

Civil War?

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IT IS NOW FASHIONABLE to say that “*the two-state solution is dead*”. Or: “*Time for the two-state solution is running out.*”

Why dead? How dead? It’s one of those things that need no proof. To say it is enough.

If pressed, though, the fake mourners of the two-state solution give a reason: there are just too many settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem. They can’t be removed. It’s just impossible.

Is it?

TWO EXAMPLES are cited as evidence: the removal of the North Sinai settlements by Menachem Begin under the peace treaty with Egypt, and the removal of the Gaza Strip settlements by Ariel Sharon.

How terrible they were! Remember the heart-rending scenes on TV, the weeping female soldiers carrying struggling settler girls away, the Auschwitz pajamas with the yellow star worn by the settlers, the storming of the rooftops, the rabbis with their Torah scrolls weeping in unison in the synagogues.

All this for just a handful of settlements. What will happen if half a million people have to be removed? Awful! Unthinkable!

Nonsense.

Actually, the removal of the Gaza Strip settlers was nothing but a well-staged tragicomedy. Nobody was killed. Nobody was seriously injured. Nobody committed suicide, whatever their threats. After playing their assigned roles, all the settlers left the stage. Only a handful of soldiers and police officers refused to obey orders. The bulk of the army carried out the instructions of the democratically elected government.

Will the same happen again? Not necessarily. Removing West Bank settlers from the hilltops in the heart of Biblical “Eretz Israel” is something else.

Let’s look at it from close up.

THE FIRST stage of planning is to analyze the problem. Who are these settlers that have to be removed?

Well, first of all they are not a homogenous, monolithic force. When one speaks of “the settlers”, one sees before one’s mind’s eye a mass of half-crazed, religious fanatics, expecting the messiah at any moment, ready to shoot anyone who comes to remove them from their strongholds.

This is pure imagination.

There are such settlers, of course. They are the hard core, the ones who appear on television. The ones who set fire to mosques in Palestinian villages, who attack Palestinian farmers in their fields, who fell olive trees. They have long hair, including side locks, wear the obligatory fringed garment under or over their shirts, dance their odd dances, are so very, very different from ordinary Israelis.

Almost all of these are new-born Jews (known in Hebrew as “*those who go back in remorse*”), and are heartily despised by real orthodox Jews, who would not marry their daughters to them. But they are a tiny minority.

Much more important is the so-called “national-religious” core, the real leadership of the settlement enterprise. They believe that God has given us this land, all of it, and many of them believe that God also ordered them to cleanse all the land between the sea and the river (the Mediterranean and the Jordan) of non-Jews. Some of them believe, anyhow, that non-Jews are not full human beings, but something between humans and animals, as held by the Kabbala.

This group has enormous political power. It is they who dragged successive governments of all parties into putting them where they are—sometimes unwillingly, sometimes more than willingly.

They are concentrated in the smaller settlements, dispersed all over the occupied territories. They have infiltrated the army and the government apparatus and terrify the politicians. Their party is the “Jewish Home” led by Naftali Bennett, the “brother” of Ya’ir Lapid, but they also have close ties with the upcoming young leadership of the Likud and Lieberman’s crowd.

Any government interested in making peace will have to grapple with them. But they are a minority among the settlers.

THE MAJORITY of the settlers are less vocal. They are mostly concentrated in the “settlement blocs” that are strung along the Green Line, extending a few kilometers inside the occupied territories.

They are called “*quality of life settlers*”, because they went there to enjoy the clean air and the picturesque sight of Muslim minarets nearby, but mainly because they got their dream-villas, with the Swiss red-tile roofs, for next to

nothing. They could not dream of ever acquiring anything similar in Israel proper.

A category by itself are the orthodox. Their huge natural increase is crowding them out of their towns and neighborhoods in Israel proper, and they desperately need new housing, which the government is only too happy to provide—in the occupied territories. They already have several towns there, one of which is Modi'in Illit, the border town which is located on the lands of Bil'in, the village fighting an epic battle to get them back.

Quite another story is the settlements in East Jerusalem. The hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews now living in the new neighborhoods there do not think of themselves as settlers at all, they have forgotten all about the Green Line. Indeed, they are quite surprised when reminded of it. It may be just a few blocks away.

ALL THESE categories—and the many sub-categories—must be dealt with separately. For each, there is a different solution.

Let's assume, for argument's sake, that in nine months Kerry's Dream will come true. There will be a signed peace agreement solving all problems, with an agreed timetable for implementation.

Let's further assume that this agreement is approved by a large majority in an Israeli referendum (and in a Palestinian one, too). This would give our government the political and moral power to tackle the settlement problem.

For the Jerusalemites, Bill Clinton had a simple answer: Leave them where they are. Redraw the map of Jerusalem in such a way that "*what is Jewish will become part of Israel, what is Arab will be part of Palestine*".

Considering the immense difficulty of unscrambling the omelet there, this has its attractions, especially if full sovereignty over the Temple Mount and the Old City is restored to the Palestinians (and the Western Wall with the Jewish Quarter remains in Israel).

For the big settlement blocs, the solution is already more or less agreed: territorial swaps. The settlements hard on the border will be annexed by Israel, Israeli territory of equal size (though, perhaps, not of equal quality) will be turned over to Palestine.

This may not be quite as easy as it sounds. Annex the settlements only, or also the land around and between them? And what about Ariel, the "settlers' capital", which is located 20 km inside the West Bank? A corridor? An enclave? And Ma'aleh Adumim, which, if annexed to Jewish Jerusalem, would almost cut the West Bank in two?

Plenty to argue about.

The "*quality of life*" settlers must be bought out. It's a simple question of money. Give any of them an equivalent or an even better apartment near Tel Aviv and most of them will jump at it. Indeed, some polls have shown that quite a number of them would move even today, if such an offer were made.¹

There remain the hard-core settlers, the "ideological" ones, those who serve God by living on stolen land. What about them?

THE SIMPLEST solution was that provided by Charles de Gaulle. After signing the peace agreement that put an end to the occupation of Algeria after a hundred years, he announced that the French army would leave the country on a certain date. He told the more than a million settlers, many of them fourth or fifth generation: If you want to leave, leave. If you want to stay, stay. The result was a last minute frantic mass exodus of historic dimensions.

I can't imagine an Israeli leader bold enough to follow that prescription. Even Ariel Sharon, a brutal person without compassion, didn't dare to.

Of course, the Israeli government could tell these settlers: "*If you can make arrangements with the Palestinian government so you can stay there, as Palestinian citizens (or even as Israeli citizens), by all means do so.*" Some naïve Israelis say: "*Why not? There are a million and a half Arab citizens in Israel. Why can't there be some hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews in Palestine?*"

Unlikely. The Arabs in Israel live on their own land, where they have lived for centuries. The settlers live on "expropriated" land, and they have justly earned the hatred of their neighbors. I don't see how a Palestinian government could allow it.

There remains the hard core of the hard core. Those who will not budge without violence. They will have to be removed forcibly by a strong government supported by the bulk of public opinion, expressed through the referendum.

A civil war? Not really. Nothing like the American Civil War, nor like the present Syrian one. But still a hard, violent, brutal struggle, in which blood will be shed.

Do I look forward to it? Certainly not. Does it frighten me? Yes it does. Do I think it means we should give up the future of Israel, give up peace, give up the two-state solution, the only solution there is?

No!

¹We suggested this to Yitzhak Rabin, but he refused.