



Israel Viewpoint

◆ STEPHEN KRAMER Jewish Times Israel Correspondent



Natural Growth Explained

“Natural growth” is an important subject when it comes to relations between America and Israel. In a nutshell, Israel’s greatest ally insists that Israel not enlarge any settlements in Jewish communities beyond the Green Line, nor build any new ones. Israel agrees, but considers that natural growth within existing legal communities is okay. (There are scores of tiny Jewish enclaves that Israel has already declared to be illegal and has promised to dismantle, although this is easier said than done.)

Natural growth in Israel refers to space to accommodate adult children who want to settle near their families. Escalating criticism is being leveled against this concept by the Obama administration, as well as by many liberal Jews. They say, “Where is it written

that a right exists to live near your family or in your home town”? I’ll grant that in America, this doesn’t seem to be important. It’s a different story in Israel.

In America, many families are separated by several thousand miles and rarely see each other. But in Israel, which is roughly the size and shape of New Jersey, most families live within a half-hour’s drive of each other and frequently have dinner together at least a few times each month, if not weekly. Close proximity to family members and frequent visits are much more common in Israel than in America.

Family size is another factor which makes natural growth important to Israelis. In Israel, with the highest fertility rate of all Western countries, the typical family has three children. Among the twenty

per cent of the population who are religious, the birthrate is even higher. Huge apartment blocs, from two-bedroom units to those with up to five bedrooms, are very common. These blocs have been built on both sides of the Green Line because developers utilize vacant space within the communities for projects geared to young married couples. In many Israeli cities, government-subsidized apartment projects for young couples are under construction or are in the planning stages.

Natural growth is very important for Arab families throughout the Middle East. Householders enlarge their homes until they resemble small apartment houses, adding quarters for young married couples, their parents, and their grandchildren. Jews share the regional desire to keep their families in close proximity.

Perhaps the most obvious reason Israelis build over the Green Line is that unused space is available WITHIN existing communities. Israel expects to retain these communities when and if a peace agreement is finalized with the Palestinians. (Let me

remind my readers that prior to the Six Day War of 1967, all of Israel’s villages, towns, and cities were within the Green Line there were no “settlements” until after Israel won that defensive war.) Currently, about ten per cent of Israeli Jews live beyond the Green Line.

The Palestinians and other Arabs must come to terms with Israel’s retaining its significant communities in the disputed areas. The Arabs must also give up the idea of a Palestinian right of return to Israel. For its part, Israel must find a way to convince the Arabs and its allies that these are immovable Israeli demands.

The current brouhaha about natural growth is a smokescreen for the real dispute over Israel’s borders. New construction doesn’t enlarge the Israeli settlements, it just increases their population. Since the end of the 19th century, long before the United

Nations Partition Plan of 1947, which paved the way for the modern state of Israel, the Arabs vociferously objected to Jews occupying (their word) ANY land in their midst. The only Arab countries to come to

terms with Israel’s existence, Egypt and Jordan, do so strictly because of the money they receive from Western countries, the EU, and the

U.N. In neither country is there any popular support for recognition of Israel. In fact, the rejection of Israel is rampant throughout both populations and in all of their organizations, except among the formal diplomatic establishment.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton recently said, “President Obama wants to see a stop to settlements – not some settlements, not outposts, not ‘natural growth’ exceptions. That is our position. That is what we have communicated very clearly.”

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