

ON THE SETTLEMENTS

Two recent events illuminate the growing West Bank ruckus, including the settlements.

First, there was the public opinion poll of Israel's Arab population; those Israeli citizens of Arab descent now living within the regular borders of Israel. Half of them do *not* believe that the State of Israel has the right to exist. Two thirds of them believe that Zionism is racism. If that many Arabs who live as citizens within Israel believe that, how much more do Arabs in the West Bank believe it!

A practical fact emerges. If the West Bank and its population were to be annexed to the State of Israel tomorrow, then about a quarter of Israel's citizenry would not believe in the legitimacy of their own government. Given the fertility rates, that proportion can only increase. But no state can survive with that kind of political force within it, never mind the cultural impact.

A few talk about expelling the Arabs from the West Bank, but let us not engage the moral question. It's just not going to happen. If all that is true, then Israel's survival requires that most of the West Bank take on some status other than an integral part of the State of Israel.

But another instructive event took place the other day: the assassination by the P.L.O. of Hasham Huzander, Imam of Gaza. He was a Palestinian Arab nationalist, no particular friend of Israel, who nevertheless believed in seeking out co-existence with Israel. Any acceptance of Israel's right to exist is intolerable to the P.L.O.

The P.L.O.'s commitment to Israel's destruction is not only attested to by its Constitution, which it refuses to change; but by its periodic assassinations of moderate leaders like Huzander. It would be insanity to assume that an "independent Palestinian State" created tomorrow would be anything but a state actively dedicated to Israel's destruction.

But if Israel cannot afford just to annex the West Bank, or allow it to be established as a separate state, the "simple" solutions are gone. Jordan doesn't want any part of it. Then, Begin's proposals for a kind of effectively demilitarized zone, locally autonomous but without military sovereignty, makes sense. It will mean trouble -- but not the certain disaster suggested by the other alternatives. At the least, it would postpone disaster -- and allow time and a turn of history to create more promising conditions which we cannot now fathom.

That is the real scene now. And on that scene, there is nothing outrageous about the concept of Jewish settlements on the West Bank. There is certainly nothing illegal about Jewish settlements in themselves. No political entity has had recognized legal custody of the West Bank since the British mandate.

If the West Bank is to remain a no-man's land, settlements are obviously needed as security posts against terrorism or worse. Such settlements have saved Israel throughout its history. If the West Bank is to become locally autonomous, then such security posts are necessary pending some other satisfactory arrangements. And if the sovereignty question is to be kept open, as it must be, then the pre-negotiation settlements are a means of doing so. American public opinion will understand hard Israeli decisions as long as they are related clearly to security needs.

Of course, any given settlement, at any given time, might be a *tactical* error. Many Israelis thought that Eilon Moreh was such an error, because it was not clearly enough related to security, and was done in a provocative fashion. Many believe that all *new* settlements are *tactical* errors. But most of those Israelis do not disagree with the concept that a pattern of settlements is needed.

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"On the Settlements"
page 3

Tactical considerations should often shape style, and some particular decisions, although they cannot dominate overall policy. American Jews are not in a position to make technical decisions for the Israelis. Our job is to inform Israelis about the public opinion realities in America; and to inform Americans about the hard realities in the West Bank.

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