

BETWEEN THE ROCK AND THE HARD PLACE

"Israel," said a friend, "has to *remove* itself from much of the West Bank in order to survive. And in order to survive, Israel has to *hold onto* the West Bank unless conditions change drastically. Talk about being between the Rock and the Hard Place!"

Other people might put it differently, but the basic dilemma was stated fairly. And the recent disturbances and tragic deaths on the West Bank underline that dilemma.

Why does he feel that Israel has to remove itself from much of the West Bank? If the Palestinian Arabs would decide to stay *happily* in a Judea and Samaria as a functional part of Israel, the nature of the Jewish state would be threatened; the Arab population is growing much faster than the Jewish population. If the Palestinian Arabs remain *unhappy* as a functional part of Israel, the nature of the Jewish state would be threatened; Israel would have to become increasingly repressive, and would be constantly at war.

There was once an ivory-tower thought that, if Israel vastly improved the Palestinian Arabs' standard of living, their education, their health care, their basic human rights, they would accept the sovereignty of Israel. Human history suggests otherwise. Indeed Israel has improved all of those conditions for the Palestinian Arabs, compared to anything they had under the Jordanian rule or before that; or compared to anything they have in any Arab land.

But it was the middle class in Europe, not the most oppressed masses, who became the most passionate advocates of nationalism. Zionists, of all people, knew that economic well-being is not enough. The Palestinian Arab aspiration for self-determination now exists, and such an aspiration cannot be stuffed back in the bottle -- except by force, and then only for a while.

Furthermore, even though Jordan is a Palestinian Arab country by majority population, land on the West Bank is still an ineradicable part of Palestinian Arab aspirations.

Why, then, for the sake of peace, shouldn't Israel remove itself from much of the West Bank willy-nilly? Even though Israel has an historic and ancestral claim to the land

of the West Bank, Israel's survival as a Jewish state is paramount. Annexation of the West Bank by Israel might well endanger its survival; but so would its withdrawal from the West Bank under circumstances of PLO dominance.

It has been said before; it has to be said over and over again: the PLO's reason-for-being is to wage permanent war against Israel. This is not a matter of the PLO using this theme of "permanent war" as a bargaining chip. Farouk Kadoumi, the mainstream head of the political department of the PLO, has just said again: "The PLO will *never* recognize Israel or its right to exist."

Israel's attempt to find a solution for survival somewhere between the Rock (a PLO state) and the Hard Place (annexation), lies in its generally overlooked proposal for a graduated autonomy, wherein the military government would be withdrawn; the armed forces would be taken out of the population centers; administrative functions would begin to be performed by the resident population; and, it is to be hoped, a Palestinian Arab leadership would develop which would be willing to live in peace alongside Israel.

There has actually been some Palestinian Arab sentiment building towards such a solution. A number of "village leagues" have emerged, sympathetic to the search for peace; and it should be noted that almost 7 out of 10 Palestinian Arabs live in the rural areas. The PLO obviously doesn't like such a peaceful solution. Seventeen Palestinian Arabs have been assassinated in the past year alone. The PLO has threatened to assassinate anyone who becomes involved in the village leagues. Mayors Karim Khalaf and Bassam Shak became an active part of the offensive against peace; Israel had to move in the direction of a peaceful solution; the PLO moved to disrupt a peaceful solution -- and the West Bank tragedies resulted.