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Your Palestinian Problem Is Back

By Ofer Shelah

- The painful terror attack in the Jordan Valley was one more in a series of recent acts of violence in Judea and Samaria (West Bank). Shooting attacks have come to be a nearly daily affair in the past several months, some of which are committed in the course of IDF arrest operations and others, as in the case of the latest attack, along the roads. In a different era, before our public discourse sank into endless cycles of elections and into the quagmire of the yes-Bibi/no-Bibi dichotomy, that would have generated a stormy public debate about whether we are in the midst of yet another Intifada. The IDF and GSS have been warning the political leadership for some time that the keg of dynamite in the territories is liable to explode at any given moment. That is the result of [Palestinian] society brimming with despair and frustration, being awash with firearms and the Palestinian Authority's weakness.
- But that is only a small part of the larger picture because the security professionals restrict their view to what is happening on what is known in military parlance as on the side of the “red team”—to wit, on the enemy’s side. If it had the prerogative of also speaking about what is happening on the “blue team’s” side, our side, they would certainly point to the indifference that has been shown by the Israeli public and decision-makers. If there is one issue over which Israel is no longer divided between left and right, it is over the sense that no one takes any interest anymore in Israel’s Palestinian problem. That issue hasn’t been raised in the current election, and that is hardly a coincidence. In-depth polling by the various parties has found that the Israeli- Palestinian conflict ranks very low on the public’s set of priorities. It doesn’t matter anymore if that fact stems either from the thinking that the conflict cannot be resolved or from the belief that the solution cannot be achieved.
- The Israelis don’t care, and their government doesn’t even pretend that it does. Similar to the Iranian issue (or economic and/or social policy), the

“government of change” has followed in the footsteps of Netanyahu’s government. There isn’t a Palestinian problem; no negotiations are being held with them; to the contrary, the government proudly and publicly says that Israel’s relations with Arab countries can be advanced without mentioning the Palestinians, even as they are being painted into a corner. Instead, [the government] has deliberately applied itself to strengthening Hamas so as to “create a distinction”—i.e., to weaken the Palestinian entity and to induce it to crumble, which sends the Palestinians a message that Israel listens only to people who choose the path of resistance, and who speak with it the language of terror attacks and Kassam rockets. The government talks about “economic peace” as if the Palestinian people’s national aspirations can be bought with perks and has come to stand squarely behind the ludicrous narrative about “shrinking the conflict,” which even Defense Minister Gantz has signed off on, the only Israeli official who has engaged in any sort of dialogue with the Palestinian Authority’s leadership in the past year.

- On that issue, too, Netanyahu may be in the opposition, but his strategy has prevailed. The resurgence of the Intifada, which takes on a new form every time, might change the situation. But even if the GSS’s intelligence capabilities and the IDF’s “grass-mowing operations” are able to keep a lid on the violence and restrict it to the West Bank only, the IDF, the justice system, the Israeli mindset, and our public image around the world will continue to wallow in the toxic mud of dominion over another people, and that poses a greater danger to us than any military threat. Every day wasted on banalities is a day in which we slip further down the slope towards becoming a bi-national state, which is a huge danger to the Israel that we want to live in. We can pretend that that isn’t happening, but the Palestinians aren’t going anywhere, and neither are we. Fifty-five years have passed since the Six-Day War.
- A week after that war, the Israeli government decided not to annex the territories but, instead, to keep them as a deposit [that could be returned in exchange] for peace. No one has yet presented any solution other than separation, which will result in the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Nothing good can be said about the Palestinians' conduct over the course of those years, but we need to focus on ourselves and on what is best for us. Ignoring the problem's existence, be that out of despair, political cowardice, or impotent leadership, won't make the problem disappear. Most of the time, doing so will only poison us slowly; from time to time—and possibly in the very near future—that problem, which isn't going anywhere, will erupt into a large fire.