

The Tragedy of Gaza

The violence that has shaken Israel in recent weeks has brought with it a wave of criticism of the government's administration of and the security methods it employs on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Since the first demonstration in Gaza's Jabaliya refugee camp, television cameras and news publications have focused on the protests of this restive population against the Israeli authorities.

Yet this media preoccupation with the violence has left little room for attention to the historical tragedy that defined Gaza long before it came under Israeli control in 1967. Gaza has never been anything but occupied territory. Ruled first by the Ottoman Empire for several hundred years, then by Britain and Egypt before Israel, Gaza has long been referred to as the "forgotten" or "unwanted" territory. Largely ignored by Britain during the Mandate, the Strip later festered in crowded misery throughout Egypt's 19-year rule.

With no Arab government willing to negotiate the area's future or care for its refugees, the Gaza problem has lain solely in the hands of its Israeli inheritors. While Israel has done more than any previous occupier to improve

the quality of life in the area, all the world's hospitals, vocational schools, automobiles and telephone lines cannot calm Gazan political frustrations. For that, the solution remains unchanged: only Arab recognition and willingness to negotiate with Israel can solve the continuing tragedy of Gaza.

Israel has repeatedly stated its willingness to enter talks and negotiate the future of the territory. But, in the two decades since the Six-Day War, no Arab state has responded in kind. Egypt, moreover, virtually abandoned Gaza during Camp David and appears to have no interest in regaining control of the area. Jordan's attention has largely been focused on the West Bank and it has expressed little interest in helping the Strip's troubled population by negotiating Gaza's fate.

As long as Arab leaders and the PLO refuse to accept its existence, Israel will have no partner with which to talk peace and chances for Palestinian political representation will remain tragically dim. While everyone is so quick to yell foul over Israel's handling of the situation, it must be remembered that the ball is really in the Arabs' court.

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and factual reports - exposing
R. Meacham's flagrant distortions
and virulent anti-Semitism.
Here is more fuel for your letters.
Keep up the good work.
Leo Leisberg