

Those "West Bank" Settlements

Are they really the "greatest obstacle to peace"?

The Palestinians have once again erupted in bloody uprising, an uprising in which so far hundreds have been killed and thousands have been wounded. Even though the terms of a final settlement of the decades-old dispute between Israeli Jews and Palestinians were clearly spelled out in the Oslo Agreement, the Palestinians insist that the so-called "settlements" in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") should be dismantled or, at the very least, that not a single building may be added to them.

What are the facts?

A thumbnail history. In order to gain perspective, some thumbnail history is in order. Large numbers of Jews have been living in these territories since biblical times—without interruption. Most of the Arabs living there are in fact relative newcomers. As the term "Palestine" is understood, it encompasses the entire area now covered by Israel including Judea/Samaria (the so-called "West Bank") and what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. It originally also included the Golan Heights. In 1922, totally contrary to the Mandate of the League of Nations, the British severed the entire area east of the Jordan River and gave it to the Hashemites as

reward for their assistance in World War I. Thus, fully 75% of Palestine, all of which under the Mandate and under the terms of the Balfour Declaration was meant to be a home for the Jewish people, was lost for that purpose. Only the area west of the Jordan River was left for the Jewish homeland.

The "West Bank" occupied by Jordan. In 1947, after decades of strife between Arabs and Jews in the territories west of the Jordan River, the British had enough and relinquished the Mandate. The United Nations proposed a partition plan under which the country (west of the River) was to be divided into respective Arab and Jewish areas. Jerusalem was to be internationalized. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs refused it out of hand. In 1948, on the twice truncated territory allotted to them by the United Nations, the Jews declared their independence and the state of Israel was born. On the same day, six Arab armies invaded the newborn state. In what can only be described as an almost

biblical miracle, the ragged and poorly armed Jews defeated the six Arab armies, though at staggering cost in lives. When an armistice was finally secured, however, TransJordan remained in possession of the "West Bank" and the eastern part of Jerusalem; Egypt retained the Gaza Strip. TransJordan promptly renamed itself Jordan.

Israel recaptures the "West Bank" in Six-Day War. Once they were in possession of the "West Bank" and eastern Jerusalem, the Jordanians immediately proceeded to expel all Jews from these territories and to make them "judenrein". They

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then proceeded systematically to desecrate most Jewish sacred places, cemeteries and houses of worship. No Jews, regardless of

whether they were Israelis, Americans or citizens of any other country, were allowed into the "West Bank" or eastern Jerusalem, the locale of the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. In 1967, Egyptian president Abdel Nasser, joined by the same array of Arab armies that had unsuccessfully tried to destroy Israel at its birth in 1948, launched another war against Israel. He promised that this time he would "drive the Jews into the sea" and into oblivion, once and for all. The Israelis pre-empted and defeated and utterly destroyed the combined Arab might in the Six-Day War, one of the greatest military victories in history. When the fog and dust of war finally settled, the Israelis had not only retained their national territory, but had *repossessed* the territories of Judea/Samaria (later called the "West Bank"), the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and had totally occupied Egypt's vast Sinai Peninsula.

It is clear from this short history that Israel's claim to the "West Bank" is a strong one. By constant repetition, the world has come to think of these territories as "occupied Arab land". Over 200,000 Jews now live there. And why shouldn't they? Why should the Arab countries and the "West Bank" be the only places in the world where Jews cannot live? How can 200,000 Jews living among one million Arabs be "an obstacle to peace"? And why does absolutely nobody care about how many Arabs "settle" in the "West Bank"? The over one million Arabs who live in Israel are citizens, enjoy every civil right, and have nothing to fear from the Jews. Nobody considers them an "obstacle to peace".

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