbreaks of violence in Lebanon, in Kashmir, in Sri Lanka or in Azerbaijan, or during the drug wars in American inner cities. And this small number is reflective of the determination of the Israeli government to minimize casualties and of the forbearance and professionalism of the IDF.

■ In their effort to minimize casualties and injuries, the IDF have detailed and specific instructions on use of force and of weapons. For instance, soldiers are only allowed to open fire when fired upon. They are never allowed to fire into crowds; they are not allowed to fire if innocent bystanders could be hurt; they are not allowed to fire at fleeing attackers. In order further to reduce casualties, the Israelis continue to experiment with plastic bullets, rubber bullets and other non-lethal weapons. Automatic weapons are completely forbidden. If at all possible, nightsticks are being used instead of guns. The role of IDF soldiers in maintaining order and tranquility in the territories is made infinitely more complicated by their being confronted mostly by children, teenagers, and women, while the able-bodied men stay safely in the background, egging them on.

The "intifada" is a violent uprising, an extension of the unrelenting war of the Arab states against Israel. It has been allowed to go on for over two years, only because of the patience, forbearance and respect for human life and property of the Israeli government and military. The "intifada" cannot solve the problems of the Middle East. Peace in the area can only come about by face-to-face negotiations between Israelis and the Arab inhabitants of the administered territories. In a recent speech, Prime Minister Shamir stated: "Israel has submitted a logical, fair and just plan for the solution of the conflict. If Arab governments sincerely want to contribute to the solution of the conflict, to the elimination of violence, and to the achievement of peace, then they must use their influence on the Palestinian Arabs to dissociate themselves from the useless, destructive and hopeless ties to the PLO."

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