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How many must die?

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Over the past long weekend Palestinians died at the rate of two-a-day. None of the ten dead was over 20. The youngest was a 12-year-old girl.

Another 60 suffered wounds, most of them caused by what a *Baltimore Sun* correspondent described as "a nickel-sized metal ball encased in a thin layer of rubber."

One youth still lives, after taking in his face six of the round bullets, the *Sun* reported. In the same hospital, surgeons failed on the first attempt to remove from a 17-year-old a metal ball that had penetrated through the back of his skull.

The *Washington Post* quoted the cabinet minister responsible for Arab affairs inside Israel proper. "I don't think there's a lot of logic or common sense in shooting after a boy when he's already finished throwing his stone. There must be some judgment and some restraint," said Ehud Olmert.

At the very least, the murderous tactics ensure heightened intensity in the occupied territories' intifida (uprising), now into its 14th month.

In addition, its army's willingness to shed the blood of boys and girls further decreases the moral claim Israel once exercised as a nation which arose from the Holocaust's slaughtered innocents. And the new killings appear to have no end.

True: Yitzhak Shamir indicated last week that his government might be willing to consider, at some future date, the possibility of an international conference on the Middle East. In the same breath, the prime minister insisted there could be no seat at the conference table for the Palestine Liberation Organization. Never, he repeated.

The Palestinian children's willingness to die says otherwise. Already, they have accomplished that which was unthinkable when their first stones began the intifida.

By coincidence, the same month (December 1987) their uprising began, Israeli supporters in this country succeeded in having Congress pass a law to exclude any PLO presence in this country, including the organization's delegation to the United Nations. They applied maximum pressure to cut off any communications between Americans and the group designated by Palestinians as their representatives.

The civilized world's reply to the occupation army's deadly repression was to demand the United States reverse its attempt to treat the Pales-

tinians as a non-people and to talk, at least, with the PLO. (And by the civilized world, I mean to include many American Jews, who supported a U.S. dialogue with the PLO by a two-thirds majority in a poll conducted by the American Jewish Committee.)

The PLO delegation remains in New York, because an American judge of the Jewish faith rejected the law seeking its ouster as a violation of this country's accords with the United Nation.

Furthermore, today the delegation represents not the PLO, but Palestine as a nation, recognized on the same level, if without all the privileges, as other UN members.

Nor is the Palestinian position in the world community diminished when, at the same time their children are being cut down in Gaza and on the West Bank, the PLO has assumed a responsibility for helping to track down the criminals responsible for blowing up an American passenger jet over England last month.

About that terrorist incident, it should be pointed out that it happened shortly after Washington agreed to talk with the PLO. With its new respectability, the organization lacked motive for sanctioning the act.

The suspects fall in two chief

categories. It could have been revenge by the Iranians for the downing of their airliner by U.S. Navy guns. It was possibly planned to disrupt a U.S.-PLO dialogue.

If the second premise holds true, then the bomb could have been planted by Arab radicals bitterly opposed to any conciliation with Israel or its principal backer, the United States. With no proof yet forthcoming, the most intense speculation centers on Abu Nidal, the leader of a Palestinian breakaway faction, who has issued a death warrant on PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The other group which must be considered in this category consists of those Israelis who are just as bitter in their opposition, as Arab radicals in theirs, to any moves which can lead to turning the occupied territories back to the people who have lived upon the land for generations.

If anything, Israeli hard-liners would have more to gain than Abu Nidal if the deaths on the Pan Am jet could have been hung on the PLO.

Under no foreseeable conditions could the Palestinian renegade succeed

Chairman Arafat, while destroying the PLO's shaky credibility in Washington would free the hands of those in Israel seeking to impose their own version of a Final Solution on the Palestinian Problem.

In any event, in recent statements British authorities in charge of the investigation have singled out for praise Mr. Arafat and his colleagues for their contributions in tracking down those really responsible for blowing up the jet.

The way things look now the incoming Bush administration will almost certainly agree to grant a visa to Chairman Arafat so that he can accept an invitation to appear before an Arab-American convention in Washington this April. As a bonus, it would provide an excellent opportunity for the new president to measure for himself the man who speaks for the people of the UN's most recently accredited nation.

Given the circumstances now prevailing, it is unconscionable that Israeli hard-liners continue their efforts to crush the desire for self-determination on the West Bank and in the Gaza refugee camps. It is only a matter of time before the colors now displayed at the United Nations will fly over a Palestinian state.

No, that's not true. More than time is involved. The real matter, as spelled out in this week's news, revolves around human life.

How many boys and girls must die before the gentlemen in Jerusalem seek peace with their consciences and let the Palestinians go?

EXPLANATION: Since Abu Nidal's name has come up, let me straighten out a false statement which has been repeated a number of times by one Letter to the Editor writer. I have never defended Abu Nidal, quite the contrary. In his last letter, the gentlemen revealed his own confusion, which apparently stems from a difficulty with Arab names.

Not Abu Nidal, but Abu Abbas was the man released by Italy and Yugoslavia shortly after the Achille Lauro hostages were set free. Both nations said they lacked evidence to hold him. I defended their upholding international law.

Abu Abbas was subsequently tried by an Italian court for masterminding the ship's hijacking. He is today a convicted terrorist which he was not before that trial.

But Abu Abbas is still not Abu Nidal, who has claimed credit for the crimes the letter writer attributed to the wrong Arab.