

Jerusalem Letter:

VIEWPOINTS

the Jerusalem center

JERUSALEM INSTITUTE FOR FEDERAL STUDIES • CENTER FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDIES

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ISSN: 0334-4096

VIEWPOINTS #12: 11 Iyar 5740/April 27, 1980

GUSH EMUNIM, PEACE NOW AND ISRAEL'S FUTURE

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Gush Emunim and Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) are currently the most prominent extra-parliamentary political movements in Israel. They address the most controversial issue now confronting Israel's leaders, namely Jewish settlements in the territories administered by Israel since the Six-Day War, with Gush Emunim favoring settlements and Shalom Achshav opposing them. In recent issues of Viewpoints Drs. Mordechai Nisan and Janet Aviad summarized the positions of Gush Emunim and Shalom Achshav, respectively. The present article is an analysis of and commentary on those two papers and the movements which they represent.

Any attempt to analyze the controversy over Jewish settlements in the area which came under Israel's administration as a result of the Six-Day War faces a terminological problem at the outset. What shall we call the geographical area at issue? Most of the people who would have the area amply dotted with Jewish settlements call it "Judea and Samaria," and most who would have it bare of such settlements refer to it as "the West Bank." The problem of biased language is a common one. Whether we choose "firm" or "intransigent," "flexible" or "weak," "courageous" or "imprudent," "discreet" or "secretive" usually depends more on whether we agree with the action being described than on any objective characteristics of that action. Objectively, both "Judea and Samaria" and "the West Bank" have some validity. In order to avoid bias by nomenclature, the area will be referred to here as the "territories." Although that term is less precise in its dictionary denotation, everyone knows what it means, and it is used, both in Hebrew and in English, in a reasonably neutral sense.

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Subscriptions: \$25 per year

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Similarities

Gush Emunim and Shalom Achshav would seem to be polar opposites. Yet, as is often the case with extreme positions, the two movements are symmetrical in several significant ways.

1. Both claim to be broad-based and popular. Gush Emunim argues that part of Israel's national consensus is that the territories are part of Eretz Yisrael, to which Jews have, if not a religious, then at least a historic right and that the area, moreover, is necessary to Israel's security, which few, if any, Israelis are willing to risk. Gush Emunim claims that its position alone implements the logical and necessary implications of that consensus. Shalom Achshav, on the other hand, points out that it has attracted active support from significantly large numbers of Israelis of all demographic and socio-economic categories, and that that support indicates the tacit assent of even larger numbers, since any popular movement enlists the public activity of only a small proportion of those who agree with its program.

2. Both movements claim to represent mainstream Zionism, Gush Emunim because it insists on the Jewish right to Eretz Yisrael, Shalom Achshav because it seeks the kind of Jewish state envisioned by most of the Zionist leaders whose work culminated in the founding of the State in the first place.

3. Although at first glance it might appear that Gush Emunim is more concerned with ideology and Shalom Achshav with practical considerations, in fact both movements justify themselves on both ideological and pragmatic grounds. Gush Emunim argues not only from Israel's historical rights, but also from Israel's need to assure its national security in practical ways. Shalom Achshav is concerned not only with considerations of international politics, but also with the ways in which Israel can realize the ideological goals of Jewish statehood.

4. Both movements are critical of current governmental decisions. Gush Emunim wants Israel's government to be more supportive of Jewish settlements, and Shalom Achshav wants the government to remove settlements that already exist and to preclude the establishment of any new settlements. The controversy between them is not a battle of insiders versus outsiders. Both movements have supporters in high political positions. Moreover, while a change in government might alter the balance somewhat, it is not unlikely that it would leave both movements intact and with the same causes.

5. Both movements are impatient. As Dr. Aviezer Ravitsky has suggested elsewhere (in a paper presented to a meeting of the Continuing Seminar in Zionist Thought held in New York in November 1979), neither Gush Emunim nor Shalom Achshav is willing to wait for the realization of its goals. They see the Jewish return to all of Eretz Yisrael or the achievement of peaceful relations with Israel's Arab neighbors, respectively, not as goals to be sought in

the historical long run, but as immediate objectives whose speedy fulfillment requires the highest priority.

6. Both Gush Emunim and Shalom Achshav believe that the principles for which they stand are of fundamental significance in Jewish history and that they, therefore, concern the Jewish people beyond the State of Israel itself. Consequently, they feel justified in their attempts to mobilize support among Diaspora Jews and thus to bring external pressure to bear on Israel's government.

Gush Emunim

Gush Emunim's position rests on three basic propositions. The first is that, not only verbally but also historically and religiously, Eretz Yisrael is the Land of Israel. From a Jewish perspective, the right of the Jews to the territories rests in the first instance on the Divine grant of that land to the Jewish people. While non-Jews, understandably, may not accept Judaism's view of the inherent relationship of the people to the land, Jews, it is argued, should be willing to assert Judaism's interpretation of history. Of greater relevance to non-Jews (as well as to secular Jews), the Jewish right to Eretz Yisrael also has a secular basis in the historical fact that the Jewish commonwealth did actually exist in Eretz Yisrael and was forcibly dismantled against the will of the Jews, who never gave up their right to inhabit the land or to re-establish their sovereign state on it. For the Jewish state, when it has authority over Eretz Yisrael, to forbid Jews in principle to settle in any part of that land would be to renounce that right for the first time in Jewish history.

The second proposition underlying the position of Gush Emunim is that Israel's security would necessarily be endangered by withdrawal from the territories. The rapid and dramatic changes in policy which characterize Arab culture and especially recent Arab history render any moment's peaceful relations tenuous and make fundamental reliance upon them imprudent. Moreover, even though modern weaponry can traverse the larger distances which the territories place between Israel's population centers and a potential enemy, recent conflicts both in the Middle East and elsewhere have shown that considerations of topography and terrain can be decisive even when weapons are available, which in theory should make those considerations insignificant.

The third proposition underlying Gush Emunim's stance is that the only way for Israel to hold the territories is to have Jews living in them. As today's proposals for withdrawal are largely the consequence of yesterday's demographic processes, so tomorrow's negotiations over formal boundaries -- whenever those negotiations come and whatever form they take -- will reflect today's demographic activities.

In summary, the Jews have a historical right to live in the territories, and Israel has the need to control the territories for the sake of its security. Only by having Jews living in the territories can that right be preserved and that need met.

Shalom Achshav

The position of Shalom Achshav also seems to rest on three basic ideas. The first is that the fundamental goal of Israel's policy should be the achievement of peace and that, since historical and religious claims to Eretz Yisrael impede the achievement of peace, those claims -- even if they be valid -- should not be pressed. While some Shalom Achshav spokesmen question Jewish claims to Eretz Yisrael, most grant their validity. All supporters of Shalom Achshav seem to agree that yielding those claims would serve the cause of peace by increasing the Arabs' willingness to negotiate with Israel and by strengthening Israel's support among the other nations of the world.

The second proposition set forth by Shalom Achshav is that it is untenable for internal reasons for Israel to rule over the substantial and unwilling Arab population which now inhabits the territories. The legality of Israel's administration of the territories has, of course, been widely debated, but there is a strong argument for the legal soundness of the administration. Nevertheless, Shalom Achshav argues that it is always immoral to rule over a population against its will and that Israel, therefore, should not allow itself to remain in the position of administering the affairs of a large unwilling Arab population. Moreover, for Israel to incorporate so large an Arab population would necessarily challenge either Israel's Jewishness or its democratic character. Israel could not, with so many non-Jews under its rule, maintain both its Jewish and its democratic natures simultaneously. In order for Israel to preserve its essential quality, Shalom Achshav argues, Israel should desist from establishing Jewish settlements in the territories as a step toward Israeli withdrawal.

The third proposition, which flows from the other two, is that Israel's only consideration in negotiating its formal boundaries should be the minimal requirements of security. To go beyond those would be to court failure in the already fragile enterprise of developing peaceful relations with the Arab states and the consequences of that failure must sooner or later be more war, with its attendant suffering and even greater risk to Israel's future.

On Jewish Claims

The validity of the Jewish claim to the territories is not insignificant. Although history shows how often right is made to yield to military, political, and/or economic might, right is still important, both for its own sake and for its indirect impact on

external support. The U.N. resolution branding Zionism as a form of racism demonstrates the Arabs' and their allies' appreciation of the influence of popular definitions of legitimacy. Just as the Arabs attempted -- and often continue to attempt -- to deny Israel's right to exist as a step toward Israel's destruction, Israel must, by contrast, affirm its right as a basis for its survival. There was comfort in the fact that many of the U.N. representatives who voted for that resolution commented privately to Israeli Ambassador Chaim Herzog that, although their affirmative votes were mandated by the political and economic interests of their governments, they really knew that the resolution was nonsense. While their private assurances did not affect their public actions, those assurances did show that the ideological goal of the resolution's sponsors was not achieved. People often do what they believe is wrong; still, they would rather believe that they are doing what is right. Israel cannot manipulate the relevant economic forces as effectively as the Arabs can these days, but Israel should not give up the moral force of its position. For Israel to yield its claim would in many ways be the ultimate irony.

It is true, of course, that the Jewish religious claim is not likely to be accepted by most non-Jews. (One recalls Samuel Johnson's quip to Boswell that two women whom he could see from afar arguing over the back fence would never agree because, although he could not hear their argument, it was obvious that they were standing on different premises.) The Jewish historical claim, on the other hand, rests on ground shared by non-Jews as well. Eretz Yisrael was the land of the Jews, and forcible expulsion is not generally considered to be a basis for legal loss, especially since the Jewish people never gave up its claim. To argue that there is a "statute of limitations" on the Jewish claim would imply that if the Jews now sit on the land long enough, the Arabs, also subject to a "statute of limitations," will lose whatever claim they may have. Either way, the implication is that Israel should settle the land. However, it is better, of course, to argue the claim from right than from sheer physical control.

When the conditions allow and the Arabs are willing, Israel may wish to compromise and give up some of the land to which it has the historical right. However, nothing is likely to be gained by yielding its claim in advance. Indeed, to do so would make even implementation of Israel's security needs questionable. No country has the right to arrange its security on another country's territory. It must make do however it can with its own territory. The argument that the Arabs' attacks on Israel gave Israel the right to Arab land is not nearly so convincing as is the argument that the land at issue is the Jews' by historical right in the first place, that it came under Arab control only by virtue of military conquests, and that it is now again in the hands of its original occupants.

On Negotiating for Security

Shalom Achshav's call to Israel to negotiate borders based on security alone seems a contradiction in terms. If Israel should insist only on those modifications of the pre-June 1967 lines which it absolutely needs for its military security, then borders would be non-negotiable. Israel would then simply decide what land beyond the "Green Line" it needs, annex it, and withdraw from the rest of the territories. It would not seek more; it would not accept less. The only thing to negotiate would be the process, presumably a speedy one, in which the withdrawal would be effected. The very notion of negotiation, however, implies reconciliation and compromise of several diverse sets of interests and desires. When a decision rests on only one issue, and that issue is necessarily determined by one party to a controversy, there is nothing to negotiate. Only if Israel were to offer land inside the "Green Line" in exchange for land outside that line would there be reason to negotiate over security borders, and one doubts that most supporters of Shalom Achshav would go so far as to propose so unlikely and untenable an offer. Moreover, Israel could hardly expect an Arab state to compromise its sovereignty by agreeing to, and permanently abiding by, the kind of limitations on its military preparedness that would assure Israel's success in any future conflict across seriously less defensible borders.

On Urging Compromise

Shalom Achshav has called both on Israel and on the Palestinians to make compromises. It is true, of course, that Israel and the Palestinians will be able to reach accord only if they both compromise. However, Shalom Achshav's call on the Palestinians to compromise is a gratuitous gesture, because the Palestinians have until now shown less readiness to compromise than anyone in the Middle East and because Shalom Achshav is hardly in a position to influence Palestinian behavior. What is more, Shalom Achshav has no counterpart Palestinian movement with which to work in tandem toward common goals within a common approach.

Consequently, Shalom Achshav's seemingly balanced demand for compromise on both sides constitutes, in effect, pressure for compromise by Israel alone. That Israel is quite prepared to make dramatic compromises with a serious negotiating partner is clear enough from its recent agreements and continuing discussions with Egypt. However, to put the Israeli government in the position of being the only party to the conflict which is publicly and seriously called on to compromise is to open only two alternatives. One is that the Israeli government will compromise unilaterally with no return and with no reasonable hope of an agreement being reached, thus weakening its position without achieving any benefit. The other is that the government will be made to look "intransigent." It is, therefore, hard to see what useful purpose is served by calling on only one side to compromise in the current situation.

On Obstacles to Peace

"Obstacle to peace" has become a catch-phrase, usually (though admittedly not always) used to criticize Israel. The achievement of peace, to say nothing of justice, requires that we have a reasonably objective sense of what the obstacles really are. A policy which actually impedes the development of amicable relations or which intrudes on and derails negotiations leading to peace agreements would, indeed, be an obstacle to peace. There is no evidence, however, that the establishment of Jewish settlements in the territories has interfered until now with the development of relations between Israel and Egypt despite the public posturing in which both sides engage on that issue. Nor can we be confident that Israeli-Egyptian accords would be hastened if the settlements were abandoned. Egyptian insistence on a fuller measure of autonomy for the Arab residents of the territories than Israel claims it offered in the Camp David agreements may be more the consequence of international pressure than of Egyptian assessments of self-interest. If so, then the talk about "obstacles to peace" is more of an obstacle than are the settlements themselves. Moreover, no one has seriously suggested that either Jordan or any Palestinian group would be ready to move closer to peace talks with Israel if only Israel's settlement activity would cease. That the Arabs would be happier without the settlements is clear. However, the crucial question concerns the conditions under which the Arabs would in fact make peace with Israel.

Concerning the influence of Jewish settlements on the tone of day-to-day Jewish-Arab relations in the territories, it is hard to know whether proximity may in the long run breed more mutual acceptance than now seems likely. History's lessons in that regard are not one-sided.

At the moment, the world usually says "amen" to any Arab claim that an Israeli action is an "obstacle to peace." In other words, most of the world seems to conclude that what the Arabs object to will lead them to be more resistant (though not, let us note, "intransigent") to attempts to bring about negotiations between them and Israel. The inherent lopsidedness of a situation in which the Israelis are believed to be impeding peace whenever the Arabs say they are is, itself, certainly no inducement to peace.

On Inhabiting the Land

Gush Emunim argues that without actually settling on the part of Eretz Yisrael that lies outside the "Green Line," Israel would void the Jewish claim to that land in principle and, further, endanger its opportunity someday to negotiate over that land. That argument seems justified. Indeed, Shalom Achshav does not deny that position, but rather wishes to void the Jewish claim and the

possibility that part of the territories (other than what is minimally essential for Israel's military security) will eventually be on Israel's side of permanent formal boundaries.

Gush Emunim's assertion that settlements need not everywhere "create facts" which remain immutable through serious negotiations is given credence by the dismantling of Jewish settlements that followed the peace treaty with Egypt. Moreover, there is cogency in the argument that any real peace with Israel's neighbors to the north and east will allow Jews who wish to do so to live in communities in those parts of the territories which may finally wind up outside Israel's permanent borders, as Arabs live in their own villages in Israel today. It would be a remarkable peace that expelled Jews altogether from part of Palestine. Even so, if Israel were to agree to such a peace, the relocation of the inhabitants of Jewish settlements could be effected.

On the Nature of the State

Shalom Achshav argues that, whatever the course of relations between Israel and her Arab neighbors, Israel cannot long incorporate a large hostile Arab population without becoming demoralized in every sense of the word. If Israel remains democratic and gives the Arabs within it the rights that inhabitants of a democracy must eventually have, then Israel's Jewish character will be seriously compromised. If, on the other hand, Israel in one way or another suppresses the full cultural and political expression of the Arabs within its borders, it will cease to be democratic and begin to implement policies toward minorities which all of Jewish tradition and enlightened political thought reject. It is, indeed, hard to envision a social and political structure that will preserve the Zionist ideals of a Jewish society, determining its own affairs in a way consonant with its own historic tradition, while at the same time providing full rights to a sizable and growing minority whose culture and commitments are different and whose members reject the legitimacy of the Jewishness of the overall social fabric. To hope that a sizable Arab minority will one day so appreciate Jewish beneficence as to accept willingly a truly Jewish state is unduly optimistic. Too much human nature and culture would have to change before that many Arabs would prefer Jewish to Arab rule on a permanent basis.

Shalom Achshav also points out that the sheer financial cost of establishing Jewish settlements in the territories keeps Israel from meeting other social needs and thus impairs the quality of life in Israel, with the consequence, among others, that the Jewish population of Israel -- through decreased aliya and increased yerida -- is diminished. That argument, too, has merit.

On International Support

Shalom Achshav argues that Israel is losing much-needed support in the Western world, not only in those countries where support for Israel is already fragile, but also and more significantly in the United States. Gush Emunim responds that Israel should not determine its policy on the basis of foreign interests and perceptions, but rather in light of its own needs, and that firmness is in the end more respected than vacillation and uncertainty. Indeed, Gush Emunim asserts, Israel is protecting the free world from its own folly and will eventually earn that world's gratitude for serving as a barrier to further Soviet influence in the Middle East.

It does appear that Israel's current policy on settlements costs it sympathy. Those who will, for a variety of reasons, lend support to the Arab position regardless of Israeli action will not, of course, be swayed by a change in Israeli policy. However, and this is especially true in the United States, there are many both in political leadership and in the general populace whose attitude toward Israel does in significant measure depend on their assessment of the rectitude and the appropriateness of Israel's position. In the crunch, it may well be this "swing vote" which determines Washington's overall assistance to Israel and, more seriously, Washington's response to a specific controversy in the Middle East.

On the other hand, it is also true that Israel's present stance creates a situation in which many nations can take positions which they could ill afford were Israel less determined in its opposition to an independent Palestinian state in the territories. Such a state would not be in the interests of many of the governments which now publicly advocate policies whose outcome would be the establishment of that state.

Israel should not necessarily follow the public advice of foreign governments, but it should try to implement its own interests in ways that minimize misunderstanding and criticism on the part of its potential supporters.

On Balancing Principles

The analysis so far leads to the well-known story about the two disputants who are told "You are right" and "You are also right." The end of the story comes, of course, when someone observes that the disputants, who have disagreed, cannot both be right. "You are right, too," declares the punch-line. If both Shalom Achshav and Gush Emunim make some valid points, how does one choose between them? Each movement vividly describes the dangers that lurk in the other's position. Probably the best way to choose is to assess which set of dangers would be more disastrous and which can best be reversed in time. There also is the possibility of an approach that minimizes the dangers of the two extreme positions.

Regarding the dangers of yielding the Jewish claim to Eretz Yisrael, both in principle and for security, on the one hand, and of continuing Israeli rule over the territories, with possible eventual incorporation of their Arab populations into the Israeli body politic, on the other, the former alternative seems both more dangerous and less reversible than the latter. Specific political structures and the tone of human inter-relationships can change with changing perceptions of self-interest and external conditions. However, land, once given up, is not likely to be returned without war. Moreover, if it is now hard to convince the world that Israel's historic claim to Eretz Yisrael is valid, it would be just about impossible to reassert that claim after it were formally renounced. Unless there are quite unforeseeable changes in the world, it will be easier to remove settlements later than to establish them later in areas left unsettled now.

There is a way, however, of at least mitigating the undesirable effects of Israeli rule of the Arab population of the territories. Although permanent boundaries and political structures which meet everyone's needs are at this time out of reach, the idea of autonomy for the Palestinian Arab inhabitants of the territories promises to be a sound temporary approach as well as a step toward a more long-range solution. One of its main strengths is precisely that it leaves the fundamental issues, which are now insoluble, alone. By contrast, the issues that do need resolution in the process of setting up the autonomy are amenable to compromise if the admittedly more basic issues get postponed until later.

In the view of the risks involved on both sides of the settlement issue, it would seem more prudent at this time for Israel to allow the establishment of Jewish settlements in the territories than to desist altogether from establishing them. However, it would also seem wise to choose their sites and the manner of establishing them more carefully and thoughtfully than has often been the case, especially in recent months. Gush Emunim is right when it cautions Israel that it cannot afford to leave the stable door unlocked until the horse is stolen. Shalom Achshav is right in warning Israel that it cannot forever endure as a Jewish state in the present situation.

"Creativity" is often taken to mean the ability to find new ways to develop support for a position. A more fruitful creativity, the kind that Israel clearly needs now, is the ability to formulate new policies which avoid many of the difficulties in what are now perceived as the only options. Sensitivity to the urgent messages of both Gush Emunim and Shalom Achshav is a prerequisite for Israel's continued development.

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