

MUDDLING THROUGH

Peres was once asked how he would handle the problem of Jerusalem in future Arab/Israeli dealings. He said there was no problem. His befuddled audience asked him why he said that.

"In politics," he answered, "there's no solution, there's no problem."

Someplace in that hyperbole, there's an eternal truth. It says that when there is no satisfactory solution for a problem, politicians should not try to force one. They should just sit on the problem in the best possible way until time offers some better options. That's sometimes known as "muddling through."

The "West Bank" - Judea and Samaria - may be a good example. There is no "solution" which anyone has proposed which will bring peace or satisfy the minimum requirements of both Palestinian Arab aspirations and Israeli security. But the status quo is not satisfactory either; it is a time-bomb which threatens everyone.

However, while creative muddling-through avoids any quick or big solutions, it does not just sit on the problem. Creative muddlers will constantly work to defuse the situation, to edge it towards better rather than worse directions, to put it in the best position for time to heal it.

The autonomy plan is such a muddling idea. Give some limited autonomy for a designated period and then see what happens. Go slowly. By time. But it has to be good faith muddling. It will not serve if it is just used as a cover to build the *de facto* basis for a Palestinian state, or to create *de facto* annexation.

Americans don't take well to deliberate muddling-through. They like quick and big solutions. Thus, the American government constantly makes a big mistake in pushing for a "comprehensive solution" for the West Bank, or for Israeli/Arab

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problems in general. They won't work.

In fact, quick and big solutions rarely worked for major domestic problems in America, although we often ballyhooed them as quick and big solutions. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, with its massive intervention, never solved the great depression of the 1930s. It set up some important social systems for the future. It kept the country together. But in 1931 when FDR was elected to fight the depression, unemployment in this country was 16 per cent. In 1938, the year before war broke out in Europe and our industry began to gear up for our entry, unemployment in this country was 19 per cent.

The New Deal did not solve the depression, but it was a brilliant and humane muddling-through. Perhaps we need fewer panaceas, and a little more creative muddling-through, both in the U.S. and in the Middle East.