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THE TRUTH ABOUT THOSE PO-LI-TI-CAL SETTLEMENTS

MANY years ago, the arch-wizard at fundraising, Meir Weisgal of Rehovot, was trying to dissuade a friend from diverting money to a co-educational school. "Do you know," he said in dramatic tones to the friend, who had only a fragmentary knowledge of English - "do you know what goes on in that school? The boys and girls - they mat-ric-u-late together!" It is not difficult, with the proper intonation and frequent repetition, to give the most innocent word or phrase a pejorative connotation. Prime Minister-designate Rabin has found this to be a magic formula for resolving his special predicament: to explain, in the midst of his propaganda campaign against "settlements" that there are some settlements to which he actually does not object.

He confers on them the title "security"; most of them are in the Jordan Valley and in the Jerusalem area. All the others are to be called (with the accompaniment, no doubt, of an appropriate sneer) "political" settlements. Somewhere in Mr Rabin's mind and in the minds of his Labor colleagues, is the vague idea that it is necessary to stop building Jewish communities in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district because their existence is an impediment to handing over the heartland of Eretz Yisrael to the Arabs.

True, nobody in Mr Rabin's prospective team talks of promoting the establishment of a "Palestinian" state. They only talk of autonomy; but everybody knows that once an autonomy administration is set up, the inevitable next step will be the demand and the pressure for statehood. Indeed the Arabs have repeatedly made it plain (Arafat did so only a few days ago) that the only autonomy they can think of accepting must be accompanied by a guarantee that it will be converted into an independent state, and that it must be preceded by an Israeli withdrawal from "all the territories," etc., including Jerusalem.

However, there is an immediate Jewish impediment to Mr Rabin's idea and that of his Labor colleagues. Judea, Samaria and Gaza contain a flourishing population of Jews, living, working, bringing up families. There are by now something like 130,000 of them.

They have not displaced anybody, they are living there legally, and Mr Rabin himself has assured us that they will receive the same service from the State as all other communities in Israel. There is yet another stark obstacle to even theoretical Arab acquiescence to Mr Rabin's idea. He himself has stated it.

It is precisely that reference of his to "security" settlements - to which autonomy would not apply. They are there, in the Jordan Valley. And Jerusalem; that exists too.

Without Jerusalem - so the Arabs have persuaded themselves - no Arab will dare agree to anything at all. WE would do well, however, not to ignore the true implications of Mr Rabin's differentiation between kinds of settlements. It is, after all, a child of the original Allon plan - which contemplated giving the Arabs most of Judea and Samaria - as a demilitarized province of Jordan.

No Arab leader ever responded favorably. Now Mr Rabin has revived the idea obliquely, insinuating that Israel's security (against attack from the east) would be adequately assured by control of the Jordan Valley and an expanded Jerusalem. It is true that in every country in the world a microscopic examination of the terrain will show that

there are some more easily defensible areas, and some less easily defensible.

When, however, you are preparing a defense line you must already know the answer to the question, where is your second line of defense, and your third. No modern development has removed the need for defense in depth. Mr Rabin implies that Israel can do without.

What indeed would happen if an Arab attack from the east overran the Israeli defenses in the Jordan Valley, and their rear, the terrain to the west, the Samarian high ground, were in sovereign Arab hands? No. This tiny country, this Western Palestine, cannot be cut up into a checkerboard of security areas and non-security areas. The country in its totality is one whole security unit; and the crucial element for its defense is the control of its "spine," the mountains of Samaria and Judea.

It is not surprising that the best military brains in the US examining the problem of Israel's defense and expressly excluding political considerations have repeatedly come to the same conclusion. Immediately after the Six Day War the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee documented its views on the minimum territory Israel required for its security needs. Its content was (for obvious reasons) kept secret for 16 years.

Stressing the importance of the "high ground," its map showed that, except for a swath along the Jordan River, all of Samaria, as well as Judea, Gaza and the Golan Heights, must remain in Israel's hands. Seven years later, independently, the US Army War College accepted a study of the same question by Col. Irving Kett, and recommended it to officers serving in the Middle East.

In 1991, Gen. Thomas Kelly, the director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf war, declared bluntly to a meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations in New York: "It is impossible to defend Jerusalem unless you hold the high ground. I look out from those heights and look onto the West Bank and say to myself, 'If I'm the chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, I cannot defend the land without that terrain.

They only have to go to the high ground running north and south in the middle of the country

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