

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 1988

Letters

Not Too Late for a Palestinian-Israeli Solution

To the Editor:

Your reporting from Jerusalem on recent Israeli-Palestinian clashes is informative and insightful. You overstate the case, however, in suggesting that the Green Line separating Israel from the occupied territories no longer exists, and you prematurely draw the conclusion that the conflict has become a dispute not over the territories but over all of Palestine ("How Long Can Israel Deny Its Civil War?" *Week in Review*, Dec. 27).

There is no question that the Green Line has been fading, and you are absolutely right in pointing out that this change cuts both ways: not only Israeli Jews, but also Palestinian Arabs can come to see Palestine or the Land of Israel as a single entity. But for the vast majority of Israeli Jews the Green Line is still very real; they do not yet see the West Bank and Gaza as integral parts of Israel on a par with the Galilee or the Negev.

Similarly, for Palestinians the line retains its political significance. The Palestinians in Israel proper — the Israeli Arabs — identify with the Palestinian nation, and most of them support the Palestinian political consensus; but they and their Palestinian compatriots in the territories recognize and accept their status as Palestinians with Israeli citizenship.

To conclude, therefore, that the conflict has become, for both sides, a conflict over all of Palestine is misleading (although you rightly point to trends in that direction). On the Israeli Jewish side, only a minority is ideologically committed to the concept of Greater Israel. For another minority, of more or less equal size,

incorporation of the occupied territories into Israel is anathema because of the effect on the Jewish and democratic character of the country.

The majority can go either way — supporting incorporation of the territories into Israel or territorial compromise — depending on the course that a firm leadership declares necessary to insure the security of Israel. True, the Israeli public has not yet been educated by its leaders about the nature of Palestinian nationalism and the difficult choices that will have to be made to accommodate it along with Israel's own legitimate security concerns. But the internal Israeli debate is far from over.

On the Palestinian side, the evidence clearly points to widespread acceptance — both in the territories and in the diaspora — of a solution based on establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside Israel. Moreover, most Palestinians agree to having this state linked to Jordan, although they insist on a solution that provides some political expression to Palestinian national identity.

Participants in recent demonstrations called for an end to occupation and for Palestinian independence without advocating a formula for a political solution; there is no indication that as a group they were rejecting the Palestinian consensus for a two-state solution. This consensus, rather than recovery of all Palestine, is what sympathy strikes by Palestinians in Israel were supporting.

The most worrisome aspect of the current situation is the mood of the younger generation. Younger Israel-

is, who have never known an Israel without the occupied territories and tend to be ignorant about the history of the conflict, may increasingly opt for solutions that pay no heed to Palestinian national rights. Younger Palestinians, despairing of genuine compromise, may increasingly return to solutions that call for elimination of the Jewish state.

Your news reports and such articles as Meron Benvenisti's on Jan. 3 (Op-Ed) perform an important service in alerting us to these trends. To propose, however, that the conflict has already reached that hopeless stage is to ignore that there are other and still powerful trends toward a historic compromise and thus contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies of disaster.

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