

FIVE SCENARIOS

As Sunday's *Chronicle* editorial and the recent press conference of six Israeli army officers suggest, the West Bank is going to be the focus of much attention in the American media, and of much tension within the Israeli society. Israel's involvement in the West Bank has much more to do with the internal nature of Israeli society than with peace in the Middle East. But a lot of people will be dealing with the West Bank as though it were the key to peace in the Middle East -- which it is not -- so perhaps that issue should be looked at coolly for a moment. Actually, with plot variations, there are only five basic scenarios for what can happen.

Scenario One: *Status Quo*; things continue as they are. Seeing how things are, that is a bad scenario getting worse. Conflict will increase; as will the drain on Israel.

Scenario Two: *Annexation*; Israel extends its sovereignty over the West Bank. As it stands, that would be a bad scenario destined to get worse. The Jewish state would stagger under the huge Arab population and the continued conflict.

Scenario Three: *Turnover*; Israel says to the Palestinian Arabs, "Okay, it's all yours." And *that* would be a bad scenario destined to get worse. The PLO would be in control -- and the PLO leaders across the board have made it crystal clear to all but the village dullard that they are not interested in the West Bank for its own sake, but as a staging area for bigger things. The conflict would escalate.

Scenario Four: *Negotiated Peace Treaty*; ceding much of the West Bank in return for some security. Land adjustments aside, the chief ingredient would have to be a credible non-aggression treaty signed with West Bank Arab and/or Jordanian authorities. Some version of Scenario Four, however hazardous, seems to the majority of American Jews the least hazardous and only acceptable scenario. But there is no current indication that it will be acted out. There are no West Bank Arab or Jordanian authorities willing to make a credible commitment of that kind.

Scenario Five: *Interim Autonomy*; some version of the Camp David framework in which most West Bank regional matters, other than military security, would be administered by West Bank inhabitants for a five year period. Then, there would be further negotiation about the future of the area. During this postponement of the harder decisions, more favorable circumstances might develop, such as the creation of a local leadership more willing to live in peace with Israel.

It would seem that Scenario Five needs to be enacted before Scenario Four can become possible. But even for this limited scenario, there are no signs of acceptance by any Arab authorities.

That's the situation; everything else is tactics. Israeli administration in the West Bank is normally about as humane as any administration over an unwilling and politicized people can be; always heartbreaking. That is the continuing tragedy of Scenario One. The only formal commitment of the Israeli government is to Scenario five. But there is some belief that the Israeli government's proliferation of settlements and hard-line rhetoric signal its underlying commitment to Scenario Two; and make Scenarios Five and Four more difficult to achieve. And there is another belief that Scenarios Five and Four can come about only when the Arab leaders recognize that they have no choice; that a strong Israel, strongly backed by the U.S., is here to stay.