



PERSPECTIVES

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The Fight for Israel's Open Spaces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Last week's murderous terrorist attack reflects the ongoing struggle between Jews and Arabs for territorial control, in which Palestinians have a clearer grasp of their goal: reducing the Jewish physical presence in the state of Israel and the West Bank to a small, ghettoized, urban "villa in the jungle."

The terrorist attack committed near Ein Buvin last Friday is about more than just unbridled evil striking down a father and his children on a summer hike. Jews and Arabs are not only fighting over freedom of movement in the country's open spaces, but over who controls them. This struggle assumes many forms and spans all corners of the land, from the Galilee to the Negev.

From the Palestinian perspective, Jews can – perhaps – be permitted to exist in their urban high-rises and engage in their white-collar occupations in high-tech and commerce. That is the Jews' place. The open spaces, on the other hand – the fields, springs, and pastures – these the Arab must control.

Former PM Ehud Barak used the phrase "villa in the jungle" to describe Israel's existential experience, a metaphor worth examining. In their quest for security, the Jews exist in spaces surrounded by fences – a type of upscale, safe ghetto with boundaries they dare not cross.

On the face of it, the "villa in the jungle" metaphor represents a modern high-tech-like outlook that ascribes struggles over countries' open spaces to an anachronistic "old world" mentality. In practice, it is a direct continuation of the millenarian diasporic Jewish experience of ghettoization, the Pale of Settlement, and denial of agricultural and farming opportunities that Zionism has sought to reverse.

In this respect, last week's murderous attack also took aim at PM Benjamin Netanyahu's promise that no Jewish communities will be uprooted in any future peace deal. Even if these Jews are allowed to remain in their homes, as per his promise (something no Palestinian leader has ever accepted), they will be forever trapped inside their fenced and fortified ghettos. The open spaces are to be dominated by the Palestinians.

This, it appears, also forms the basis for the idea behind President Donald Trump's peace deal.

For decades now, the Palestinians have understood the essence of their struggle better than the Jews have understood theirs. The purpose of the Zionist enterprise was clear long ago, and Israelis would be wise to reembrace it: reestablishment of statehood and full sovereignty in the Jews' ancestral homeland in its full scope. Not in a small, ghettoized, urban "villa in the jungle."

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