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The Israeli Peace Initiative

Can it restore peace and tranquility to this troubled area?

During his recent visit to Washington, Prime Minister Shamir of Israel proposed a comprehensive Peace Initiative to the U.S. Government, to the world, and especially to the Palestinian Arabs and to the Arab states. This Initiative has been endorsed by the Israel government and the Knesset, by the U.S. State Department, by a bi-partisan group of 95 U.S. Senators, and 233 members of the House. Many western governments have expressed their agreement with elements of the proposal. The PLO and the Arab states have so far rejected the Initiative. What is Mr. Shamir's proposal, and can it indeed lead to peace in this troubled part of the world?

What are the facts?

■ In order properly to assess the political realities in the Middle East, it is important to realize that the conflict between Palestinian Jews (Israelis) and Palestinian Arabs is not the core of the Arab/Israel problem. It is only a side issue. The main event, the core of the problem, is the unrelenting effort on the part of some Arab states to defeat Israel militarily, to dismantle (what they call) the "Zionist entity." That effort has been unceasing since the creation of Israel in 1948, and has given rise to five major wars. With the exception of Egypt, which finally concluded peace with Israel in the Camp David Accords, most other Arab states are still in a state of war with Israel. All Arab states are participants in the worldwide boycott of Israel, which has as its purpose the economic strangulation of that country. The Covenant of the PLO, which cannot be voided by a casual word by its chairman, makes the "liberation of all of Palestine"—and that, of course, includes the state of Israel—its primary goal and ultimate purpose.

■ Since the beginning of the so-called "intifada," Israel has spared no effort to control and appease that uprising, with as little loss of life and injury as possible. It is likely that this very concern for human life is the reason that the situation is not yet under control. One cannot help but compare the Israeli way of handling civil disturbance with the "effective and efficient" method of the Chinese, who watched *their* dissenters for a week and then restored "order" by ruthlessly killing several thousand citizens; or with the Syrians, who when the citizens of Hama defied the regime of President Assad, killed about 20,000 of their own people in one quick operation; or with the Iraqis, who poison-gassed 4,000 of their own Kurdish citizens, whom they suspected of "disloyalty" and chased over 10,000 survivors over the frontier into Turkey and Iran. Israel is prepared to make far-ranging concessions to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs. Such accommodations, however, can only be made after order has been restored. Also, a final settlement could only take place in the context of peace—not just with the Palestinian Arabs, but with the Arab states

themselves, especially, the so-called "confrontation states"—Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Libya.

■ Unfortunately, while there is constant clamor for Israel to make "sacrifices for peace," no such requests are being made of any of the Arab countries. Nor has any Arab country come forward offering to change its stance toward Israel, even if the Palestinian conflict were settled. A good beginning, for instance, could be made by the Arab states denouncing and rejecting the infamous equation that "Zionism = Racism," by rescinding the economic boycott against Israel, and by public declaration that peace negotiations with Israel could start simultaneously with the effort to address and resolve the Palestinian problem. Any cessation of territory or even of administrative control over the territories would fatally weaken the already precarious military situation of Israel—unless it were in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement with all of the Arab countries.

■ In spite of these difficulties, and in spite of the unrelenting hostility of the Arab states, Mr. Shamir, Prime Minister of Israel, has presented a comprehensive Peace Initiative. The peace with Egypt, based on the Camp David Accords, should serve as the cornerstone for this Initiative, enlarging the circle of peace in the region. It calls for the extension of that peace through continued consultation. Israel, in its Initiative, calls for an international endeavor to resolve the problems of the residents of the Arab refugee camps—slums that have been perpetuated for over 40 years. Israel wishes to improve the living conditions of these people and to rehabilitate them. It wishes to be an active partner in this humanitarian enterprise. The most important step of this Initiative, are full and democratic elections in the territories, so that the inhabitants of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and of the Gaza district can elect representatives with whom negotiations for a 5-year transitional period can be held. During this period, options for a permanent solution will be examined and peace between Israel and Jordan will be achieved. Negotiations for such permanent solution shall begin as soon as possible, but not later than the third year of the transitional period.

The above is of course, only the barest outline of Israel's Peace Initiative. It is the first viable peace plan ever offered. It is the expression of the yearning for peace of the people of Israel and of its desire to make peace with its neighbors, to build a Jewish homeland without the ever-present specter of war, and in the hope of being able to play its role in the development of the entire region. In order to begin with the first phase—free democratic elections in the territories—it is obvious that tranquility has first to be restored. The Israelis, unwilling of course to use Chinese, Syrian or Iraqi methods of "restoring order," have so far been unable to do it. But the Arab governments, by expressing *their* desire for peace and by supporting Israel's Peace Initiative could do so practically overnight. And the Arab states could further signal *their* desire for peace by declaring their willingness to enter peace negotiations with Israel, by renouncing and rejecting the slanderous equation that "Zionism = Racism," and by ending the economic boycott against Israel. Thus, Israel's Peace Initiative, being accepted by the Palestinian Arabs and finding echo with the Arab governments, could be the first step toward a just and permanent peace in an area of the world that hasn't known it for decades.

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