

CAPITAL COMMENTARY

April 22, 2002

Seeing Two Sides in the Land of Promise

Creation of the State of Israel in 1948 brought a measure of justice to Jews who had suffered centuries of persecution culminating in the Nazi holocaust. But the creation of that state brought a great injustice to Palestinian Arabs, Christian and Muslim alike, half of whom were displaced or fled in fear and remain refugees to this day.

Not until the secret talks between Israel and the PLO that led to the Oslo accords in 1993 had the two sides held serious negotiations. The promise of Oslo was that finally the two parties would work together face to face to resolve all the difficult issues: international borders for both sides; Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza; the status of Jerusalem; the Palestinian refugee problem; and other specific matters such as water and oil resources.

Palestinians now had a growing hope that they would be treated as equals by Israel and would have their own secure state in all the land taken by Israel in 1967, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. Israel had new hope that the Palestinians would now recognize the Jewish state in its pre-1967 borders so Israelis could live in peace and security.

Today, tragically, Oslo is dead, having been derailed by untold acts of non-compliance, desperation, and sabotage on both sides, including the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in 1995, continuing Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, the failure of the Camp David summit in 2000, and the mounting assault of suicide bombings.

The crisis is now more severe than ever because the Oslo hopes have been dashed and worst fears have returned and intensified. Moreover, there is a growing tendency to see fault primarily on only one side. Some place the burden of responsibility for the current violence on the reprehensible Palestinian suicide bombings. But that overlooks the greater burden of Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, including the ongoing expansion of Israeli settlements in those territories.

If Israel had ended its occupation by 1999, as envisioned by the Oslo accords, there would have been no second *intifada* or wave of suicide bombings. Let us not forget that the Palestinian Authority has accepted the state of Israel in its pre-1967 borders. It is Israel that has still not acted to accept a Palestinian state. There is no doubt that Israel still faces serious threats, but two or three generations of Israelis have enjoyed the benefits of freedom and independence. This is clearly not the case for the Palestinians, still living as refugees or under Israeli military occupation.

Since September 11, Americans have been asking why the Arab and Muslim worlds hate us so. There are many complex answers to that question, but a fundamental fact is that by and large we have not taken the Arabs seriously except for their oil. At least that is what they think. They are convinced that we will defend Israel no matter what it does and that we have no real concern for treating the Palestinians fairly. Despite the unwillingness of our government and media to say so, there is no need to look beyond the bondage and daily humiliation of Palestinian Christians and Muslims to find reasons for this hatred.

President Bush has spoken of his vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. Nothing could be more urgent now than for the United States, with the greatest energy possible, to build on the recent Saudi peace proposal and help guide both sides, without delay, toward the two-state solution that is agreed upon by our European allies, Russia, our Arab friends, and the United Nations.

The sooner there is some justice for the Palestinians, the sooner there will be security for Israel. The obverse is also true: without justice for the Palestinians there will not be peace for Israel.

—Donald A. Kruse
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former American Consul in Jerusalem*

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