

Middle East Options

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "Can the Palestinians Make Peace?" [April], Daniel Pipes comes to the unavoidable conclusion that there can be only one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, he goes even farther, by stating that to think otherwise is "either naive or duplicitous."

I certainly agree with Mr. Pipes's cogent and well-reasoned arguments, but if one follows his logic, all present and putative negotiations that could lead to a binational solution are naive or duplicitous. What is more, any argument for territorial withdrawal by Israel falls into these categories. Mr. Pipes, however, like many of Israel's most articulate and realistic supporters, stops short of using the "A" word—annexation of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.

The objection most often cited to the annexation of these territories is the so-called "demographic time bomb"—the argument that the Arab population is growing so fast that by the end of the century, Arabs will no longer be a minority in Israel. From this argument, the naive and the duplicitous conjure visions ranging from Israel's loss of its Jewish character, to the specter of "apartheid and fascism." Fortunately, two facts easily dispose of this argument. First, the census of Arabs in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza

demonstrates that the population has not grown rapidly, and, in fact, has leveled off and even dropped in recent years. Although relatives living abroad are listed as members of their respective households, since 1967, the Arab population of the territories has grown by 200,000 persons—hardly the "explosion" that was feared. Second, the anticipated influx of Russian Jews which, by some estimates, will reach one million by the end of the decade, would clearly offset even a sudden spurt in the growth of the Arab population.

Why not argue the case for annexation, since all other solutions are impossible? Annexation could include limited autonomy for the Arabs, a solution that even human-rights groupies would agree could bring Israel's Arabs a degree of freedom and a standard of living not available in any other Middle Eastern nation. It also seems to be the only solution which is compatible with Israel's survival.

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DANIEL PIPES writes:

Ruth King admonishes me to the effect that the logic of my argument implies Israeli annexation of the West Bank. Well, maybe my argument leads her to that conclusion, but it doesn't take me there. There are two principal reasons.

First: Mrs. King correctly raises demographics as a central issue—but then proceeds to give incorrect figures. In fact, the Arab population in the occupied territories has increased from almost exactly a million in 1967 to over a million and a half today. A 56-percent increase in one generation sounds like a population "explosion" to me.

Further, the increase in Arab residents would have been much greater except that so many people emigrated to take advantage of the opportunities created by the oil boom. But the economic downturn in the Middle East means that emigration has declined precipitously, and there is no reason to expect it to resume. As for the influx of Soviet Jews, like Arab emigration, it provides a one-time-only boost to the Jewish population.

In the long term, what counts are underlying birth rates, and these are overwhelmingly in the Arabs' favor. According to a 1981 estimate, Muslim women living under Israeli control average 6.6 children per

woman. If there is to be a flat-out demographic contest between Arabs and Jews west of the Jordan River, Mrs. King, surely you would join me in putting your money on the former.

But demographics is not all; politics also count. Most of the two million Arabs living under Israeli control execrate the Jewish state. Therefore, I ask of Mrs. King and those who think like her: of what benefit is it to them or to Israel that they become citizens of Israel? Put differently, is not Israel's first priority to be a Jewish state, with the exact nature of its territory to be determined by the exigencies of this goal? Or is the point to skip over two thousand years and control the lands of an ancient kingdom?

The Lebanese example should caution expansion-minded Israelis: the Maronites had a choice seventy years ago between a small but overwhelmingly Maronite state or a large, diluted one. Foolishly, they pushed for the latter. For fifty-five years, they could delude themselves into thinking they had made the right decision, but in 1975 the Muslims finally sought control of Lebanon. Fifteen years of civil war have exposed the futility of the Maronite choice; and there is no reason to think that an analogous Jewish choice would fare better.

As an American analyst I am always cautious about advising foreign states what to do. That said, here are some of my own thoughts about the situation. I reject three options—an independent Palestinian state (at least until all the Arab states make peace with Israel); Israeli annexation of the West Bank; and Israel's expulsion of Arabs living under its control. What does this leave? Not much. The ideal would be a voluntary exchange of populations, but that is exceedingly unlikely, if only because most Jews have already left their homes in Arab countries.

The only realistic solutions are old-fashioned and unsatisfactory: a West Bank under Jordanian control; a West Bank confederated with Jordan; a Jordanian-Israeli condominium in the West Bank. I propose these not out of enthusiasm but *faute de mieux*. The past century's experience suggests that virulent nationalism cannot be suppressed, except through the most brutal means. Ruling those out, I see nothing better than patched-together efforts that can be adjusted as need demands.