

Why we can't dump Gaza

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THE killing of three IDF soldiers on Monday has again raised the question of whether we should unilaterally withdraw from Gaza.

Gaza has haunted many Israeli leaders, frequently provoking them - whether through despair or foolhardiness - into curious, if not bizarre, public statements. It was the apparent insolubility of the problem that prompted Yitzhak Rabin to blurt out that his preferred solution would be for "Gaza to sink into the sea."

Even former defense minister Moshe Arens, a staunch longtime opponent of any territorial concessions, has called for a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza.

The despair and confusion evident in such pronouncements have trickled down into public attitudes.

But the inevitable implications of Israeli withdrawal can be ignored only at great peril to Israelis and Arabs alike:

□ First, in the ensuing political vacuum, the most radical and violent elements in Gaza would undoubtedly seize power. In the absence of recognized institutions of government, all the more moderate elements would be speedily eliminated, either politically or physically.

□ Second, the Gaza Strip does not have the means to sustain any semblance of durable economic life. Its water resources are increasingly being salinated through overuse, it has no land reserves, no indigenous sources of energy or power, no existing infrastructure for the conduct of international trade or finance and no supply of human skills which, for example, characterize Hong Kong.

□ Third, those who bewail the ill effects on Israel of large-scale em-

ployment of Gazans must necessarily propose a *total separation* between Israel and the Gaza Strip: anything less would do little to stop the flow of the "undesirable" workers in search of the livelihood their immediate environs cannot provide. A denial of employment opportunities would inevitably increase the frustration and bitterness of the beleaguered population and its potential for incitement, lawlessness and violence.

Moreover, the IDF would only be able to supervise along the northern and western approaches to the Strip. It would have no control over smugglers wishing to enter from the west (via the sea) or the south (via Sinai).

The combination of these three elements is a certain formula for explosive social and political unrest, feeding on a deepening sense of hopelessness, misery and deprivation of the local population; feelings which will inevitably be directed against the most obvious and convenient target - Israel.

THE frustration and despair will manifest themselves in hostile action against Israel as the perceived cause of their privation; our southern settlements and towns will be the targets of frequent attacks, which will compel Israel to retaliate.

But how and against whom? Without a military presence in the region, the IDF will not be able to identify and apprehend those responsible for firing. Air strikes or artillery shelling on civilian population centers would cause heavy casualties among the dense, destitute masses in whose midst the attackers conceal themselves. How would world opinion react?

A unilateral withdrawal from Gaza will do nothing to ease the socio-economic plight of the local inhabitants, nor will it reduce the politico-security problems of Israel; rather it will likely exacerbate

them further.

Even in the highly unlikely event that the international community or Egypt were to agree to accept the responsibility for the administration of the Gaza Strip, how could Israel pursue (perhaps repeatedly) those seeking to murder its citizens into areas administered by UN or US forces, without creating an international furor?

Such retaliatory operations would also significantly increase the chances of military clashes with Egypt, seriously endangering the fragile peace between them.

What, then, is the solution to this festering and intractable problem?

It is essential to realize that no measure, whether total annexation or total withdrawal, can be reconciled with either Israel's security needs or the welfare of the Arab population there.

This is *not* a call for a forcibly imposed racist "transfer" by the Israel, but rather for an initiation of an appeal to enlist international support for the rehabilitation elsewhere of hundreds and thousands of refugees. They are victims of war, held hostage in vile camps - by those purporting to be committed to their welfare.

Such rehabilitation - in countries where the language, religion and culture are virtually identical to their own - should make it one of the most untraumatic in history.

Instead of expounding the merits of a policy of dismantling Jewish settlements or abandoning the fate of Jewish settlers to some autonomous Arab regime (both antithetical to the Zionist ethos), the new leadership charged with the responsibility for the conduct of Israel's foreign policy would do well to devote its efforts to marshaling international pressure in support of this humane and historically imperative enterprise.

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