



Israel Viewpoint

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The Real Story

What's the real story about the Palestinians? Are they in an "intolerable situation," as President Obama said in his groundbreaking speech in Cairo? David P. Goldman says, "The simplest explanation is that [the Palestinians] like it there [West Bank and Gaza], because they are much better off than people of similar capacities in other Arab countries."

How's that? Palestinians are better off than many other Arabs? Goldman, in his article "Palestine problem hopeless, but not serious," gives the facts. "The standard tables of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita show the West Bank and Gaza at (US)\$1,700, just below Egypt's \$1,900 and significantly below Syria's \$2,250 and Jordan's \$3,000. GDP does not include foreign aid, however, which adds

roughly 30 percent to spendable funds in the Palestinian territories."

Goldman doesn't accept population figures from UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees. He says, "Adjusting for the Begin-Sadat Center population count [www.biu.ac.il] and adding in foreign aid, GDP per capita in the West Bank and Gaza comes to \$3,380, much higher than in Egypt and significantly higher than in Syria or Jordan. Why should any Palestinian refugee resettle in a neighboring Arab country?"

From the U.N. website: "Under UNRWA's operational definition, Palestine refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-

Israeli conflict." In contrast to the counting of any other refugee population, the U.N. gives refugee status to subsequent generations of Palestinians. The result is that the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Arabs who may have lived in Palestine for only two years are counted as "Palestinian refugees."

UNRWA receives compensation per capita, so the more refugees, the more money pours into the agency, which itself employs tens of thousands of Palestinians. Obviously this situation encourages the over-counting of the population and under-recording of deaths. The population figures from the Begin-Sadat Center show an UNRWA disparity of more than one million people!

Goldman writes, "Without disputing Obama's claim that life for the Palestinians is intolerable, it is fair to ask: where is life not intolerable in the Arab world? When the first U.N. Arab Development Report

appeared in 2002, it elicited comments such as this one from the London Economist: 'With barely an exception, [the Arab world's] autocratic rulers, whether presidents or kings, give up their authority only when they die; its elections are a sick joke; half its people are treated as lesser legal and economic beings, and more than half its young, burdened by joblessness and stifled by conservative religious tradition, are said to want to get out of the place as soon as they can.'

"Palestinian Arabs are highly literate, richer and healthier than people in most other Arab countries, thanks to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the blackmail payments of Western as well as Arab governments. As refugees, they live longer and better than their counterparts in adjacent Arab countries. It is not surprising that they do not want to be absorbed into other Arab countries and cease to be

refugees." Goldman avers that the Palestinians are blackmailing the West, which is reluctant to defend itself against Palestinian terrorism. He says they have no other obvious source of income other than handouts, due to a lack of industry, natural resources and infrastructure. "The Palestinians cannot form a normal state. They cannot emigrate to Arab countries without accepting a catastrophic decline in living standards, and very few can emigrate to Western countries. The optimal solution for the Palestinians is to demand a state and blackmail Western and Arab donors with the threat of violence, but never actually get one [a state]. That is why the Palestinian issue is hopeless, but not serious." I find Goldman's argument compelling, given the fact that the Palestinians concentrate more on destroying the Jewish state than building a state of their own. The West condones this behavior, preferring that Israel bears the brunt of Palestinian terror.

What's the real story about see VIEWPOINT page 6 ▶

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