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WILL THERE BE PEACE?

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Incremental Buildup and Sudden Mutation

The sudden turn of events in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians reminds us once again that despite theories of evolution, great political and social changes are more likely to come by mutation, after a period of incremental developments, and that both are necessary. Without incremental buildup, the environment is not open to the mutation, and even so, the mutation's survival remains in doubt until it passes its birth crisis. If it is a mutation that responds to a changed environment in an appropriate way, it survives and may even thrive. If it is not, it dies like a freak. This is as true in human events as in biology.

We are presently witnessing that process taking place in Israel's relations with its immediate neighbors. Most of us — supporters, opponents, and (if there be any) fence-sitters

— are hoping that this will be a mutation for peace and that it will take hold. Most of us are skeptical, even fearful, with regard to its likely success and even survival.

As an analyst as well as a human being, a Jew, and an Israeli, it is not easy to approach what has happened with a clear head. First of all, one is never simply an analyst. One is simultaneously whatever else one is. As a human being, who is also Jewish and Israeli, the hope for and the promise of peace cannot help but pull at what Abraham Lincoln described as "the better angels of our nature." Peace may be difficult to grasp but it is easy to envision — the hopefulness, the prosperity, the contentment, the lessening of danger, the opening of opportunity, the saving of life. Sitting in the pleasant climate of Jerusalem in the late summer, even a realist hopes that the peace will create a human climate similar to

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the climate outside. Even if it remains a little too hot, it is dry and even and life-sustaining. Yet as a human being with the baggage of one's Jewish and Israeli experiences and those of one's forebears, one cannot help being nervous if not downright skeptical. There are so many pitfalls along the way to peace and even as we tell ourselves that peace is worth the risk, we can see how deep those pitfalls might be and how little opportunity we are likely to have to retrace our steps if they turn out to be missteps.

Now the nations of the world are trying to reassure us as to the feasibility of the risks, to promise us support and in some cases even guarantees. But we Jews of the post-Holocaust era have forgotten the lessons at least partially learned by our forebears that the world does not owe us a living (although at times we seem to think that it does), that the nations have long since come to believe that the debt to the Jews incurred by their behavior during World War II has been sufficiently repaid and, while we present our claims again and again, they are more often than not ignored or put off. So not only do the nations not owe us a living, but they are not going to provide one for us. Their encouraging noises of today are likely to be worth as much in a pinch as were their guarantees in late May and early June of 1967 when Israel saw itself faced with the choice of a war for survival or destruction. Indeed, for those of us whose historical memories are strong, the words of blessing from the Europeans and the pope seem to be the height of arrogance and hypocrisy at a time when neither can do anything to save the Bosnians and, indeed, contributed much to the disruption of Yugoslavia by callous, insensitive and self-interested actions within the last few years.

Uneasy with Israel's Negotiators

Nor is it easy or altogether sound to separate the negotiation from the negotiators. Prime Minister Rabin is quite correct when he repeats the old aphorism that one makes peace with one's enemies, not with one's friends (although sometimes that might be necessary, it also may be even more difficult), and to do that one must not only take risks but swallow certain past grievances, even severe

ones. The problem is where to draw the line. And none of us know the right answer, a priori. Moreover, when the negotiators for your own side are those who, however admirable they may be as people, hold positions which one believes are so diametrically different from Israel's security needs and as Jews are forever willing to sacrifice practice as principle, red lights go on.

This intense commitment to principle, even at the expense of practicality or recognition of reality, is an old Jewish trait, not confined to the left or to the right, but the common property of our people. (Most of us take great pride in it, but it is not conducive to good statesmanship.) In this case it is those of the left, most specifically, Meretz and that faction of the Labor party led by Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, who have already made up their minds that the Palestinians should have a state and a presence in Jerusalem for reasons of principle, who are worrisome. In the long run they may be right and in a democratic age it is hard to object to their principle that every people should be able to rule itself, that the Palestinians have a long-standing claim in this land, even if it must take second place to the Jewish claim in certain things.

But even that statement is fraught with ambiguities. What is a people? Who is a people? Who decides? After what tests and measures? What kind of claims do the Palestinians have? To what extent must they be separate from the Jewish claims? Exclusive? And to what extent can they be shared? These are only some of the questions for which the Israeli negotiators have already determined on firm answers that are more to the liking of their Palestinian counterparts than to many, it seems even a majority, of their Israeli compatriots.

As we know from history, even people whom we think are approaching matters erroneously sometimes succeed better than those who are "right-thinking" in achieving what we all want to achieve, so we must separate our opinions of the negotiation from the negotiators to an extent — but only to an extent. In some respects, at least, who the negotiators are does weigh heavily on our perception of the negotiation. That is why it was

easier for Menachem Begin to give back all of Sinai than the Labor party.

The Rabin-Peres Rivalry

Moreover, in the case of these negotiations, there is an added complication and that is the long-standing rivalry between Mr. Rabin and Mr. Peres for the senior position in the Labor party and hence in the government. These are two talented men, each of whom in his own way has achieved much, neither of whom could have achieved this present step in the peace process without the other. Hard as it may be for them to live together, Peres has a breadth of vision that allows him to take chances, while Rabin has a solidity that enables him to consider the meaning of risks. Peres's imagination seems to soar; Rabin brings reluctant people along with him because he seems to have his feet so firmly planted on the ground. Yet the nagging feeling remains that, though these men are patriots, seriously and honestly concerned with Israel's security, especially in their own minds, who see what they are doing in the context of Zionism and Israeli security, what if in the last analysis their choices are made primarily in the subconscious hope that those choices will help them achieve or sustain them in the public positions that they seek? They themselves would vigorously deny that and, on one level, they would be absolutely correct. Who among us has not made "objective" decisions that managed to coincide with our subjective interests even when other options are open that may be preferred but which do not so coincide, without even knowing that we do so.

From all of this, an opportunity has been opened which cannot and should not be dismissed. The terms of the letters exchanged between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin seem to fulfill the conditions which we set forth long ago, that our Palestinian partner had to recognize Israel's legitimate and secure existence as a state, renounce terrorism, and renounce those portions of the Palestinian Covenant that called for Israel's destruction. The draft agreement printed in the Israeli and American press, while filled with ambiguities, seems to provide a basis for further negotiations along acceptable lines.

What Role for Federalism?

There are some problems. For example, the agreement in many respects seems to echo not only the ideas put forward from the Jerusalem Center in the 1970s but even their latest formulation calling for a Palestinian-Jordanian federation, confederated with Israel, with one important exception. The terms have been shifted to call for a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation with joint authorities with Israel. This could be merely a symbolic change designed to satisfy the symbolic needs of the Palestinians or a very real, substantive change which is fraught with danger for Israel: the danger of a separate Palestinian state west of the Jordan river and the danger of an insufficient Israeli presence in the territories once relinquished to the Palestinians. This certainly remains to be negotiated.

Even if matters do work out in the direction of sharing the territories in question, can the parties involved sustain that sharing through federalism, of which confederal arrangements, including joint authorities, are a species, which is predicated on the proper combination of self-rule and shared rule? Shared rule is a great deal to expect under the present circumstances. Perhaps the most we can hope for is joint rule within a properly constitutionalized framework that requires the establishment of joint policies but more separation in their execution than might be desirable in principle. (Again, there is the question of principle and practice, where neither side has shown the ability to make easy accommodations.)

Short-Range vs. Long-Range Approaches

In the conduct of those negotiations Israel faces another dilemma, hinted at above. Israelis tend to think short-range in their negotiating style on the assumption that only the short range is negotiable, that the long range is fraught with too many potential and even likely changes to be properly considered. On this issue, however, the Arabs are thinking long range: what will Israel be like in the future? will it even be in the future? They have demonstrated a stated willingness to sacrifice certain short-term gains because of their long-term expectations. This might put us at a serious dis-

advantage in the negotiations in various ways, ranging from the acceptance of our adversary's short-range concessions or seeming concessions at face value without considering their likely long-range consequences, to pursuing short-range political gains over long-range national considerations.

Like the Girl Who Can't Say "No"

We do not have a government that seems to be able to say "no," despite its intentions. It is rather like Addo Annie, the girl in the musical "Oklahoma!" who could not say "no." No matter how much she thought that she should and she wanted to when she started, fundamental urges led her to give in to seduction every time. Not surprisingly, the potential seducers figured that out early on and took full advantage of it. So have ours.

In the musical, Annie's father finally caught one of them and undertook to force him to marry her. But even there the musical has a lesson for us. The trapped seducer was himself from the Middle East (a Persian peddler named Ali Hakim in this case) and in the end he weaseled out of the match through smooth, ingratiating talk.

None of this is foreordained. We are certainly in a position to conduct a better negotiation and to use force or the threat of force if necessary, better than Addo Annie's father did to bring about the results we desire. The question is: will we?

A Fair Deal for All Sides

On at least one point Israelis seem to share agreement with the negotiators. We want a fair deal for all sides. Unfortunately, what would be a fair deal for all is not entirely clear to any. It does involve a significant dimension of Palestinian self-rule, yet it also involves a fair degree of continued Israeli presence in the territories to protect Israeli settlements and Israeli security. It does involve instilling the feeling that they have achieved their basic political needs as should we. To coin a phrase, this process will be difficult and painful, but that phrase should not be used to explain away every concession that we will be asked to make.

I do not envy our political leaders who must conduct this negotiation. It is certainly not easy. And all of us certainly wish them well. Yet we cannot forget how difficult it is for humans to keep their interests in proportion when they sit down at the table and for Jews to keep their principles in proportion as well.

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