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The "Troubles" in Israel

Should Israel withdraw from the "West Bank" and Gaza?

For more than six months now, the "troubles" in Israel have been daily front page features and daily fare on the evening television news. Many thoughtful people may have come to the conclusion that peace could come to this troubled part of the world if the Israelis were to withdraw from Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and from Gaza and if they turned these areas over to the Arabs.

What are the facts?

■ It is a fundamental error to believe that the "occupied territories" are at the root of the problem in Palestine. When the British resigned the Palestine mandate in 1947, the United Nations offered a partition plan to the Jews and Arabs living in the area. The Arabs rejected that partition plan out of hand. The Jews accepted partition into a gerrymandered crazy-quilt and even accepted the internationalization of Jerusalem. This diminished and indefensible territory was to be the dreamed-of Jewish homeland and the haven for the pitiful remnants of Nazi Holocaust survivors.

■ But the Arabs would not allow this to happen. It called for "jihad" — holy war. Five Arab armies attacked the Jewish state at the very moment of its birth. They were defeated, but they managed to occupy and to stay in control of the "West Bank", of Gaza, and of the eastern part of Jerusalem. The Arabs were the occupiers: the Jordanians in the "West Bank" and the Egyptians in Gaza.

■ The goal of the terror group known as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was obviously not to "liberate" Judea/Samaria and Gaza, which were under Arab control, but "to wipe Israel off the map and drive the Jews into the sea". These goals and sentiments are part of the PLO's unchanging philosophy. The PLO has always opposed and continues to oppose any policy that does not include the destruction of Israel or calls for the establishment of a "secular state" in Palestine instead of Israel. One would expect that to be on the model of Lebanon. It's not an attractive prospect for the Jews of Israel, or for its Arab citizens, for that matter.

■ In 1967, following the victorious Six-Day War, another war that had been imposed on Israel by the Arabs, Israel assumed the administration of Judea/Samaria and Gaza, and united the liberated city of Jerusalem as the nation's capital. Israel's intent, declared and repeated over and over, was to return

most of these territories to Arab control, as part of a comprehensive peace treaty. But in the Arab League Khartoum conference, immediately following the war, the Arabs pronounced their "three inalterable nos": no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel. The purpose of the Arabs to "wipe Israel off the map" was re-asserted.

■ People in the United States believe that conflict between nations can be resolved or at least be kept from exploding. Even the cold war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. takes place in a context of relative civility. But the enmity of the Arabs against Israel is of a different nature altogether. For the last 40 years, the Arabs have committed themselves almost single-mindedly to the destruction of Israel — by war, by terror, and now by mob violence, sending their women and teen-age children to throw Molotov cocktails at Israeli civilians and soldiers.

■ There is yearning for peace in Israel, a deep desire to be done with the wars that have been pressed on it without surcease since the very day of its birth. And Israel has proven that it is ready to make territorial concessions for peace. That's what happened with Egypt, to which Israel returned the vast Sinai Peninsula — over 90% of the territory taken by Israel in the Six-Day War — in exchange for recognition and peace. But much greater guarantees with responsible and immediately involved governments would be required to induce Israel to cede any territories in Gaza and Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). Because without the "West Bank", Israel would be militarily indefensible. It would be only nine miles wide at its "waist". All of its major population centers, its industries, its military installations would be within easy mortar range of enemies on the "West Bank". Before Israel could make any further territorial concessions at all, it would have to have ironclad guarantees. And for that to happen, the Arabs must rethink the role of Israel in the Middle East and their relationship to it.

The root of the "problem" is not Israel's administration of the territories. The root is the Arabs' inalterable desire to destroy Israel. No country should be asked to commit national suicide in order to appease world public opinion. Israel is surrounded by implacable enemies. Does anybody really expect the Israelis to turn over the strategically crucial "West Bank" to those who are sworn to destroy them? No solution of the territorial dispute of the "West Bank" and Gaza is possible until the Arab nations give full recognition and acceptance to Israel and are genuinely willing to make peace and to establish full normalization of relations.

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