

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Gaza

Are its inhabitants being "subjugated" by the Israelis?

If that mythical man from Mars were to appear today, he might believe that Gaza — that tiny strip of land wedged between Israel and Egypt, and home to about 650,000 Palestinian Arabs, is the flash point of the world. There are daily banner headlines in the newspapers and extensive coverage on television newscasts. Howling mobs of teenagers, armed with bricks and Molotov cocktails, confront and defy Israeli security forces. Inevitably, people get hurt and die. The U.S. public is uncomfortable and bewildered.

What are the facts?

■ In 1922, together with the rest of Palestine, Gaza was entrusted to Britain, as a League of Nations mandate, committing them to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. But they created the Kingdom of Trans-Jordan, to the east of the Jordan River, 77% of the original country. In 1947, the U.N. offered a partition plan for the remainder, to be divided into a Jewish and an Arab state. Gaza was to be part of the Arab state. The Jews agreed to the partition. The Arabs refused. No Jewish state, however minuscule, could be allowed on "sacred Arab soil". On the day that Israel declared its independence in 1948, five Arab armies invaded the new state. The newly founded state of Israel, rather than dying at its birth, defeated the invading armies.

Jordan, however, was able to occupy Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and the old city of Jerusalem. Egypt occupied Gaza. Their administration lasted for 19 years. It ended with the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel routed the Egyptians and Jordanians in defensive response to Colonel Nasser and King Hussein's aggressions. During these years, the Palestinians voiced no demand for self-determination. The subject matter, then as now, was not Israel's "occupation", but rather Israel's existence.

■ During the 1948 War of Jewish Liberation, many Arabs fled from their homes to Gaza for what they expected to be a short sojourn. Because, exhorted by their leaders and by blood-curdling broadcasts, they were urged to vacate Palestine so as not to interfere with the invading Arab armies. They would be able to return very soon, to recover their homes and their property — and that of the Jews.

■ Things didn't turn out that way 40 years ago. Gaza became one of the most densely populated spots on earth. The inhabitants

could not go to Egypt, nor would any other Arab country admit them. And why not? Because it served the political purposes of the Arab nations to leave these poor people in the pitiful condition in which they find themselves — still refugees, still living in squalid camps with their children and grandchildren, 40 years after their flight. The Arab nations could easily relieve the population pressure and the despair in Gaza by participating in and assisting with the programs of Israel and international organizations for the absorption and economic development of the refugees. They won't do that, and it doesn't look as though they ever will. They wish to keep the wound festering. What is the ultimate goal from which the Arabs have never deviated? It is the dismantling and the "Lebanonization" of the State of Israel.

■ What could the Israelis do to mitigate the situation? Not much more than they are doing now. Under Israeli administration, and under their policy of open borders, Gazans can freely move between the "strip" and Israel, "West Bank", Jordan, and anywhere else that they might be allowed to travel. The political and personal liberties that Gazans enjoy, their standard of living, level of education, social and public health services are incomparably higher than ever before. 60,000 Gazans work in Israel. Apart from the dole of the world, these jobs are the main income of the population — the economy would totally collapse without them. Can Israel "walk away" and relinquish this area? It is impossible, because the PLO would immediately re-establish military bases and make them launching pads for attacks against Israel's main cities, only a few miles away. That's what happened daily under Egyptian administration before 1967.

Gaza is a tragedy — people are in misery and young men are dying. Like all other problems dividing Arabs and Jews, this too could be settled by good will and direct negotiation. The 1978 Camp David Accords provide the framework for such negotiation and for establishment of autonomy for Palestinian Arabs. The PLO totally reject Camp David. Their acceptance would relieve the plight of the Palestinian Arabs and assure their rights, as well as safeguard Israel's security and existence.

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