

I know these essays are supposed to be funny. I'm sorry. I promise that I'll try and get back to my happy-go-lucky self again. Right now, with the trouble in Israel, all I feel like doing is picking up a gun.

After the questions I got from last month's A Dog's Lunch, I realized that maybe I should backtrack a little and explain better the history and evolution of Israel and the West Bank. Let's start first with the phrase West Bank and how much of a misnomer it is. The idea of a West Bank makes the geography seem so well defined and the problems so easily solved. People who have never been there envision a river or towering mountain range bisecting two clear cut areas. It's not so.

Let's say Israel is Yankee Stadium (hallowed ground of another sort). The West Bank would run from where the second baseman plays; south to the pitcher's mound, and then a little toward the first base line; west to second base; and north into a little bit of center and right field. In this scenario, the second baseman is standing in Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip would be off somewhere in the South Bronx, which is an insult to the Bronx. The rest of the field is unequivocally Israel. To put Israel's Yankee Stadium location in geographic perspective, picture all the rest of New York City as being the Middle East, Muslim, or Arab countries.

In 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel won control over the West Bank, the Old City of Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Pre-1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank and Jerusalem, while Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip. Before 1967, not only were many synagogues and Jewish properties in Old Jerusalem destroyed, but no Jews were even allowed to enter the Old City, let alone worship at the Western Wall. What Mecca is to Muslims, the Western Wall is to us Jews.

The Six Day War, while possibly the greatest modern military campaign, has been a disaster politically. Why? Because Israel thought that they could trade the land they'd won for Arab peace treaties and begin an era of prosperity for themselves and the Arabs. Unfortunately Arab hatred runs so deeply, its governments so corrupt and in need of a scapegoat, that peace to this day seems impossible. Recently, the media monitoring group Freedom House rated the level of press freedom in over 200 countries. Israel was the only country out of 14 in the Middle East to have a free press. Incredibly, Mali is the only one of 46 Muslim countries with a free press. One out of 46! No free press, no free exchange of ideas, no questioning the government when they portray Israel as the bogeyman responsible for all the problems of the masses.

The refugee camps we read so much about already existed pre-1967 because the Jordanians and Egyptians preferred the Palestinians to be outcasts and martyrs rather than welcoming them as citizens. Oh, and by the way after 1948 and Israel's creation, almost a million Jews were exiled from their homes throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Jews had to flee Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Morocco, et al. It's funny, nobody ever suggests that a Jew who lost a shoe store in Cairo be entitled to return or at least be compensated.

Has Israel always been fair to its Arab citizens and the Palestinians? Although plenty of Druze and Bedouins serve in the Israel Defense Forces and many Arabs actively participate in Israeli society, the answer is no. Unfortunately it's difficult to close one's eyes in trust when freely elected Arab members of Israel's parliament gleefully meet with leaders of countries sworn to

destroy Israel. If a United States Senator stood up in the Capitol and shouted that he agreed with Osama Bin Laden, what would the reaction of most Americans be? Justified outrage and wariness if not worse.

Let's jump to the recent past. Two years ago, Prime Minister Ehud Barak saw his government fall after offering Yassir Arafat, and being snubbed, the best deal the Palestinians will ever get. The deal included virtually all of the land of the West Bank (over 90%) and sovereignty over the Arab parts of East Jerusalem, if not the entire Old City. Israel was even willing to compensate the Palestinians for land kept by decades old settlements. The answer from Arafat and the Palestinians: violence. No counter proposal. No realization that compromise was the only way. Simply violence.

I realize that I'm pro-Israel and some would say anti-Palestinian (which I don't consider myself, just anti-current Palestinian leadership), but Arafat and the Palestinians just make it so damn easy. Before the recent violence, 99% of all Palestinians were under Palestinian rule. By that I mean Arafat's rule. There was no continuing Israeli occupation. The Palestinians were free to build their economy, develop a free press and judicial system, and continue the peace process. Of course these wonderful, some would say banal things never happened. The refugee camps and their poverty, for political reasons, have continued to exist despite billions of dollars pouring into the Palestinian Authority's treasury. Of course, Arafat and his cronies have been able to find a few bucks to build opulent seaside villas and buy fleets of luxury cars. In the North, Hezbollah, whose sole declared aim was seeing Israel withdrawal from Lebanon has continued attacks on Israel and kidnappings of Israeli soldiers despite even the UN, never fair to Israel, declaring that Israel has pulled back to within its own internationally proven border. But they just want peace right?

That's the great lie. The land for peace initiative is a hoax. Pushed so hard by the United States and Europe, when Europeans aren't too busy burning immigrant Turkish coffee shops or voting for Fascists, land for peace is a fraud. Like Hezbollah, the Palestinians have only responded with more violence, not less, for every kilometer of land Israel has surrendered. Yankee Stadium compared to the whole of New York City. Isn't there one tiny piece of earth where the Arabs will let the Jews live in peace?