

THE PROGRESS REPORT

The Solution to the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

By Fred E. Foldvary

Isaiah 59:8 tells us, "The way of peace, they know not." Events are hurling Israel/Palestine down a spiral to ever more fearsome conflict. Suicide bombers wrecked terror to disrupt the peace process, killing 14 Israelis in Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Arafat's government of not doing enough to curb terrorism and arrest those responsible. The Israeli government shut the border, banned travel by Palestinians, and withholds tax revenues that pay the government workers in Palestine. The Palestinian authority in turn has retaliated. Yasser Arafat's government now threatens to boycott Israeli products.

Why have terrorists on both sides sought to stop "the way of peace?" Because they don't like the direction it is taking. Extremist Israeli Jews insist that the West Bank should remain part of Israel, as its historic Samaria and Judea. Extremist Palestinian Arabs demand total possession of the West Bank, and then the rest of Israel as rightfully Arab. The heart of the conflict is land: two peoples claim to own the same piece of territory. Splitting the land and separating the two peoples is difficult because the populations are now intermingled, Israeli Jews having resettled the Judea-Samaria West Bank, and Palestinian Arabs having become dependent on jobs in Israel.

The problem with the peace process is that the two sides set forth on a path whose destination was unknown. Without a known goal, fearing the worst, extremists on both sides have sought to halt the process with violence, and they succeeded in derailing the caravan to peace. What is needed is a clear destination, and one that satisfies the desire of both sides for justice. Most Israelis and Palestinians are willing to co-exist, but only if they feel the ultimate settlement does not betray their quest for a homeland.

But how can two peoples justly occupy the same land? The main principle of justice is equality. Each side should recognize that the other has a just and equal claim to live in Israel/Palestine. The just solution to the land question is to endow each resident of the territory an equal claim to the land.

To implement an equal share of the land, it is not necessary to reassign the land titles, or force people to move. There is no need to physically redivide the land itself, but rather the benefits of the land. And the benefits of the land are manifested in the value of the land, which can be measured by the rent that people are willing to pay to be located in the land.

The solution to the land question in Israel/Palestine is to make each Israeli and Palestinian resident a common owner of all the land there, and then to have each person that possesses land pay rent to the people as owners. The more valuable land one side occupies, the more rent it will have to pay. Land would be held at a price. A market for land would replace the conflict over land.

To whom would the rent be paid? Certainly not to the Israeli or the Palestinian governments. Instead, there could be a confederation of the two governments. The rent would be paid to the confederation, which would then allocate some of it to the two governments and use some of it for common territorial services, such as environmental protection. The confederation could also have courts to resolve disputes between Israelis and Palestinians, and also have authority over common resources such as water.

The concept of sharing the land was recognized by the religious philosopher, Martin Buber, who settled in Israel. In a 1956 article, "Socialism and Peace," Buber wrote that the only thing that can bring about peace in Israel is "a just distribution of the soil, and the formulation of small communities which would be organic cells of this new economy and this new society" (*A Land of Two Peoples*, 1983). But he said he had no blueprint of how to bring this about. Economics offers the blueprint: a just distribution of the rent of the soil, because the rent can be easily collected and divided.

If this economic solution can be made known, discussed, and then implemented, then the Israelis and the Palestinians can set forth together on an upward spiral to living together in peace. With a known and just destination, then those extremists will not be able to disrupt the peace process, because the two peoples will have already settled on a just solution.