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ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

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LAND FOR PEACE OF EXPANSIONISM IN DISGUISE

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It has been fashionable to call for peace by reciting the slogan "Land for Peace" as the Oslo formula. The Arabs are enchanted; the Europeans are proud; the Americans are lukewarm, and the Israelis play the game of unwilling but anxious. Unfortunately this formula of land for peace, as it relates to the Arab-Israeli conflict, is deceptive, biased, and embodies potential instability in the future of the region. If the parties truly want peace with each other, why not trade peace for peace? If they want land of each other, why not trade land for land? The fact is that all parties want both peace and land, but do not know how to go about it in a legitimate manner. The formula of land for peace may turn out to be nothing but a mechanism for disguised Israeli expansion at the expense of the neighbors.

The land for peace formula, as commonly understood, would have Israel give back occupied land in return for peace with its neighbors. Within that framework politicians, media experts, and academicians go on debating how much land Israel would or might give back in return for peace. Israeli authorities, in the meantime, ridicule the idea of land for peace, assert again and again that they would never return to the pre-June 1967 boundaries of the West Bank and Gaza, nor to the prewar boundaries between Syria and Israel. More bluntly they state that they would never give up the whole of the Golan Heights. The fault with this formula and the logic of the perpetual debate is that peace is not a commodity you trade on the market, nor is the land Israel is supposed to trade for peace legally its own. That land belongs to Arab neighbors. Thus, the land for peace formula seems to say that Israel would let her neighbors have back some of their land and surrender the rest in return for peace. Accordingly, the Palestinian would give up parts of the West Bank and Gaza; Jordan would give up parts of the Jordan Valley; Syria would give up parts or all of the Golan Heights for the privilege of having peace with Israel. And Lebanon! Lebanon does not have to give up any land because the whole country is an open stage for Israeli forces.

Another problem with the common understanding of the formula is that it assumes that the Arabs want and need peace more than Israel does. It also assumes that land is more precious for Israel than it is for its legitimate owners, the Arabs. The fact is that Israel has been trying, with a certain degree of success, to expand its domain, while pretending that it is making a sacrifice of land in the cause of peace. The rest of the world watches, some with admiration and high expectations, while others seem indifferent as Israel scores a diplomatic coup on behalf of the land. Unfortunately the impact of such action is that any such expansion will legitimize territorial war gains and, by the same token, will encourage the losers to prepare for future rounds in order to recover any territory they might lose in the process.

Israel has several arguments to justify its continued hold on occupied territories. Certain parts of these territories may seem essential for Israel's security; other parts may seem necessary to safeguard water resources; still other parts may be considered

necessary to allow Jews to settle in the òland of their forefathersó. These arguments might make sense to Israel, but they do not justify expansionism nor do they make sense to owners of the occupied land. Furthermore, such arguments are in contradiction with international laws and conventions regarding occupied territories.

However, Israel's arguments for more land may be justified on the basis of need. If so, there should be other ways to satisfy the need. An alternative approach may be the following: peace for peace and land for land so that both Arabs and Israelis enjoy land as well as peace .

There is little doubt that both Israel and the Arabs are tired of war and are anxious to have peace. There is little doubt either that the Arabs can appreciate Israel's needs for security and water resources, since they too feel the need to attain security and safeguard their water resources. If so then there should be room for negotiation and settlement as follows. First, the parties to the conflict will conclude peace for the sake of peace. They start with an agreement of non-belligerency; Israeli troops will then withdraw from the occupied territories; the Arabs will at the same time renounce all means of violence and forms of threat against Israel. This will achieve peace for peace between the parties.

As to the land Israel needs, there are three legitimate ways to secure the land: leasing, trading, or neutralizing the strategic areas while sharing the economic resources. Israel can approach its neighbors with proposals of leasing the vital territories for such periods that security will be guaranteed long enough to become a normal condition. Israel can approach its neighbors with proposals to trade land for land. Given that the most common perception of legitimate boundaries is the pre-June 1967 boundary line, any reduction of Arab land within those boundaries in favor of Israel would be offset by Israeli surrender of land of equal value. Finally, if leasing and trading do not meet the requirement, security can be achieved by demilitarizing equal areas on both sides of the boundaries between Israel and its neighbors while the shares of economic resources can be negotiated. It is true that demilitarization does not guarantee security, given the nature of arms available to both Arabs and Israelis, agreed demilitarization will minimize the risk and remind the parties of their commitment to peace, and of the benefits of enhancing security for each other.

The Arabs should have little reason to argue against this alternative approach. They will recover the occupied territories and have peace. Israel will attain peace and security and possibly the use of areas it considers strategic for its viability and survival. Israel will in either case be a winner: it will have secured legitimacy within the 1967 borders which gave it almost a third more land than had been allocated to it by the United Nations. Israel will be a winner also in the sense that its neighbors will no longer feel that a part of their land is still under occupation (in spite of a signed peace agreement) and therefore should be liberated. Stability will prevail instead of instability; peace instead of war; and potential harmony and cooperation would replace suspicion, intrigue, and conflict.

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