

SIX ANNOTATIONS ON SETTLEMENTS

By Yoram Ettinger - September 28, 2004

1. Are Settlements A Major Cause For The Arab/Palestinian-Israeli Conflict?

The Arab/Palestinian offensive against Israel erupted independent of the existence/absence of Jews in Judea, Samaria (J&S) or Gaza. The Jewish communities in J&S and Gaza were erected following the 1967 War, following the establishment of the PLO (1964!), following the 1956 and 1948 wars, the 1929 decimation of Hebron Jews and the expulsion of Gaza Jews, the uprooting of the Jewish communities of Gush Etzion (1920s, '30s and '40s) and following the demolition of Gaza's Kfar Darom in 1948.

2. Are Settlements An Obstacle To Peace?

If 1.3MN Israeli Arabs among 5.5MN Jews constitute peaceful coexistence, why would 250,000 Jews among 2.5MN Arabs in J&S, Gaza be considered an obstacle to peace?! If dismantling Arab communities in Israel is a major violation of human rights, why would the dismantling of Jewish communities be perceived as a contribution to peace?! The fact that no responsible Israeli would consider residing under Palestinian sovereignty, suggests about long-term Palestinian aims, which are the real obstacle to peace. The Oslo Accord does not prohibit settlement activity, and Israeli laws prohibit the expulsion of Arabs or the expropriation of private Arab land, in order to establish settlements.

3. Settlements Are The Barometer Of Palestinian Definition Of Peace.

The hope for peace, on one hand, and the intent to uproot Jewish or Arab communities, on the other hand, constitute an oxymoron. If Arabs cannot tolerate the existence of 250,000 Jews in their midst, what do they mean by "peaceful coexistence"?! How can one talk, simultaneously, about durable peace and about "Judenrein area", and still be perceived as a peaceful person?! Palestinian/Arab virulent opposition to Jewish presence in J&S, Gaza reflects an established, inherent and long-term ideology and strategy, which has been the root cause of the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict. One can claim that settlements are an obstacle to peace, but reality suggests that the litmus test of Palestinian/Arab adherence to genuine peace would be their recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish settlements in their midst.

4. Would The Uprooting Of Settlements Moderate The Conflict?

The Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict has not been driven by despair or territory. The Oslo Accord has provided the PLO/PA with unprecedented hope, territory and legitimacy, and therefore has yielded unprecedented Palestinian terrorism. Prime Minister Barak offered the PLO/PA 98% of J&S , and as a result ignited the Palestinian war of the last four years. The conflict has been driven by the venomous opposition to sovereign Jewish presence in the Middle East and by the hope for Jewish vacillation and eventual cut & run. Thus, the uprooting of Jewish settlements in Gaza and Samaria (disengagement) is perceived as weakness and surrender. It would, therefore, inflame Palestinian terrorism, especially in the Middle East, which tolerates only deterrence- driven, and not concession-driven, peace.

5. Are Settlements Critical For Israel's National Security?

The Gaza Jewish communities of Kfar Darom and Netzarim were founded in 1967 as a result of IDF pressure. The late General Earl Wheeler, former Chmn. of the Joint C-o-S, stated that Israel's presence in Gaza would reduce the terror potential by 80%, constraining incitement, recruitment, training, operation, manufacturing and smuggling of terror supplies and equipment. The 1993/4 disengagement from Gaza and 40% of J&S, caused the tripling of the number of Israeli security personnel in and around Gaza and the appropriate budget. The uprooting of Jewish communities would increase the burden on the IDF and on Israel's budget. Most settlements in J&S are located in strategic areas, and constitute the "Golan Heights" of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. They control major transportation arteries, required for the deployment of troops, hill tops essential for intelligence and surveillance, they constrain the maneuverability of terrorists and they guard 40% of Israel's water reservoir. Uprooting Jewish settlements would divert the fire power, which is currently aimed at them, to Israel's "soft belly".

6. Does Israel have the legal right to erect settlements in J&S and Gaza?

Justice Steve Schwebel, former President of the International Court in Hague, determined that Israel's presence in J&S and Gaza constitute a form of self- defense, and therefore does not constitute "occupation". While the Fourth Geneva Convention refers to "occupiers", and not to self-defense, Israel adheres to its statutes, with regard to Arab human rights. The last legal sovereign power in J&S and Gaza was Britain, which received the 1922 UN Mandate, which allocated the area to the establishment of Jewish national home, including settlements. The 1922 Mandate recognized J&S and Gaza as the cradle of Jewish history, and the foundation of Jewish experience and identity. A nation, which is willing to negotiate away its cradle of history, forfeits its future.

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