

**“SECURITY” VERSUS
“RIGHTS”: A Different View
of the Israeli-Arab
Communication Problem**

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OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS NO single answer to Israel's communication problems. But, it began before the “peace in Galilee” or the “invasion of Lebanon.” Take your choice.

More and more, Israel was being “boxed in” to the position of “security,” while “human rights” have been left to the PLO and the Palestinians.

The issues are great. Words alone won't cure them. But, they may very well affect them or how they are perceived.

Language has played a large part in the isolation of Israel and has created an atmosphere of misunderstanding and hostility which threatens the very existence of the State of Israel itself. Its support from many sources throughout the world is beginning to erode.

The “right” of Israel to exist began to disappear. Hardly anyone emphasized the “human rights” of the Jewish people whose very origin is in Palestine and the Land of Israel.

The “legal” action of the United Nations in bringing Israel into being fades into argument and rocket fire on the Israeli-Lebanon border.

Israel's Jews are pictured as lepers in a territory which they have never left for thousands of years.

The “inalienable legitimate rights of the Palestinians” to a “home-

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land" are often heard of. Israel's "security" is "guaranteed," but its "rights" are seldom mentioned.

Jordan refused for almost twenty years to permit a single Jew to live or worship in East Jerusalem at the Western Wall. There was no hue and cry about the "rights of the Jews" to worship.

Jordan enacts legislation that makes it a crime "punishable by death" for a Jordanian citizen to sell even so much as one foot of property to a Jew on what is called the West Bank. No hue and cry are raised about the "rights" of Jews.

Israelis and even many Americans have become obsessed with the word "security," a word which arouses very little sympathy or support from anyone.

The United States makes verbal guarantees of "security," including those of its own diplomats or employees in foreign countries. Events have proven that these "guarantees" are not the same as "security" and that American citizens serve at their own peril.

Anyone who believes the United States will or should send troops to Israel to "guarantee" the "security" of Israel is living in an unreal world.

But, realistically enough, the United States still has troops in West Germany, Japan, and other places — while at the same time granting these countries sovereignty with no apparent problems.

Israel, however, is not allowed one soldier to protect the rights of its Jewish citizens in even the tiny village of Yamit on the Israeli-Sinai border.

There are those who insist that words are not important. They can insist, but they are living in an unreal world.

Human "rights" which do arouse people's emotions were one of the basic elements of President Carter's recent entire program. But, human "rights" for Israelis are lost in the shuffle even by Carter.

"Security" stirs no emotions. Proof that human emotions play a large part in actions is evident all around.

The Talmud itself, a commentary on the Old Testament, labors over the content and the meaning of words at great length. Students become very emotional over the words and the meanings they attribute to them.

Purists and politicians can insist that "words" are idle "public relations talk," and the real "thing" is "action."

But, in the real world in which we live, there is ample evidence that we live by emotions and words and that we die by emotions and words in the same manner.

Words play a major role in how people perceive situations to be. Israel sends troops into Lebanon to "gain peace in the Galilee." The Defense Minister then talks about "finishing them off," as he refers

to the PLO holed up in Lebanon. To many, this doesn't sound like "peace" talk. The perception of the media concerning Israel's actions is reported accordingly.

Israel complains of unfair and distorted reporting. The media contend that Israel's words dictate otherwise; she gives out little information; their censorship is immature, unreal, and its news releases are sometimes less than accurate. Israel does not appear to give as much importance to its "communication" with the media as to its own actions in the field, which it expects the media to understand. Studies in this area may reveal some of the answers to Israel's dilemma.

Arabs attach great significance to their communications. Yasir Arafat suddenly begins to smile; he holds little wounded or tearful children in his arms; he retreats from West Beirut saying he is doing so to "save women and children"; he is no "terrorist"; he cares about human beings.

The PLO itself replaces its avowed declarations that the "blood of Jews will run in the streets of Tel Aviv" with its "real goal" of a "democratic secular state" — being aware all the time that such a state really means the demise of Israel.

Israel's policy is being viewed as "intransigent," "stubborn," "colonialist," "conquerors," "racists," etc. These are emotional "words" which endanger Israel's place in the world.

The results of the use of this language run the gamut from periodic denunciation in the United Nations to condemnation of everything Israel does or attempts to do, almost by the rest of the world. This appears in various different forms as the reassessment of policies vis-a-vis Israel; in the withholding of arms to Israel; the delay of funds; efforts to sway public opinion against Israel, etc.

The obsession, even by the Israelis, with the word "security" (and I distinguish that from the act of "security" itself) has not seemed to be understood or constructively applied. It has not helped the Jewish position in the world community. "Security versus Rights."

The question raised is: Is the current language, the semantic ploy of the Arabs, effective and, if so, how much?

The answer may be found in almost every utterance dealing with the Middle East, beginning in the White House and threading its way through just about every government agency or official. What is heard are the code words — "legitimate rights of the Palestinians."

By using this kind of language, an air of "moderation" is given to those who were only recently shelling civilian population centers in northern Israel.

Harold Saunders, that astute former Under Secretary of State for Mid-Eastern Affairs, began almost every speech and every statement

dealing with the Middle East with what became a ritual. "Israel's security is a must," etc. From there, he is off and running to the "legitimate rights of the Palestinians."

Moshe Sharon (not General Ariel Sharon), writing in the *Jerusalem Post Weekly*, makes a point. His main thesis is "preoccupation with security has blinded Israel's leaders to the Jewish people's historic entitlement to the land of Israel." He points out how, when the Arabs (whether Palestinians, Egyptians, Syrians, or Saudis) talk, they speak in terms of "rights." Israel speaks in terms of "security."

He further points out that Israelis are being branded as an "obstacle to peace" . . . using this term to describe Israel's push for "security."

Sharon does not deny that oil is generally the blackmail weapon used on the rest of the world. But, he also says that oil is only one component that has resulted in bringing Israel into almost total isolation in the international community.

The need for "security" would not seem to be the major question. But, how the words or the terms are being used and how they affect the situation could supply some of the essential answers.

Sharon points out that many Israeli leaders and politicians present the "security" of the State as the single most important factor in determining Israel's policy toward a peace settlement with its Arab neighbors. That usually means that the "historic rights," "national aspirations," the "cultural and religious roots" of Jews who never left that part of the world for over twenty centuries are subdued, suppressed, and dismissed.

Sharon contends, interestingly enough, that throughout history, Jews have never been "secure." Nor will they now be more "secure" by the use of this word weapon. In fact, the use of the word itself may have become counterproductive.

Abba Eban, writing in the *Jerusalem Post*, makes some points in this regard. Eban says, in part, "There is a new vocabulary since the Lebanese conflict. It includes special verbs, 'to pound,' 'to crush,' 'to liquidate,' 'to eradicate,' 'to the last man,' 'to cleanse,' 'to fumigate,' 'to solve by other means,' 'not to put up with,' 'to mean business,' 'to wipe out.'

"It is hard to say what the effect of this lexicon will be as it resounds in an endless and squalid rhythm from one day to the next."

Anyone who believes that actions do not influence events is obviously living in an unreal world. But, anyone who does not believe that words influence public perception and ultimate action and results is living in an equally unreal world.

Ariel Sharon's "we will finish them off" has changed the thinking

— and the perception — of Jews and Israelis, even among Jews themselves.

The United States has also played its part in the verbal confusion which was of such importance.

For example, on Wednesday, September 1, 1982, President Reagan made a speech on the Mid-East to which the whole world seemed to be tuned in. Again, there was an absence of reference to the "rights" of Israel, but again and again there was a reaffirmation of Israel's "security." "Rights" are reserved mostly for the Palestinians.

Some significant quotes from the speech tell part of the story:

" . . . Throughout this period of difficult and time-consuming negotiations, we never lost sight of the next step of Camp David, autonomy talks to pave the way for permitting the Palestinian people to exercise their *legitimate rights*.

" . . . The question now is how to reconcile Israel's legitimate 'security' concerns with the *legitimate rights* of the Palestinians.

" . . . I call on Israel to make clear that the 'security' for which she yearns can only be achieved through genuine peace, a peace requiring magnanimity, vision and courage.

" . . . I call on the Palestinian people to recognize that their own political aspirations are inextricably bound to recognition of Israel's *right (sic) to a secure future*.

" . . . The State of Israel is an accomplished fact; it deserves unchallenged legitimacy within the community of nations. But, Israel's legitimacy has thus far been recognized by too few countries, and has been denied by every Arab state except Egypt. Israel exists; it has a *right* (note, this is the only mention of "right" for Israel) to demand of its neighbors that they recognize those facts.

" . . . The Camp David agreement recognized that fact when it spoke of the *legitimate rights* of the Palestinian people and their just requirements.

" . . . will Israel be able to rest confident in the knowledge that its *security* and integrity will be respected by its neighbors.

" . . . Further settlement activity is in no way necessary for the *security* of Israel.

" . . . At the same time, such a transfer must not interfere with Israel's *security* requirements.

" . . . that threatens the *security* of Israel. America's commitment to the *security* of Israel is ironclad.

" . . . I am convinced that these proposals can bring justice, bring *security*, and bring durability to an Arab-Israeli peace.

" . . . The United States will stand by these principles with total dedication. They are fully consistent with Israel's *security* requirements and the *aspirations* of the Palestinians."

In the President's twenty-minute address, these excerpts are about the sum total of the references to "rights" and "security." It seems to me that they speak volumes.

Will the United States, the PLO, the Arab states, the Palestinians, or Israel benefit or learn from a study of their communication, both good and bad?

If so, what, if anything, will they do about it?

In the meantime, would Israel be better off or make any constructive progress if it asserted more authoritatively its "rights" in the Middle East and refused to deal with or talk to or plan anything with anybody who did not recognize its "right to exist" as a preliminary step to any further discussions?

No one but parties involved can answer that.

First and foremost, there needs to be an awareness of the very important role communication has played in the past in the Middle East and, even more importantly, the role it will play in the future.

It's a good question for everyone . . . not just the Israelis!