

Israelis and Palestinians

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In 1187 the city of Jerusalem, held by the Crusaders, was lost to Saladin, and eighty–seven years of control of the eastern Mediterranean coast was soon ended. The creation of a Crusader state in Palestine in 1100 was followed by the building of strongholds or castles on heights, to dominate the countryside. The local population, neither Christian, Jewish or Muslim, never rallied in support of their rulers from the west, and in the end the outsiders could not maintain their rule without the support of the locals. Is this not a lesson for the Israelis, who too brought the technology and the paraphernalia of European society to the Middle East?

Inasmuch as the dream of Arab and Jewish moderates in 1945 to create one state, where both peoples could live in peace, is decisively dead, one must now seek an agreement which would establish two states with acceptable boundaries for both sides. Is this possible? It may be, if only fanatics are not allowed to impose their views on the majority of population on both sides, as they did in 1948. Everyone has forgotten the pre–war cooperation between Judah Magnes, head of Hebrew University and Husain Nashishibi, of a prominent Arab family, in Jerusalem. They even agreed to one state with one currency, with coins reading Israel in Hebrew on one side, and Filastin in Arabic on the other. What happened to these moderate leaders? Husain was killed by Arab fanatics, while Magnes almost lost his life by order of a Jewish Irgun gang. His chauffeur, however, was killed in the attempt. Magnes, it is said, died of a broken heart in New York after 1948. Since that time relations between the two peoples have progressively deteriorated. One cannot return to the past, but surely now enough blood has been spilt to satiate everyone on both sides.

Unfortunately history is made by fanatics, who will stoop to any act to seize or hold onto power. How can moderates and peaceful people succeed

against the determination and ruthlessness of extremists? The main problem in relations between the two sides are the Israeli settlers, who live in their fortresses, like the Crusaders of old, while the countryside is hostile. If this problem could be solved, then chances for peace would be enormously enhanced. But it would take intelligent, well-meaning people on both sides to compromise, and find a solution for the problem of settlements.

A possible scenario would be the following: The Gaza strip is an absurd piece of land which should not be divided as it now is. The Israeli settlers who live there should be given an option to sell their land to Palestinians, obviously financed by the USA and UN, or to remain under Palestinian sovereignty, although for a time, if they wished, they could retain dual citizenship—Palestinian and Israeli. All such land might be converted into *kibbutzim* type to insure joint ownership and responsibility. Similar conditions could apply to other settlements in the middle of Palestinian territory. In the beginning such settlements might have to be protected by joint Israeli and Palestine security forces, with the understanding that the entire area juridically would be under Palestinian rule. Compromises and sacrifices are needed from everyone.

Another question is that of refugees, and they could be allowed to return to Palestine or Israel, provided an Arab family in either area would support a returned family. Older refugees should be allowed to be buried in cemeteries of their old villages. Obviously all refugees could not return, since there would not be enough land or jobs to support them; the UN would need to provide various kinds of reparation or resettlement elsewhere for refugees. The key to success of all the above is the maintenance of one currency in both states, for economics more than politics will help in reconciliation, which, in any case, will be the task of the children of both Arabs and Jews.

There are now a few places where the children of both peoples play together and learn to respect each other. The village of Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salam is an example of such peaceful co-existence. These should be expanded, and more examples of cooperation and friendship need to be fostered, so that the two peoples, and the rest of the world, can be persuaded that peace is possible. Finally the capital of Palestine could be a Vatican-like enclave in east Jerusalem, with no barriers to travel between the two parts. In the long run both

sides will have to return to the dream of the old moderates of both sides, even though it may take generations until sanity is restored to all.