

Next: Senseless Violence

Sari Nuseibeh, 36, teaches philosophy at the Bir Zeit University and edits Al Mawkef, an East Jerusalem Arabic-language weekly that supports Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization. Nuseibeh recently spoke with NEWSWEEK's Jerusalem bureau chief, Milan J. Kubic, in Jerusalem. Excerpts:

Kubic: Do you see any hope for a peaceful solution of the Palestinian problem?

Nuseibeh: There was some hope that last week's meeting of King Hussein and President Hafez Assad might result in Syrian acceptance of Hussein's peace plan. But apparently the summit has not changed either side's position. Hussein is offering to Israel a process in which Jordan and the PLO would negotiate a settlement consisting of peace for Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank in confederation with Jordan. This is unacceptable to most Israelis. The government of Israel is proposing negotiations with Jordan and Palestinians outside the PLO. This is unacceptable to Jordan and to us, the Palestinians.

What will happen next?

The next stage, which is already developing, is one of senseless and counterproductive violence. Such acts as the airport attacks in Rome and Vienna are ugly symptoms of rising frustrations on our side. We can expect that our terrorists will be matched by their Israeli counterparts in the Kach movement of Meir Kahane, who wants to expel all Palestinians from the occupied areas. There will be killing on both sides, without achieving a solution.

What about the Israeli proposal to grant limited self-rule to the oc-

cupied Palestinians without any negotiations? The recent appointment of West Bank businessman Zafer al Masri as mayor of Nablus shows that Israel has decided to give such an idea a try. Can it work?

The individual Palestinian in Nablus is better off when he gets his building license or electricity from al Masri instead of an Israeli. But from the broader Palestinian point of view, unilateral autonomy is a dangerous idea. It would rid the Israelis of the bother of running the day-by-day af-

occupied areas anyway. The Jewish settlements are growing. Our land is being confiscated. We have most of the obligations and almost none of the rights of the Israeli citizens. Annexation would make the Israelis pay for what they're now getting for free. They would have to offer us Israeli citizenship.

The Israelis assume that even if they annexed the occupied territories, the Arabs would prefer to remain Jordanian citizens. That's

Palestinians, do you believe that they would eventually have more votes than the Israeli Jews?

According to some demographers, we would be the majority by the year 2020. Moreover, once we get the Israeli citizenship, we could go to the Knesset and demand a law that would also allow the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who are now abroad. But the ratio of Arabs to Jews is not my primary concern. The main goal is to give the Palestinians the same rights that the Jews already have—the right to live in an independent state in Palestine as full citizens with the right to shape their own destiny.

The Israelis, of course, would never accept such an arrangement.

That's their option. What I am saying to the Israelis is, "Listen to us now. We are asking for the right to establish our own state side by side with Israel and live in peace as your neighbors. Because if you turn us down, the day may come when we will take over your state from within." That message should strengthen our hand at the negotiating table, if the peace talks ever get off the ground.

How many Palestinians support your "message"?

The fundamentalists of the [right-wing] Muslim Brotherhood at my university have called it "the lowest bottom" of Palestinian compromise-making. The Marxists have denounced the annexation proposal as "treason" and "madness," and charged that I am a class enemy. But most Palestinians are silent. They can see the hopelessness of the present situation, the high price they pay for being an occupied people. The idea of becoming Israelis is in their heads, and slowly ripening.

Sari Nuseibeh



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Israel should annex the West Bank, and all of the Palestinians should demand full rights as Israeli citizens

fairs of the West Bank town halls without losing control of the area and without handing any real power to the Arabs. For us, this is unacceptable.

What is the solution?

I believe that it would be in the best interest of all 1.1 million of us to demand full rights as Israeli citizens.

But that is agreeing to Israeli annexation of the occupied areas, which is opposed by all Arabs.

I can see a time, 5 to 10 years from now, when annexation will be regarded by most of us as a victory, just as it would be today if the Israelis would leave the occupied territories and let us establish our own independent state. As things are now, the Israelis are gradually annexing the

what the 100,000 Palestinians did in East Jerusalem after Israel annexed it in 1967.

Our situation in East Jerusalem is different. We regard ourselves as part of the West Bank, and as such we refuse to be separated from the rest of the occupied Arabs. I foresee a decision by the whole Palestinian nation to demand annexation by the Israelis in order to pave the way for the solution to the Palestinian problem. An Israel where 40 percent of the population—including the 600,000 Israeli Arabs—is non-Jewish would be the first stage of the secular, democratic, binational state of Arabs and Jews in Palestine that was the original goal of the PLO.

Given the high birthrate of the