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The Promised Land of Milk and Honey

Could it have been? Could the dream still come true?

In 1947, the British, who had the Mandate over Palestine, decided that they had enough of the decades of fighting and slaughter between Arabs and Jews. They washed their hands of the Mandate and turned it over to the United Nations.

What are the facts?

A solution not accepted. Wishing to end the bloodshed and to create a stable and, hopefully, permanent solution to the decades of conflict, the U.N. decreed a partition of the country west of the Jordan River into an Arab and a Jewish state. In deference to Arab Muslim insistence that it was their “third holiest city,” the city of Jerusalem, the focus of all Jewish aspirations for two millennia, was to be “internationalized.” For the Jews this was bitterly disappointing. Still, in order to create their dreamed-of state, to normalize the lives of the Jewish inhabitants, and to make possible the ingathering of the Holocaust survivors, they accepted the partition plan. They declared their state, *Eretz Yisrael* – the Land of Israel – and became a nation. Forever to his credit, US President Harry Truman recognized the nascent state of Israel within minutes of its declaration of independence.

The Arabs rejected the partition proposal out of hand. Instead, six Arab armies invaded the country from all sides. They vowed to wage a war of extermination. The Jewish population of only 650,000 people was lightly armed and almost hopelessly outnumbered. But in an almost Biblical miracle, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might. They suffered horrendous casualties – about 1 per cent of the population. It was as if the United States were to lose 3 million people in a conflict. The Arabs also suffered greatly. Goaded mostly by their leaders to make room for the invading armies, about 650,000 fled the fighting. They were not accepted by their Arab brethren. They were interned and live to this day in so-called refugee camps, slum cities, in which they lead miserable and totally unproductive lives, dependent on the dole of the world. They are consumed with hatred against the Jews who, they believe, have deprived them of their patrimony.

Prosperity despite unending attacks. But Israel was not

allowed to live in peace. Virtually without interruption, it was victimized by attacks from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. There were two major wars: the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Israel prevailed in both. It acquired major territories, most of which, in its never-ending quest for peace, it returned. Following these unsuccessful wars, the Palestinians subjected Israel to almost uninterrupted “intifadas,” essentially one-sided civil wars, in which suicide bombings and other assorted terrors were the main weapons.

Despite these unending tribulations and absorbing close to 4 million migrants from all parts of the world, Israel prospered mightily. Its population is now close to 8

“Then the dream could finally be fulfilled
. . . Milk and Honey could indeed flow.”

million. Over 1 million of them are Arabs. They are Israeli citizens, have all the rights of their fellow Jewish citizens, serve in the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) and in the diplomatic corps. They are full participants in the economic prosperity that permeates Israel. Israel’s product per person is on the same or higher order as that of most European countries. It is a center of science and of culture. Its industrial output encompasses some of the most advanced technology and sophisticated production in the world. Next to Canada, Israel is the most represented country on US stock exchanges. Most major high-tech companies have facilities – factories and research establishments – in Israel.

All of this is admirable, of course. But there is a flip side to this edifying story. That is the fate of the Arab descendants of those who fled Israel in the 1948 War of Liberation. Had they followed the example of the Jews and agreed to the partition decreed by the U.N., they could today be in the same advanced position as Israel, instead of the misery in which they live. Because there is no question that Israel would have been more than willing to enter into a federation with Palestine, in which citizens of both countries could peacefully partake in common prosperity.

Can that dream still come true? Of course it can! Israel has accepted virtually all of the “conditions” for reconciliation on which the Palestinians have insisted, with the sole exception of the demand for the “right of return.” That “right” would swamp Israel with hundreds of thousands of Arabs. And it would with one stroke be the end of Israel as the Jewish state. Even for the thorny question of Jerusalem a compromise could be found. But, having been misled by the thuggish Arafat for decades, Arab Palestine needs a wise leader in order to finally make peace with Israel. In view of Israel’s experience in Lebanon and Gaza and because it would be fatally vulnerable if an armed enemy occupied the Judean heights, the state of Palestine would have to be totally demilitarized and controlled (probably by US military) for compliance. It would be a difficult condition to swallow, but it would have to be the price to gain their own country. But the dream could then finally be fulfilled and peace and prosperity could be extended over all of the Promised Land. Milk and Honey could indeed flow.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
P.O. Box 590359 ■ San Francisco, CA 94159
Gerardo Joffe, President

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