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ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

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HEBRON AGREEMENT AND FINAL SOLUTIONS

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

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It took about ten months, depending on who does the counting, for the Israelis and Palestinians to work out the details of an agreement that had been concluded in substance about two years earlier. Both Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu must now feel that they have done the best they could for their people. And both probably believe that they have achieved more than they would have, had they signed an agreement sooner than they did, which is doubtful. They could reach a conclusion only if they were to consider the short run at the expense of the long run, the direct effects at the expense of the side effects, and their own immediate political circles at the expense of the majority of the Israeli and Palestinian people who want peace as soon as possible. They also could have reached such a conclusion by considering only the benefits accrued while ignoring the costs incurred in the process. It is not inconceivable that both parties could have achieved the same results sooner had they decomposed the contents of the agreement and dealt with each part separately or incrementally.

Mr. Netanyahu managed to clarify and establish details regarding security in Hebron, relations between Israeli and Palestinian security officers, the weapons they will carry, how they conduct peacekeeping jointly, as well as the schedule of redeployment in areas outside Hebron. Mr. Netanyahu might have benefited from the delay by assuring support of his cabinet and preparing the Hebron settlers for the pending redeployment. He might have benefited by trying to lower Palestinian expectations from the tough negotiations for final solutions. He might also have wanted to gain time in order to expand Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories. He might even have planned prolongation of the negotiations in order to gain concessions and aid from the United States in return for complying with US requests for compromise. However, none of these potential benefits could not have been realized by an earlier agreement. On the other hand, an earlier agreement would have spared Israel the costs incurred in the process: loss of human and material capital, time and effort of the negotiating team, energies and efforts of the leaders, and the detrimental effects on relations between Palestinians and Israelis because of the mutual incriminations they aimed at each other. Israel also could have avoided worsening relations with Egypt, Jordan, and other Arab countries.

Mr. Arafat has not fared any better. He might have gained some benefits by bringing the deadline for total withdrawal a few months closer, but he delayed the start of the withdrawal almost by the same length of time. He might have gained some footage by reducing Israel's authority within Palestine after troop withdrawal, but he had to agree to a reduction in the power of Palestinian security officers in Hebron, and to cooperation in fighting terrorism beyond what had been practiced before. He also had to agree to negotiate a probable loss of territory to Israel in the final settlement. However, none of these so-called benefits could not have been realized by approaching them incrementally through a quick

agreement on redeployment in Hebron, nor were any of these benefits of great enough substance to justify the costs incurred in the process: loss of life and material, deeper strangling of the Palestinian economy, and waste of time, energy, and capital which could have been invested more productively in the economy. The Palestinians had finally to agree to surrender twenty percent of Hebron to Israeli settlers and the troops that would guard them.

Of course, most of these observations may make sense only in retrospect. However, there are lessons to be learned from the protracted negotiations. First, it has become evident that a delay in the process does not guarantee the desired benefits, such as expansion of Jewish settlement or securing more land or more concession from each other. Second, it seems obvious that once the two parties had agreed on Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, there was little to gain by prolonging the process. On the country expediting the process might have won cooperation and reciprocity by both parties and appreciation by the international community. Expediting the process would also have released energies on both sides to be utilized in other and more productive functions for their prosperity and happiness.

However the most important effects of the prolonged negotiations, relate to both Palestinians and Israelis. On one hand, they seem to have accepted the reality of their relationship. On the other, they have established precedents that are bound to influence their future and final solutions of the pending conflicts between them. Israelis have shown that they did not want to rule others. The Palestinians have shown that they have accepted Israel as a neighbor. Both have found that they must coexist in Hebron, and that they can by joint effort to safeguard peace and order, and fight terrorism on both sides.

Most important of all is that both have accepted the principle of extraterritoriality as it is applied in Hebron. But if Arab Hebron can accommodate an Israeli sector in its midst, on religious and historical grounds, why could not Jerusalem accommodate both Israelis and Palestinians, as citizens of two separate countries, on religious and historical grounds? And if Arabs and Jews can coexist peacefully in towns and cities in Israel, they can learn to coexist peacefully in Jerusalem, Hebron, and elsewhere in Palestine.

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