



PERSPECTIVES

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Israel's Arabs v. Israel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The ongoing explosion of violence by Israel's Arabs against their Jewish compatriots is not an act of social protest as is wrongly claimed by many commentators but an internal uprising in support of an external enemy—a corollary of decades of steady nationalist and religious radicalization, especially since the September of the Oslo “peace process” in September 1993.

This article was published in *Commentary Magazine* in December 2003, in response to the ill-conceived conclusions and recommendations of the Orr Commission, appointed by PM Barak to explore the roots of the October 2000 violence wrought by the Israeli Arabs in support of Yasser Arafat's freshly-waged war of terror (euphemized as “*al-Aqsa Intifada*”). Two decades later, the same pattern is repeating itself on a far greater scale and with vastly more destructive consequences.

OCTOBER 1, 2000, a day when most Israelis were observing the Jewish new year, was also the second day of the “*al-Aqsa intifada*,” a campaign of anti-Israel violence planned and coordinated by Yasir Arafat's Palestinian Authority after the collapse of the Camp David talks in July. It was also a day on which, to add shock to shock, Arab citizens of Israel unleashed their own wave of violence against their Jewish compatriots.

For the next ten days, Israeli Arabs blocked several main roads, cutting off Jewish localities and forcing some of them to defend against armed assaults by neighbors with whom they had maintained cordial relations for decades. Scores of Jewish families spending the holiday season in the Galilee found themselves attacked by frenzied Arab mobs wielding Molotov cocktails, ball bearings in slingshots, stones, even firearms. Stores, post offices, and other public places were ransacked as rioters clashed with police. Forests were set

ablaze. In Nazareth, thousands of Arabs marched in the streets chanting, "With our souls and our blood we will redeem Palestine." Jaffa and Haifa, the showcases of Arab-Jewish coexistence, were rocked by violence and vandalism.

That was three years ago. This past September, an Israeli state commission of inquiry headed by deputy chief justice Theodore Orr finally submitted its official report on the riots. Acknowledging the strong chauvinistic impulse behind them, the commission noted grimly that "Jews were attacked on the roads merely for being Jewish," and it rebuked Israeli Arab leaders not only for failing to direct their grievances into democratic channels but also for having worked over the years to delegitimize the state and its institutions in the eyes of their constituents:

The messages transmitted prior to and during the October disturbances blurred and sometimes erased the distinction between [on the one hand] Israel's Arab citizens and their legitimate struggle for civil rights and [on the other hand] the armed struggle against Israel by organizations and individuals in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. More than once, the two struggles were presented by leaders of the Arab community as a single struggle against one adversary, if not an enemy.

Yet even while denouncing such actions as "incompatible with the concept of citizenship," the Orr commission refrained from proposing disciplinary measures against Israeli Arab leaders who had incited their fellow Arabs to violence. Instead, it attributed the volcanic eruption to something else entirely—namely, a longstanding callousness on the part of *the Israeli establishment itself* toward the state's Arab minority:

The state and successive generations of its government have failed to address in a comprehensive and deep fashion the difficult problems created by the existence of a large Arab minority inside the Jewish state. Government handling of the Arab sector has been primarily neglectful and discriminatory. The establishment did not show sufficient sensitivity to the needs of the Arab sector, and did not do enough to give this sector its equal share of state resources. The state did not do enough or try hard enough to create equality for its Arab citizens or to uproot discriminatory or unjust practices.

BEHIND this mournful and self-incriminatory diagnosis lie the ruins of an age-old Zionist hope: that the material progress resulting from Jewish settlement of Palestine would ease the path for the local Arab populace to become permanently reconciled, if not positively well disposed, to the project

of Jewish national self-determination. Thus, in December 1947, shortly after Palestinian Arabs had already initiated a violent effort to subvert the UN resolution partitioning the territory of Palestine into two states, David Ben-Gurion, soon to become Israel's first prime minister, argued that despite appearances of implacable enmity, "If the Arab citizen will feel at home in our state . . . if the state will help him in a truthful and dedicated way to reach the economic, social, and cultural level of the Jewish community, then Arab distrust will accordingly subside and a bridge will be built to a Semitic, Jewish-Arab alliance."

In Ben-Gurion's view, as in that of other Zionist leaders, Arab resentment and distrust were linked above all to socio-economic deprivation; with growing affluence, such feelings would be supplanted by their opposites. Over a half-century later, the Orr commission comes to the same conclusion, and blames Israel for the ongoing failure to achieve Ben-Gurion's vision: the fact that Arab enmity has not given way, but on the contrary has intensified, confirms the melancholy fact that the "Arab sector" is a victim of official discrimination and has yet to receive "its equal share of state resources."

Unfortunately, this theory is false in general, and especially false in this particular case. In the modern world, it is not the poor and the oppressed who have led the great revolutions and/or carried out the worst deeds of violence; rather, it is militant vanguards from among the better educated and more moneyed circles of society. As for Israeli Arabs, the more prosperous, affluent, and better educated they have become, the greater has grown their disaffection from the state, to the point where many openly challenge the fundamental principles underpinning its very existence. Finally, the commission's portrait of Israeli Arabs as a deprived and discriminated-against community bears no relation to reality. But to understand this requires a look back at the history of Israel's Arab minority over the past 55 years.

THE END of the 1948 war found the Palestinian-Arab community profoundly shattered. Of the 750,000 Arab residents of the territory that came to be Israel, only 160,000 had stayed put through the hostilities; at the state's founding, they formed 13.6 percent of the total population. But these numbers did not stay low for long. Thanks to a remarkable fertility rate of 4.2 percent a year, and despite successive waves of Jewish immigration into Israel, the proportion of Arabs grew steadily over the decades. By the end of 2002, Israel's Arab minority had leapt eightfold in number to over 1.2 million, or 19 percent of the state's total population. Today, about half of this community resides in the Galilee, with the rest spread more or less evenly among the

Haifa district, the “little triangle” in central Israel (along the “green line”), the Negev, and, since June 1967, east Jerusalem.

The mass exodus of 1948-49 took Israel’s leadership by surprise. As I have already suggested, the Zionist movement had always assumed that there would be a substantial Arab minority in the future Jewish state, and the general conviction was that they would participate on an equal footing “throughout all sectors of the country’s public life.” The words are those of Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the founding father of the branch of Zionism that was the forebear of today’s Likud party.

In 1934, Jabotinsky had presided over the drafting of a constitution for Jewish Palestine. According to its provisions, Arabs and Jews were to share both the prerogatives and the duties of statehood, notably including military and civil service; Hebrew and Arabic were to enjoy the same legal standing; and “in every cabinet where the prime minister is a Jew, the vice-premiership shall be offered to an Arab and vice versa.” Echoing this vision, David Ben-Gurion told the leadership of his own (Mapai) party in 1947 that the non-Jews in the Jewish state “will be equal citizens; equal in everything without any exception; that is, the state will be their state as well.”

Committees laying the groundwork for the nascent state discussed in detail the establishment of an Arabic-language press, the improvement of health, the incorporation of Arab officials into the government, the integration of Arabs within the police and the ministry of education, and Arab-Jewish cultural and intellectual interaction. Even military plans for rebuffing an anticipated pan-Arab invasion in the late 1940’s were predicated, in the explicit instructions of the commander-in-chief of the Hagana, on the “acknowledgement of the full rights, needs, and freedom of the Arabs in the Hebrew state without any discrimination, and a desire for coexistence on the basis of mutual freedom and dignity.”

The same principle was enshrined in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, issued on May 14, 1948. The new state undertook to “uphold absolute social and political equality of rights for all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex.” In particular, Arab citizens were urged “to take part in the building of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship and on the basis of appropriate representation in all its institutions, provisional and permanent.” While the Declaration lacked constitutional status, its principles were taken as guidelines for governmental behavior; over the years, they would gain legal authority through supreme-court decisions and acts of the Knesset (parliament).

ISRAELI ARABS have indeed enjoyed full equality before the law, and are endowed with the full spectrum of democratic rights—including the right to vote for and serve in all state institutions. (From the first, Arabs have been members of the Knesset.) This is in itself a remarkable fact. From the designation of Arabic as an official language, to the recognition of non-Jewish religious holidays as legal resting days for their respective communities, to the granting of educational, cultural, judicial, and religious autonomy, Arabs in Israel may well enjoy more formal prerogatives than ethnic minorities anywhere in the democratic world.

This hardly means that the state's treatment of its Arab minority has been spotless. Civic equality, like any other principle, does not exist in a vacuum, or in isolation from other fundamental political values like stability and public security. In every modern nation-state, majority-minority relations have been a problem, and all the more so when an ethnic minority forms part of a larger nation or group that is hostile to the state in which it resides. Early on, the attempt of Arab nations to destroy Israel at birth, the repeated talk of a "second round," and the fact that many Israeli Arab enclaves were located in sensitive border areas fueled fears within the Jewish state of a possible transformation of its Arab communities into hotbeds of subversive activity.

For security reasons, then, the main Arab population centers were placed under military administration, a policy that ended only in December 1966. Similar considerations precluded the conscription of most Arabs into military service. The exemption was also designed to ease the Arabs' "dual loyalty" dilemma, sparing them the need to confront their cousins on the battlefield; it corresponded, as well, with the wishes of the Arab population itself.

The policy of exempting Israeli Arabs from military service had real-life effects. In the short term, it conferred a certain practical benefit, giving young Arabs a three-year head start over most of their Jewish counterparts in entering the labor force or acquiring a higher education. Over the longer term, however, it worked to constrain Arab economic and social mobility, for the simple reason that, until the 1990's, military service was the main entry point into the corridors of adult Israeli life. But these constraints were not the result of "insufficient sensitivity," let alone of discrimination on the basis of religion or nationality; the same disadvantages beset and continue to beset Jewish individuals and communities that have likewise been exempted from military service, notably the ultra-Orthodox.

The issue of discrimination aside, it cannot be sufficiently stressed that, contrary to the dismal pronouncements of the Orr commission, the Arabs living in the Jewish state have made astounding social and economic progress. Far from lagging behind, their rate of development has often *surpassed* that of

the Jewish sector, with the result that the gap between the two communities has steadily narrowed.

Health statistics are but one indicator. Perhaps most significantly, mortality rates among Israeli Arabs have fallen by nearly two-thirds over the last decades, while life expectancy has risen from age seventy (in 1970) to seventy-six today. Not only does the latter figure compare favorably with the Middle East's average of sixty-eight, but the average Israeli Arab male can expect to live substantially longer than his white European counterpart. Thanks to Israel's medical and health-education programs, infant-mortality rates have similarly been slashed: from 56 per 1,000 live births in 1950 to 7.6 today. (In the U.S., the infant-mortality rate for whites is 8.5, for African-Americans a dismaying 21.3.)

No less remarkable have been the advances in education. Since Israel's founding, while the Arab population has grown eightfold, the number of Arab schoolchildren has multiplied by a factor of 35. If, in 1960, the average Israeli Arab spent one year in school, today the figure is over eleven years; over the same period, adult illiteracy rates have dropped from 52 to 6.2 percent (3.5 percent among women younger than forty-five). This not only places Israeli Arabs miles ahead of their brothers in the Arab world—in Morocco illiteracy is at 69 percent, in Egypt at 61 percent, in Syria at 44 percent—but reflects a pace of improvement nearly double that of the Jewish sector.

Still more dramatic has been the story in higher education, where the numbers of Arab graduates multiplied fifteen times between 1961 and 2001. Thirty years ago, a mere 4 percent of Arab teachers held academic degrees; by 2000, the figure had vaulted to 47 percent.

Standard of living? In the late 1940's, following the flight of its more affluent classes and the breakdown of economic relations with neighboring Arab states, the Arab minority in Israel was left largely impoverished. As they became increasingly incorporated into local economic life, Arabs experienced a steep rise in earnings and a visible improvement in their material circumstances. By 2002, 86 percent of Arab households—more Arab households than Jewish ones—occupied dwellings of three or more rooms. Contrary to the standard image of cramped neighborhoods and acute land shortages, population density in Arab localities is substantially *lower* on average than in equivalent Jewish locales.

As for income statistics, it is undeniable that, on average, Israeli Arabs still earn less than Jews. But to what is this attributable? For one thing, the average Muslim in Israel is ten years younger than his Jewish counterpart; all over the

world, younger people earn less. Then, too, fewer Arab women enter the labor market than do Jewish women. The salience of these and other factors—family size, level of schooling, cultural tradition, and so forth—may be judged by looking at segments of Israeli Jewish society like the ultra-Orthodox or residents of development towns (localities established during the 50's and 60's to absorb the fresh waves of Jewish immigration, especially from Arab countries), whose income levels more closely resemble those in the Arab sector. In 1997, for instance, when the average monthly salary in Arab Nazareth was 4,450 shekels, the equivalent figure for mostly Jewish Upper Nazareth was 4,780 shekels. During the late 1990's, the unemployment rate in Israel's Arab sector was consistently lower than in Jewish development towns.

Has the government given short shrift to the economic needs of the Arab sector, as the Orr commission asserts? Quite the reverse. Allocations to Arab municipalities have grown steadily over the past 40 years, and are now on a par with, if not higher than, subsidies to the Jewish sector. By the mid-1990's, Arab municipalities were receiving about a quarter of all such allocations, well above the "share" of Arabs in Israel's overall population. In numerous cases, contributions to Arab municipal budgets substantially exceed contributions to equivalently situated Jewish locales: in 1996, for instance, relative disbursements to the Arab town of Tamra were three times higher than to the Jewish town of Yahud; nearly three times higher to (Arab) Abu Snan than to (Jewish) Even Yehuda; twice as high to (Arab) Iksal as to (Jewish) Azur.

AND SO it goes. According to the Orr commission, the cause of the October 2000 riots is to be sought in the palpable discontent and resentment of Israel's Arab community, and that discontent and resentment can in turn be traced to the discriminatory state policies that have led to large-scale social and economic deprivation. About this, the commission is quite spectacularly wrong.

Besides, if the culprits are poverty and second-class status, why were there never any disturbances remotely like the October 2000 riots among similarly situated segments of *Jewish* society in Israel, or, for that matter, among Israeli Arabs in the much worse-off 1950's and 1960's? Why, indeed, did dissidence increase dramatically with *improvements* in the standard of living, and why did it escalate into an open uprising after a decade that saw government allocations to Arab municipalities grow by 550 percent, and the number of Arab civil servants nearly treble?

In fact, what led to growing defiance of the state, its policies, and its values was not deprivation. Rather, it was the steady radicalization of the Israeli

Arab community over the past decades. This process was facilitated by rising affluence and education; it also followed a political logic of its own.

The process began with the Six-Day war of June 1967. In the relatively relaxed aftermath of that conflict, Israeli Arabs came into renewed direct contact with their cousins in the West Bank and Gaza as well as with the wider Arab world. Family and social contacts broken in 1948 were restored, and a diverse network of social, economic, cultural, and political relations was formed. For the first time since 1948, Israeli Muslims were allowed by Arab states to participate in the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, thus breaking an unofficial ostracism and restoring a sense of self-esteem and pan-Arab belonging—and encouraging a correlative degree of estrangement from Israel.

Six years later came the Yom Kippur war, shattering Israel's image as an invincible military power and tarnishing its international reputation. One result was quickly felt on the local political scene. During the 1950's and 60's, most Arab voters had given their support to Israel's ruling Labor party and/or a string of associated Arab lists. This had already begun to change by 1969, when Raqah, a predominantly Arab Communist party and a champion of radical anti-Israelism, made its successful electoral debut. By 1973, in elections held three months after the Yom Kippur war, Raqah (or Hadash, as it was later renamed) had become the dominant party in the Arab sector, winning 37 percent of the vote; four years later, it totally eclipsed its rivals with 51 percent of Arab ballots cast. By the late 1990's, things had moved so far in an anti-Israel direction that many Arabs, apparently finding Raqah/Hadash too tame, were shifting their allegiance to newer and still more militant parties.

Nor did the PLO fail to capitalize on these internal developments. Founded in 1964, it had at first ignored the Israeli Arabs, but soon embarked on a sustained effort to incorporate them into its struggle for Israel's destruction. In 1972, the Palestine National Council, the PLO's quasi-parliament, decided to consolidate "the ties of national unity between the masses of our citizens in the territories occupied in 1948"—i.e., Israel—"and those in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and outside the occupied homeland." Within a few years, having been recognized by the Arab League as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people and then gaining observer status at the United Nations, the PLO increasingly became the main focus of identification for Israeli Arabs.

Things came to a head on March 30, 1976 in the form of mass riots—harbingers of worse to come. The occasion was the government's announced intention to appropriate some 5,000 acres of the Galilee for development. Though most of the land was owned either by the state or by private Jewish individuals, the announcement triggered a wave of violence

that ended in the deaths of six Arab rioters and the wounding of dozens more. “Land Day,” as the disturbances came to be known, was thenceforth commemorated annually in renewed and often violent demonstrations.

Almost immediately following the first “Land Day,” a group of Arab leaders met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to demand that Israeli Arabs be officially recognized as a national rather than a religious and cultural minority. The demand was turned down, and the government managed temporarily to defuse the situation by transferring state-owned lands to the Arab sector for agricultural and building purposes. But the “Palestinization” of Israeli Arabs continued apace. By 1980, some 55 percent defined themselves as Palestinians; by 1995, virtually all did.

By then, too, extremist politics and violence had become institutionalized. December 1987 saw the outbreak of the first widespread Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) in the West Bank and Gaza. Showing their support for their brethren in the occupied territories, Israeli Arabs committed acts of vandalism (burning forests, stoning private cars, destroying agricultural crops and equipment) and launched armed attacks on Jews within Israel proper. In the course of two years, the number of such individual attacks rose sharply from 69 (in 1987) to 187 (in 1989), and acts of sedition from 101 to 353.

The *intifada* strained Arab-Jewish relations within Israel to their limits (till then), lapsing only with the signing of the 1993 Oslo peace accords between Israel and the PLO. But if Oslo eased the violence, it also proved a major catalyst of further radicalization. Enthused by the prospects of Palestinian statehood, fearful of being left behind, Israeli Arabs steadily escalated their nationalist demands. Now put forward were such hitherto unsayable ideas as that Israel should be dissolved and transformed into a bi-national state—that is, an Arab state in which not Arabs but Jews would take their place as a minority.

OTHER FACTORS contributed to the worsening of the situation as well. One was the rising power and influence of the Islamist movement, which injected into the conflict a religious element that had largely lain dormant ever since 1948. Another was Israel’s delusional embrace of Oslo, despite the PLO’s brazen and continual flouting of its obligations under the 1993 agreement. A third was the growing “post-Zionist” trend among educated Israelis, which, by creating the impression of a fatigued society ready to pay any price for respite, emboldened the most radical elements on the Arab side to dream of delivering a final blow.

It was the embrace of Oslo that did the greatest damage. In recognizing the PLO as “the representative of the Palestinian people,” the Rabin government

effectively endorsed that organization's claim of authority over a substantial number of Israeli citizens, and gave it carte blanche to interfere in Israel's domestic affairs. Such a concession would be a sure recipe for trouble even under the most amicable of arrangements; made to an irredentist party still officially committed to the destruction of its "peace partner," it proved nothing short of catastrophic.

From the moment of his arrival in Gaza in July 1994, Arafat set out to make the most of what Israel had handed him, indoctrinating not only the residents of the territories but also Israeli Arabs with an ineradicable hatred of Israel, of Jews, and of Judaism. His intention was made clear as early as his welcoming speech, which smeared his new peace partner with extensive references to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and ended with a pledge to "liberate" Israel's Arab citizens from their alleged subjugation. "I am saying it clearly and loudly to all our brothers, from the Negev to the Galilee," Arafat proclaimed, "and let me quote Allah's words: 'We desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors, and to establish them in the land.'"

Within a month of his arrival in Gaza, Arafat had secretly ordered the extension of PA activities to Israeli Arabs, allocating \$10 million in initial funding and appointing Ahmed Tibi, his political adviser and an Israeli citizen, to head the subversive operation. In subsequent years, PLO and PA interference in Israel's domestic affairs would range from mediation of internal Arab disputes, to outright attempts to influence the outcome of Israeli elections, to the spread of vile propaganda calling for Israel's destruction. "Zionist—your death is in my hands," ran a videocassette produced by Force 17, Arafat's praetorian guard, and distributed in Nazareth in the mid-1990's. "The one who has forcefully robbed my land will only give it back by force. [Force] 17 in Gaza and Jaffa, 17 in Jerusalem and Haifa, 17 in Jenin and Ramleh, 17 in Lod and Acre."

The incitement struck an eager chord. As the 1990's wore on, open identification with Israel's sworn enemies and even euphemistic calls for Israel's destruction became regular themes of Israeli Arab leaders. Azmi Bishara, a member of the Knesset and head of the Arab nationalist Balad party, applauded Hizballah's struggle against Israel in Lebanon and urged Israeli Arabs to celebrate the terrorist organization's achievements and internalize its operational lessons. Likewise, Abdel Malik Dahamshe, the Islamist movement's most senior Knesset representative, justified his own repeated anti-Israel incitements on the grounds that "the 1948 war [to destroy Israel] goes on."

SUCH STATEMENTS had their predictable effect. When, in February 1994, a Jewish fanatic murdered 29 Muslims at prayer in Hebron, large-scale riots erupted in numerous Arab localities throughout Israel, with mobs battling police for four full days. The scenario repeated itself in September 1996 when Arafat, capitalizing on the opening of a new exit to an archaeological tunnel in Jerusalem, stirred a fresh wave of mass violence. In this respect, at least, the riots of October 2000 were an event foretold, although one could not have predicted their scope and duration.

The first signs occurred as early as July. As the Camp David summit was about to convene amid widespread talk of a breakthrough for peace, Abdel Malik Dahamshe threatened that any Arab concessions over Jerusalem would trigger a violent eruption of cosmic proportions. "Our souls yearn for martyrs' death for the defense of al-Aqsa and blessed Jerusalem, and millions of Muslims and Arabs will respond to the call to martyr themselves," he declared. "I am willing and praying to be the first *shahid* [martyr] to sacrifice his body in defense of Islam's holiest sites in Jerusalem." Not to be outdone was Sheik Raid Salah, leader of the northern faction of the Islamist movement. In public appearances, newspaper articles, and poems, he urged his followers to make the ultimate sacrifice for the liberation of the "stolen homeland."

The Camp David talks ended on July 25 with Arafat's blanket repudiation and walkout. On September 30, the day after an approved visit by Ariel Sharon to the Muslim-administered areas of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the second *intifada* began with open clashes between Palestinian rioters and police. That same day, in an official statement, a committee making up the effective leadership of Israeli Arabs called the deaths of seven Palestinian rioters a "premeditated horrendous massacre" by the Barak government and proclaimed October 1 a day of national mourning, strikes, and demonstrations. "The blood of our wounded has mixed with the blood of our people in defending the blessed al-Aqsa and crossed the green line [i.e., the pre-1967 line]," ran the statement. "It does not stand to reason that we will remain aloof in the face of the . . . barbaric actions in Jerusalem and the attempt to desecrate al-Haram al-Sharif and to subject it to Israeli sovereignty."

The following day the Israeli Arab sector exploded. The shock waves of the ensuing weeks are still being registered, and not even the Orr commission's elaborate fudgings can dispel the true nature of the crisis facing Israel from within.

THE OCTOBER 2000 riots were not an act of social protest, and they did not mark a stage in "a legitimate struggle for civil rights." They were a violent internal rising in support of an external attack. It was as if tens of thousands

of Japanese Americans had responded to Pearl Harbor by engaging in wholesale violence against their fellow Americans. Of course, that particular uprising never happened—which did not prevent the American government from interning thousands of American citizens of Japanese origin for much of the war as suspected members of a “fifth column.”

In Israel, the violence did happen. But the Barak government, declining to acknowledge it for what it was and what it portended, instead apologized for the thirteen rioters who died in violent clashes with security forces over the ten-day period, announced increased economic support for the Arab sector to the tune of four billion shekels, and proceeded to appoint the Orr commission to investigate not the rioters but the state’s response to them. Small wonder, then, that this commission ended up lifting the lion’s share of the blame from the shoulders of the aggressors, or satisfied itself with uttering the naive wish that its own demonstration of good faith would “contribute, in the final analysis, to a meeting of hearts among Arabs and Jews in Israel.”

No such meeting of hearts seems in prospect. The fundamental problem of Israel’s Arab minority lies not in any lack of rights or opportunities but in its unique national character. Unlike almost every ethnic or religious minority throughout the world, Israeli Arabs are an avowedly non- or anti-assimilationist minority with the mentality of a majority. Far from seeking to adapt themselves to the norms and habits of the majority, now more than ever they regard themselves as unlawfully dominated by an alien invader who must be supplanted. Their rejection of their minority status has not diminished but has intensified with the rise in their economic and political fortunes, and so has their opposition to the Jewish state *per se*. If, in the mid-1970’s, one in two Israeli Arabs repudiated Israel’s right to exist, by 1999 four out of five were doing so.

Such fundamental dissonance is indeed “incompatible with the concept of citizenship,” to use the Orr report’s tepid formulation. Unless it changes, it spells even deeper and more intractable trouble ahead. The advice of the Orr commission is useless; to the contrary, following it would amount to an open invitation to Israeli Arabs to go on undermining the country’s legitimacy while continuing to enjoy the benefits of citizenship. But *is* there, at this late date, any way to encourage Israel’s Arabs to normalize their minority status within the Jewish state, intensify their identification with its destiny, and thereby help convince their Palestinian cousins to reconcile themselves as well to its permanent existence?

One good place to start would be with conscription of Israeli Arabs into military service—or, in specific cases, equivalent national service. This would not require any special legislation; the 1986 Defense Service law obligates all

Israeli citizens to serve in the army upon reaching the age of eighteen. But it would certainly be a revolutionary move, one that would force Muslim and Christian Arabs to decide where their deepest loyalties lie and act accordingly. (The Druze community, whose sons already serve in the armed forces, made its choice as early as 1948.)

Defending one's state against external aggression is indeed the ultimate test of citizenship. Just as French Jews fought German Jews during World War I, Italian Americans and German Americans fought Italians and Germans during World War II, and Arabs have incessantly fought other Arabs, why should Israel's Arab citizens not undertake to defend their country against its enemies? Failure to share the burden, the anxieties, and the suffering of their Jewish compatriots runs counter to the very principle of equality that Israeli Arabs have been trumpeting for so long as their watchword. Why not test it?

Of course, to raise the possibility is to expose the idea as utopian in the extreme. That is merely another measure of the extremity in which Israel finds itself.

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