

THE READERS PAGE

Each side in Middle East conflict should reassure the other

By Louis Kriesberg

Palestinians and Israeli Jews lack a strategy that could resolve their tragic conflict. Even if the violence is limited by a ceasefire, the adversaries continue to

COMMENT be locked in a self-perpetuating destructive struggle. Most people on each side are resolute and ready to endure the pains that the other side can inflict rather than surrender to it. Some people on each side may believe they can unilaterally impose their solution on the other, but they cannot succeed.

A campaign of mutual reassurance is needed to transform this destructive conflict and to conduct negotiations successfully. Each side should undertake reassuring actions that would contribute to such a transformation, but leaders on neither side can make them unilaterally.

Prior to the breakdown of negotiations and the eruption of violence, considerable progress toward an agreement was made. The negotiations failed, however, because they were conducted without each side helping the other so that it could respond by providing what was needed for an acceptable agreement to be reached. Doing so now is harder

than before the eruption of violence. Nevertheless, more than ever, to restart the negotiations and to successfully complete them, the two sides must help each other.

Some steps of reassurance could be made with little cost or risk, particularly if both sides make them at the same time or in coordination with each other. Other steps may be undertaken only after earlier ones have begun to lower the level of antagonism.

Here are a few examples of the kinds of reassuring moves that might be made: the parties themselves, of course, must formulate them according to their own judgment. Instead of calling for the end of the occupation, the Palestinian leaders might assert their acceptance of the legitimacy of Israel within the 1967 borders. Israeli leaders might express their readiness to accept the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, recognizing the benefits that would have for a democratic Jewish society.

Leaders of each side might proclaim their recognition of the importance of Jerusalem and of the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif for the other side. This would be made more credible if the Palestinian authorities wel-

comed Jews to visit the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount and if Jewish Israelis agreed that the capital of Palestine should be in Jerusalem.

Leaders on each side could insist that people on their side not do violence nor incite violence against people of the other side. The credibility of such declarations would be enhanced if militants, police, settlers, and soldiers were arrested and prosecuted for initiating violent attacks against anyone. Furthermore, police, soldiers and others in authority should treat civilians with respect and protect them from harassment.

In preparing for negotiations about the future of Palestinian refugees, Israeli leaders should acknowledge the harms suffered by the refugees, and Palestinian leaders should make it clear that the right of return of Palestinian refugees would not be used to transform the demographic balance of Palestinians and Jews in Israel.

To make these measures jointly or in a coordinated manner is no easy matter, particularly if leaders on each side simply want to defeat the other. Much work needs to be done by members of each society. Discussions about the importance of mutual reassurance and how it might be



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brought about are needed and the discussions themselves might provide some reassurance.

Intermediaries also can contribute greatly to fostering coordinated measures of reassurance. U.S. officials are in a good position to help in such endeavors.

Many other official and non-official interveners and supporters of each side can provide the incentives for reassuring actions.

The Jewish-American and Arab-American communities should also consider ways they might encourage their side to

provide appropriate reassurance to the other. Even a few reassuring actions could enable more far-reaching ones to be taken and set in motion a spiral of improving relations.

Louis Kriesberg of East Syracuse is Maxwell Professor Emeritus of Conflict Studies at Syracuse University.