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Nine Wars Too Many

If I were making a movie of the Arab-Israeli conflict today I would call it "Ten Wars and a Funeral." Because the biggest problem in resolving this conflict is that there are at least 10 different wars being fought over Israel-Palestine, and we need to reduce them to just one to have any chance of making peace.

Let's run down the list: A majority of Israelis are fighting a war for the right of a Jewish state to exist in the Middle East, roughly along the pre-1967 borders. But a minority in Israel today want a Jewish state within the pre-1967 lines and a Jewish state in the West Bank and Gaza. This was amply demonstrated by Bibi Netanyahu's stunt at the recent Likud Party convention, where he tried to advance his political career and embarrass Ariel Sharon by getting the lunatic core of the Likud to reject any Palestinian state ever in the West Bank. These Israeli rightists and settlers deliberately label any Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank as "terrorism" in order to rope the U.S. into supporting Israel's continued hold on the occupied territories as part of America's global war on terrorism. Beware.

The same is true inside the Bush administration. The State Department sees the Mideast war as a war over Israel's 1967 boundaries, and its focus is "conflict resolution" — diplomacy aimed at getting Israel to trade occupied land for peace. But over at the Pentagon, the view is that Yasir Arafat is no different from Osama bin Laden, and the other Arab leaders are worthy only of contempt. The Pentagon sees the Israeli war to crush Mr. Arafat as an extension of the U.S. war on terrorism and believes that the most you can do with Arabs and Israelis today is "conflict management," not conflict resolution.

This view is reinforced by the fact that the Palestinians are fighting two wars. Yes, many Palestinians are simply fighting to get Israel out of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem so they can establish a state there — not because they acknowledge the legitimacy of a Jewish homeland in pre-1967 Israel, but because they know they lack the power to eliminate it. But some Palestinians, and Mr. Arafat is among them, have not abandoned hope of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza today — through diplomacy and armed struggle — and a Palestinian state in pre-1967 Israel tomorrow — through a baby boom and securing the right of return of millions of Pal-

estinian refugees. Israel still does not appear on many of Mr. Arafat's maps. So let's cut the nonsense that the only thing that all Palestinians want is an "end to the Israeli occupation." I wish that were true.

Ditto the Arabs. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria all claim they just want Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders, but anyone reading their official media, which regularly spew articles comparing Israel to Nazi Germany and extolling the virtues of Palestinian girls who commit suicide amid Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv, would hardly be assured that for them the only problem is the Israeli occupation

The one Mideast war that counts.

— and not the Jewish people's right to a homeland in the Middle East.

And ditto-ditto the Europeans. Yes, yes, many Europeans really do just want an end to the Israeli occupation, but the anti-Semitism coming out of Europe today suggests that deep down some Europeans want a lot more: They want Mr. Sharon to commit a massacre against Palestinians, or they want to describe what he did in Jenin as a massacre, so that the Europeans can finally get the guilt of the Holocaust off their backs and be able to shout: "Look at these Jews, they're worse than we were!"

I just attended an Arab media conference and was on a panel with Eric Rouleau, the Middle East correspondent of *Le Monde*, who said he had recently spoken to some French generals who told him that what Israel did in Jenin was worse than anything France did during the Algerian war. One million Algerians were killed in that war and two million were made homeless. So far 60 bodies have been recovered in Jenin, many of them fighters. You do the math.

Frankly, I'm happy President Bush is getting more involved in Mideast peacemaking. But he'll get nowhere unless he can get the parties (including his own aides) to abandon all the other wars they're fighting and to tell their own people, and each other, that there's only one war left — a war to determine the border between a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. Anyone who's fighting any other war is an enemy of peace and an enemy of America's national interest. □