



Demonstrations by Palestinian Muslims forcibly taken to Lebanon in December have stung Israel by continuing to stir world criticism.

Israel Revives Its Garrison Mentality

Arab Attacks, World Criticism of Deportations Prompt Rabin to Change Course

By David Hoffman
Washington Post Foreign Service

JERUSALEM, Feb. 6—When he took office last year, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin appealed to Israelis to abandon the garrison outlook that had shaped much of their 44-year history. "We must overcome the sense of isolation that has held us in its thrall for almost half a century," he said. "No longer is it true that the whole world is against us."

In gestures to the United States, Europe and the Arab world, Rabin tried to show he was lifting the "siege mentality" that had been an enduring feature in the rhetoric, politics and world view of his Likud predecessors, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir.

But in recent weeks, Rabin himself has been sounding ever louder the klaxon of the siege. He has declared that Israel is threatened from within by the "murderous terrorist organization" Hamas, and from without by what he sees as the relentless march of Islamic extremism in the Middle East. He has lashed out at the United Nations and Europe, and demanded that the United States protect Israel from its adversaries.

In the face of a storm of international criticism, Rabin has staunchly defended the forced deportation of suspected Islamic fundamentalists, and threatened to do it again if necessary.

What happened? The tumultuous events of recent weeks have revived in Israel a long, agonizing debate about its

future, spanning both of the views Rabin has offered. In countless ways, Israel is reaching out to once-forbidden parts of the globe, integrating itself into a rapidly changing international order and enjoying the fruits of a long-sought "normal" existence. But at the same time, it seems to be haunted by fears of its own vulnerability—imagined and real—and still caught up in a fortress outlook.

"The history of Israelis is one in which they have always been torn by a profound sense of invincibility and a pervasive sense of vulnerability," said historian Michael Oren, director of the American Jewish Committee office here.

He recalled how Moshe Dayan, visiting

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the Pentagon in the 1950s, declared that Israel faced annihilation from its neighbors, yet had an army so strong it could be in Damascus in a week. "It's more than just a siege mentality—both views have a foot in reality," Oren said.

The deportation dispute has opened a window on this complex inner psychology, and perhaps ultimately will shape the outcome of peace talks with the Palestinians and Arab states. According to many analysts here, if Israelis feel the siege is lifting, they may be more willing to make the concessions needed for a settlement. But when feeling cornered or besieged, as just before the deportations, Israel has often reacted harshly—and plunged deeper into the garrison outlook.

These two moods are often intertwined. Rabin has made one of his principal goals a future peace agreement: the ultimate lifting of the siege. Yet in the aftermath of a string of attacks on Israeli soldiers, he also decided to do something drastic, to show Israeli Jews his empathy for their fears and their anger. Even if the deportations created a messy problem for Israel abroad, Rabin struck a powerful chord at home.

Israel today is far more secure and self-assured than it was four decades ago when its envoy, Abba Eban, told the United Nations it was "embattled, blockaded, besieged," and facing "a battle for its security anew with every approaching nightfall and every rising dawn." The threats to its existence have all but abated. Israel is the only nuclear power in the Middle East and one of the strongest conventional military powers, backed by the only remaining superpower. For the first time since the birth of the state, it is engaged in direct, if lagging, peace negotiations with its Arab neighbors and Palestinians.

In short, Israel is in a post-apocalyptic era," said Harry Wall, the Israel director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. "There are dangers that most nations don't face, but having said that, these no longer threaten to destroy the country."

Yet Israel's public mood often

seems suspended between self-confidence and foreboding. Even when the fortress gate seems to be lifting, there are insistent voices demanding that it be closed again.

Recently, for example, after months of delays, the parliament repealed a law passed in the mid-1980s that made talking to Yasser Arafat or his Palestine Liberation Organization a crime.

The vote was the latest sign of a



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Rabin announced a plan last Monday, arranged with the United States, for a return of 100 of 396 Palestinian deportees. The Palestinians rejected the deal.

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changed approach to Arafat, long considered by the government to be Israel's leading nemesis. He then gave an interview to Israel's largest mass circulation daily, Yedioth Aharonoth, and a telephone interview to state-run Israeli television. A leftist legislator, the Labor Party's Yael Dayan, daughter of Moshe Dayan, went to Tunis last week to meet Arafat, the first member of parliament to do so after the ban was lifted. She was pictured on the front page of newspapers here with Arafat's arm around her.

But on her return, she was enveloped in controversy. Rabin called her visit "a shame to us all and a disgrace to the Labor Party." Dozens of other legislators de-

nounced her. Although the law has been changed, the taboo on meeting with Arafat remains powerful.

Veteran pollster Hanoach Smith said Israelis "remain distrustful of the world around them. When I ask periodically, 'If they could, would the Arabs drive Israel into the sea?' almost 70 percent are saying yes. That's what I call a people with a siege mentality."

Meanwhile, almost every day brings new evidence that Israel is shedding its history of isolation.

The crumbling of the Soviet empire not only unleashed a new exodus of immigrants, but also opened fertile new territory for Israeli business ventures and agricultural expertise in the once-closed republics

of Central Asia and Europe. Israel has become a leading source of irrigation technology in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kirgizstan. Recently, Askar Akayev, Kirgizstan's reformist president, visited Israel and signed farming agreements, then announced his country would open an embassy in Jerusalem.

Industrialist Eitan Israeiliy, who recently spent two weeks in Central Asia, told the Jerusalem Post on his return that the new factor in Israel's acceptance is not ideology but profit. "I am not going to Central Asia for Zionist principles. I am going there to make money," he said.

Israel has diplomatic relations today with more nations than at any time in its history. Last year, barriers fell with China, India, Nigeria and 20 other states. "Our diplomatic globe is starting to correspond to the geographic globe," said Eviatar Manor, a Foreign Ministry spokesman.

The Arab boycott remains a powerful reminder to Israelis of their isolation, but there are signs it is weakening. Japan recently condemned the boycott, to which some Japanese companies had long hewed, opening prospects for new business investment from there.

"In the last couple of years, people have come to appreciate the fruits of the world opening toward Israel," former government spokesman Yossi Olmert said. "You can go to Cuba, China or India on an Israeli visa. The sense that people have in

Israel is that in this new world of open borders, open movement, it is not as salient to say Israel is still a fortress by itself."

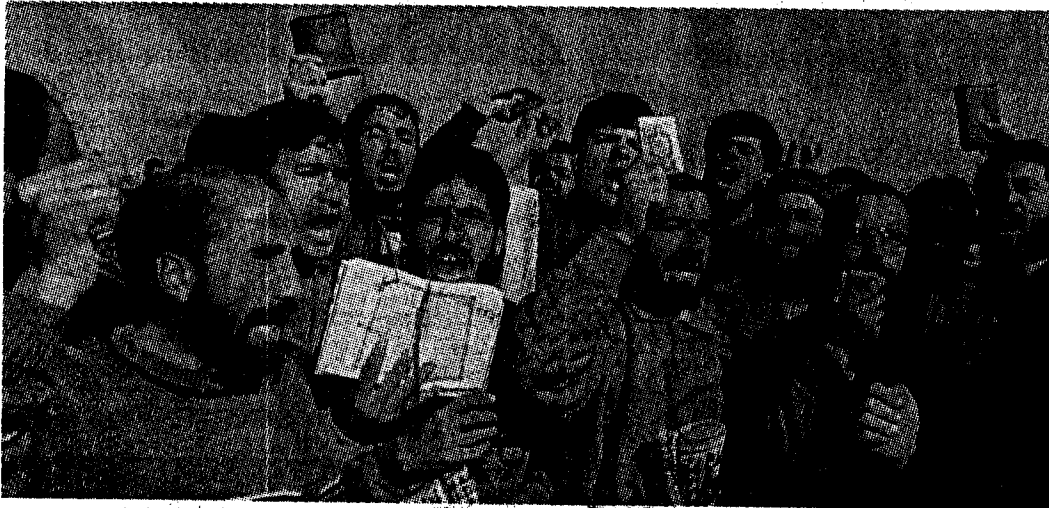
Pollster Smith said this sentiment runs particularly strong among Israel's younger, more educated and well-off population, who have traveled often in Europe and the United States. Many political analysts say these Israelis were pivotal in Rabin's victory last June be-

cause they yearned for a more normal existence and resented the enormous resources the previous right-wing government had channeled to Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

At first, Rabin moved quickly to keep faith with this mood. He slashed housing construction in the territories, made the first visit in six years to Egypt by an Israeli prime minister, and won loan guarantees from the United States. The U.N. General Assembly even repealed the infamous Zionism-is-racism resolution.

But the sense of siege was revived by events in December, when Hamas guerrillas staged surprise attacks on Israeli military patrols, followed by the kidnapping and slaying of a border policeman from a street in Lod.

"The whole point of terrorism is



Palestinian deportees in a no-man's land in Lebanon hold Korans as they chant slogans condemning Israel and Rabin. REUTER

not to win a war, it is to instill uncertainty and insecurity," said Galia Golan, a Hebrew University professor who is a spokesman for the Peace Now group. The violent attacks "have upset our daily routine, instilled fear. You can be walking down the street and someone can pull out a knife."

While condemned by the outside world, the deportations remain highly popular at home. Recent surveys showed that 78 percent of Israeli Jews questioned said the decision was correct, and they would not allow the exiles to return.

In addition to the deportations, Rabin also began sounding the alarm of a greater siege from Islamic fundamentalism.

"Our struggle against murderous Islamic terror is also meant to awaken the world which is lying in slumber," he told parliament. "We call on all nations and peoples to devote their attention to the great danger inherent in Islamic fundamentalism. That is the real and serious danger which threatens the peace of the world in the coming years. The danger of death is at our doorstep."

When the expulsions prompted international protests, Israel's sense of siege grew deeper, especially with the prospect of U.N. sanctions. The complaint that "the whole world is against us" was heard across the political spectrum.

Zeev Binyamin Begin, son of the late premier and a Likud member of parliament, said the U.N. resolution was a sign that "when we take measures, necessary measures, and minimal measures against the surge in terrorism, we are reprimanded and threatened."

He said Israelis believe they are confronted by a "non-understanding, cynical world, ignoring the reasons for the deportations and denouncing the act of self-defense."