

Comment

Peace: Mideast will-o-the-wisp

Peace, in the Holy Land, remains a shimmering mirage. Talking to anyone from the Palestine Liberation Organization is now a criminal offence in Israel. On the West Bank, Arabs and Jewish settlers are busy killing one another.

The news gets worse. Israel's economy, unable to support huge defence expenditures, teeters on the brink of ruin. Now, Israeli MP and former general Matti Peled charges that more than 200,000 Palestinians have been in and out of Israeli prisons since 1967. If correct, this means that one Palestinian adult male in four has been imprisoned by Israel, a figure that makes South Africa pale by comparison.

Out of this gathering gloom comes one faint beam of light. The Washington-based Foundation for Middle East Peace has just published a remarkable document, *Facing the PLO Question*. This collection of essays will certainly cause uproar in the Jewish community.

In it, Meir Merhav, a member of the editorial staff of one of Israel's leading newspapers, *The Jerusalem Post*, writes that public opinion in the U.S. and Israel must be "pulled back from myth, paranoia and messianic delusion."

He says, simply, that Israel must talk to the Palestinians; there is no other solution to the endless cycle of Middle Eastern wars and terror.

Otherwise, warns Merhav, Israel may become another embattled apartheid state, turning into a "walled-in fortress surviving from one war to the next and paying debts of each war in between."

The next article is even more striking because of its author, Philip Klutznick, past president of the B'nai B'rith International and the World Jewish Congress and



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former U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

He begins: "Conflict between Jewish and Arab claims to the land known to some as the 'Land of Israel,' and to others as 'Palestine' . . . could become a source of world conflagration . . . and must be prevented on an urgent basis."

Klutznick describes how, in July 1982, he, former French Premier Pierre Mendes-France (leader of the French Jewish community) and Dr. Nahum Goldman, President of the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Congress made the "Paris Declaration." They called for mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian people.

Most important, Klutznick reveals for the first time that he and his fellow leaders of the World Jewish community agreed that Palestinian self-determination meant "Palestinian statehood in one form or another." And Klutznick adds that the U.S. and Israel — in their own interest — should begin negotiating with the only Palestinian organization which can "conclude a satisfactory and widely supported agreement"—the PLO.

These words will be anathema to many Zionists wed-

ded to the dogma that all Palestinians are terrorists who can only be addressed from the muzzle of a gun. Give an inch, they will say, and postage-stamp-sized Israel will be swept away by its legion of enemies. But what, ask a few daring Jewish voices, is the alternative to negotiations?

Even posing this question requires courage. Klutznick describes how he, and other questioners of Israel's hard line, "have had our intelligence, as well as our motive, questioned in ways which are not the ways of free people." Many Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of Israel who have tried to prevent it from becoming, in the words of author Arthur Koestler, "a nasty little Sparta" have been subjected to intimidation.

Klutznick and Merhav, Mendes-France and Goldman, all have spoken as traditional elders or rabbis of the Jewish community, wise minds who can see beyond today's passions, warning their people of impending dangers.

Muted voices from the World Jewish Congress have joined them. Little by little, the unthinkable, the unspeakable is being discussed. Other influential members of the American Jewish community are discreetly funding these efforts.

What these leaders are saying is that something must be done now to prevent the sixth Arab-Israeli War from occurring. Israel's economy must be saved from collapsing, and with it the nation's precious democracy. And Israel must not be turned into a colonial state, ruling over two million rebellious Palestinians.

Meir Merhav, sums it all up with razor-sharp logic: "But if we want peace, with whom shall we make it if not with our mortal enemies?"