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## Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

### Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood", the myth of the Gaza Strip and Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory", the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace", and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace". And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories and not the unrelenting hatred of the Arabs against the Jews, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But these are not all the myths; there are more.

### What are some of these myths?

■ **Myth:** The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority.

**Reality:** The 700,000 non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic services, just as their Jewish fellow citizens. Arabs have complete religious freedom, and full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems, including Arabic and Moslem universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that Jewish young men must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age 50. Young Jewish women serve for two years. The Arabs have no such civic obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. Not too surprisingly, very few avail themselves of the privilege.

■ **Myth:** Israel should give up the administration of Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles.

**Reality:** Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals and admirals. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depths Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.

■ **Myth:** If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea and Samaria it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized.

**Reality:** There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created in the territories. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under Israeli administration, the PLO, the Islamic fundamentalists, and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. Another Lebanon is likely to be a much better prospect. As for demilitarization, it is totally unlikely that – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, all of which are in a declared state of war with Israel at its borders – a power vacuum would be possible or tolerated. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.

■ **Myth:** Israel should make "confidence building gestures" for the sake of peace.

**Reality:** What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Twenty-one of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence". That has been going on for over 43 years. Wouldn't it be about time that the *Arabs* made some kind of a "gesture"? Could they not for instance terminate the state of war? Could they not abolish the economic boycott against Israel that has been in place for over 40 years – long before Israel's administration of the "West Bank"? Could they not stop the yearly charade of attempting the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations? Could they not withdraw that slanderous resolution ramrodded through the General Assembly of the United Nations about 16 years ago that Zionism, the liberation movement of the Jewish people, is racism? Any one of these would be such a "gesture", but none so far is forthcoming.

Finally, after endless negotiating and haggling about procedural details, the parties to the Mid-East conflicts – Israel, the Arab nations, and the Arab residents of Judea/Samaria (the "Palestinians") – have come together in the initial sessions of a peace conference. Not unexpectedly, all the old clichés were once again trotted out, all the old myths resurrected in order to pressure Israel to make "concessions", such as to yield "land for peace", instead of negotiating "peace for peace". Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true ally in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern any peace negotiations.

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