

After 100 Years of Middle East Conflict – an Honorable Solution

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Some chapters of the book already appeared as blogs in „The Times of Israel“:

The Religions’ Potential to Contribute to Peace in the Holy Land. A dream image for the UN-Center in Vienna on the occasion of the Interfaith Harmony Week of 2017 C.E.: the PM of Israel, Benyamin Netanyahu, re-enacting the scene behind the origin of “Israel”:

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/religions-potential-to-contribute-to-peace-in-the-holy-land/>

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/two-israels-two-tricks-two-offended-brothers-two-deadly-threats-two-reconciliations-peace-through-authenticity/>

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/good-news-about-peace-in-the-holy-land/>

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/why-did-the-imam-of-al-azhar-visit-the-pope/>

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/naqba-how-a-new-interpretation-of-facts-on-both-sides-can-create-a-reality-in-which-both-sides-become-winners/>

The Settlements – an Opportunity for Peace

(pp. 61-62)

The Israeli settlements in the West Bank are usually seen in European and American media as an obstacle to peace. For this reason, president Obama promised even before he took office to stop all further expansion of the Jewish settlements. Nearly all European governments welcomed this statement.

After it became clear that the Israeli government would not act accordingly the Palestinian leadership threatened to break up all further peace negotiations or even to start a new intifada. Palestinian President Abbas threatened to step down and said he would not be available for another term in office – because if he did not step down, Fatah, the political party of Abbas, would be accused of collaborating with Israel.

Public opinion in the Western hemisphere leaned more and more towards condemning the Israeli settlements. More and more the media are demanding that Israel, to attain a peace treaty, evacuate the settlements.

Throughout the West, the political left is united behind this view. They speak of an Apartheid-system, and accuse Israel of trying to shrink Palestine to a few urban centers in order to annex the greater part of the West Bank.

Unfortunately, not a single Western politician seems to have seen the opportunity the settlements are offering – and if any of them could see it, they lacked the courage to speak about it.

But despite this cluelessness – there has never been a greater opportunity to make peace in Palestine, not in spite of, but because of the Israeli settlements on the West Bank. That opportunity would be lost, if Israel were to decide to evacuate the settlements, because it is precisely their existence that provides the opportunity – even though even Israeli politicians seem hardly able to recognize that.

Some Israeli politicians may indeed have intended what the European left is insinuating: to erode the West Bank by reducing Palestine to a few conurbations and to annex the rest. But even if that might have been one of the motives for building the settlements, now, since they exist, the settlements offer a real, if unintended, opportunity to make peace – and Israeli politicians, Western politicians, and the politicians of the Muslim world would do well to forget about the motives of yesterday, recognize a chance, when they see one, and grasp it.

The opportunity comes from not evacuating the settlements and it comes from not integrating them into Israel proper, rather the opposite. The opportunity arises from the presence of a Jewish minority on the West Bank.

Just turn all of the West Bank and Gaza, including the Jewish settlements into the new state of Palestine – and, as the latest edition of the Arab peace initiative does, provide for some swaps of territory.¹

This will produce a Palestinian state with a strong Jewish minority and a Jewish state with a Palestinian minority.

The Jewish minority in the new state of Palestine will insist, under all circumstances, that their minority rights must be protected by international treaties. The international community will see to it that these rights are duly protected, if necessary by stationing an international strike force in the new state of Palestine.

This will have consequences for the Arab minority in Israel. Their territory will thus not be swapped for the territory of the settlements, as has been suggested, quite the opposite, their rights will now be guaranteed internationally, in parallel to the rights of the Jews in the West Bank. In Israel proper, troops will hardly be necessary, but clear and internationally enforceable rules will.

Grabbing this opportunity will create at long last two states with a minority in both of them which will have to be protected by the international community – at least until life there has normalized.

Such a peace will create equal conditions in each of the two states. Now, Israelis and Palestinians will be able to meet on equal footing.

And a fundamental longing of religious Jews will now find fulfillment, because now they will be allowed to settle and to feel at home in all places of Biblical importance. The same rule will have to apply for religious Palestinians, Christians and Muslims.

As a consequence, the economy in the new state of Palestine will start booming. International investors will come and put their money to work, because now it will be safe to invest. And the Palestinians will rebuild their country in no time. The world will see another economic miracle.

A new economic community will come into existence, at first probably with Jordan, Egypt and Turkey as additional partners, but bit by bit other States of the neighborhood will join and finally, even Iran will put aside its separatist and competitive attitude and ask to become a member.

¹ The basic idea behind my suggestions is the nearly general request that the solution be based on international law. Admittedly, the UN declaration of partition of 1947 posed an injustice to most of the people of Palestine, because it meant that an alien population from abroad would occupy large portions of the country, but to the Jews it meant relief from the unimaginable suffering they had to endure – mostly at the hands of European powers – by the protection the Jewish partition could offer to them. That protection is the aim of the UN declaration of partition and that protection is an essential part of the intention of international law.