

Treatment of the Arab Population in the Administered Areas and the Fate of Men in the Sinai Desert

Sitting 186 of the Sixth Knesset

21 June 1967 (13 Sivan 5727)

M. Wilner (Rakah): Knesset Members...on behalf of the Communist party group I propose that we debate the treatment of the Arab population in the conquered areas and the fate of the thousands of men in the Sinai Desert....After the Sinai Desert was conquered by the IDF many thousands of Egyptian soldiers remained there without food or water.... There have been reports in the Israeli and foreign press of how these thousands are wandering about the desert, dying. Time has passed, various people have approached the Government, but nothing has been done. Only after precious time had been lost and pressure had been exerted by the International Red Cross and public opinion did rescue operations begin. 11,000 men were returned, and according to their reports, the wounded were subjected to horrible treatment while prisoners of war.

We have heard and read reports that the Military Governor of the West Bank announced that anyone wishing to leave the area would be enabled to do so....This constituted pressure to leave an area under military occupation. The response from the other side was a call to the population not to leave their homes. According to reports in the Israeli press...100,000 people have already left, and this process is continuing....There have been reports of the blowing up of villages in the Latrun area, for example, for "strategic, tactical and security reasons"....

We have all heard stories from our soldiers about what was and was not done to the civilian population. Villages were destroyed not only in the Latrun area after the military operations had ended....Old and young, men, women and children, the sick and the feeble were moved out of the former Jewish Quarter of the Old City in a horrifying way....Houses have been destroyed in the area around the Western Wall and there seems to be general confusion and disorganization....

M. Hacohen (Ma'arach): Stop conducting this anti-Israel propaganda campaign!

M. Wilner (Rakah): I am saying these things for the good of the State of Israel....Anti-semitism never did any good when it was directed against the Jews, nor when it was directed against others by Jews.

The Security Council unanimously demanded that Israel adopt a humane approach to the inhabitants of the conquered territories, enabling those who had fled or been expelled to return to their homes....Leading Israeli intellectuals, academics and professionals have called for a stop to all the persecutions, deportations, and destruction of houses and property in the occupied areas and for medical aid to be extended to the population there immediately. We endorse that demand. I note with satisfaction that many soldiers refused to participate in action directed against the civilian population, and some even prevented action of this kind from being taken, while endangering their own lives.

Our behavior in the occupied territories has caused untold damage to Israel in addition to the actual waging of the war. As a Jew who lost all his family in the war, my heart is filled with pain and shame at the fact that it was the Government of Israel which initiated war for the second time, thereby endangering world peace, and which is taking shameful action against the civilian population of the occupied territories.

M. Cohen (Ma'arach): Shame on you!

M. Wilner (Rakah): Shame on the persecutors of the Arab population! Shame on the anti-semites in the State of Israel!

I propose that we debate this issue, and I would like to conclude with a few lines which Nathan Alterman wrote during the War of Independence. Some people are able to keep their heads even in stirring times:

A brave, armed boy crossed the conquered town in a jeep,
And an old man and a woman stood against the wall in the street.
The boy smiled, showing milk teeth, "I'll try the gun."
He tried, the man covered his face, didn't try to run,
Then his blood covered the wall....

We may talk of "sensitive incidents" which happen to be murder,
Then we smile apologetically, and the matter goes no further....
Because fighting men, us included, whether near or far,
Murmur "necessity," and "revenge," and are criminals of war.

If this was so in the War of Independence, how much more so today.

The Minister of Defense, M. Dayan: If MK Wilner...wanted to accuse Israel of starting the war, he should have said so openly and tabled a motion for the agenda...instead of slyly slipping it into his speech about thirsty Egyptians wandering about the desert....The Government of Israel did not start this war. The first act of aggression was the closing of the Straits and the blockade on Israeli shipping.

As to the other points raised by MK Wilner, one must have a sense of proportion when speaking of civilian casualties and soldiers wandering around the desert hungry and thirsty. I do not think there have been

many wars in which the civilian population suffered as little as in this one, as a result of the policy of the Government and the IDF. Jerusalem was shelled for days, but the IDF did not fire a single shell or drop a single bomb, on any civilian locality, not even on the Old City when Jerusalem was being shelled from there for days, neither on Damascus nor on Cairo, though we could have had we wanted to...

So, when you speak of harming the civilian population, kindly keep a sense of proportion....You were in Jerusalem, you saw what was inflicted on Jewish Jerusalem by the other side...yet there was no retaliation from our side....No one was even scratched in Hebron when it was taken. In Jenin two or three people were hurt, and there were a few casualties in Nablus. Is that what an army does when there is fighting—including Jordanian tanks—inside those towns? Do you know of any other army which would make its way right across a town, while clashing with the Legion, without harming a soul...?

As for the Egyptian soldiers in the desert...many of them refused to give themselves up either because of the instructions broadcast over Cairo Radio to continue fighting as guerrillas...or because they thought they could make their way back to Egypt....That is why many thousands of Egyptian soldiers are wandering about the desert....Those soldiers who lay down their arms and gave themselves up are not wandering around and are neither hungry nor thirsty....We did not prevent foreign journalists from entering the Sinai, the Syrian Heights and the West Bank and seeing the situation for themselves....We have cooperated with the Red Cross in assessing the situation...and hardly a single Egyptian soldier has been found wandering around, since they seem to have either found their way to Egypt or given themselves up....

The same applies to the accusations that we bombed hospitals in El-Arish and elsewhere. Red Cross representatives visited the hospitals and talked with Arab P.o.W.s. They found that no one had been hurt while in hospital and that the conditions in which the P.o.W.s were being kept in camps was in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

There may have been some discrepancy between the orders that were issued and the facts on the ground in the West Bank. When there is a war, especially one in which both regulars and reserves are fighting, with all the differences in their ages, backgrounds and mentalities, not every order is obeyed instantly, immediately and to the fullest extent....The inhabitants of the West Bank were not an objective, neutral population in this war. They constituted part of the Jordanian kingdom and of the forces which waged war on Israel on June 5 by shelling Jerusalem and its corridor....This war began with the closing of the Straits, and until the moment Jordan started to fight we did not think it would spread to the Jordanian front. No one thought that it would. But the civilian population there...in places like Latrun, Tulkarm and Kal-kilya was part of the military disposition of the Jordanian Army, which

was placed under Egyptian command...and was ordered to attack Israel....Jordanian cannon fired on Israel from there, not from the other side of the River Jordan...and the civilian population helped the Legion....It was not neutral in this war....

For the last twenty years the West Bank has belonged to Jordan. Many of the soldiers of the Legion came from there. Regrettably, I cannot distinguish between them and Jordan today, just as I cannot distinguish between Jordan and Egypt....The orders given regarding the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem...were to evacuate the people living in synagogues and holy places and offer alternative accommodation to anyone living in houses there....Are any of those people left out in the street...? The people living in the synagogues were not residents of Jerusalem before 1948. Most of them came from Hebron or elsewhere....If anyone is left without a roof over their heads we will see to it that they get one...but we will not let them continue living in synagogues in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. We intend to restore those synagogues so that they may serve as places of worship once more.

With regard to the refugees who left the West Bank—and who may or may not number 100,000, I have no precise figures on that—it is true that an order was issued to the effect that any inhabitant of the West Bank who wished to leave for Jordan could do so...and that a certain number of those inhabitants took advantage of that order, for a variety of reasons....Individuals and groups are still seeking to take advantage of the arrangement enabling them to leave, and we are not preventing them from doing so....I see nothing wrong in this arrangement and regard it as perfectly fair and humane....We are trying to attain the maximal normalization of life on the West Bank with maximum speed. There may be hitches here and there, and it is evident that this normalization will not constitute a return to the regime which existed there formerly. There will be no Egyptians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank will be under Israeli rule. The normalization will not be political, and certainly not military. The IDF will be there, not the Legion, the Egyptian Army, the Fedayeen or those cannon. But from the point of view of the Arab individual living there, I assume that we will be able to attain normalization within a short period of time.

I propose that we remove the motion from the agenda.

S. Mikunis (Maki): Distinguished Speaker and Knesset, I propose that we transfer the motion to an appropriate Knesset Committee...so that it is not simply removed from the agenda...because it is an important issue....The information we have received about certain Arab areas which were conquered by the IDF during the fighting arouses grave concern. I am talking about the demolition of several Arab villages in the Latrun area and the expulsion of their inhabitants by certain groups of soldiers....There are reports of collective punishment being inflicted on the inhabitants of certain villages, forcing men, women and chil-

dren to abandon their homes and possessions and leave without food or water. It appears that the soldiers who were ordered to do this were deeply shocked, and in some cases refused to obey that order....All these human tragedies are in complete contradiction to our moral superiority in battle, our advanced sense of justice and the basis of our very existence in this region....

Israel embarked on a war which was forced upon it in order to protect its existence in the face of the Arab leaders' intentions of destroying it and in order to attain permanent peace with the Arab peoples. Any harm inflicted on the civilian Arab population contradicts the defensive nature of the war and the objective of peace....The propaganda campaign currently being conducted against Israel obliges us to be doubly careful that no injustice is done...for injustices of this kind harm us as much as the Arabs...and hamper our political campaign.

I would like to express my reservations regarding the description of thousands of Egyptian soldiers wandering hungry and thirsty around the Sinai Desert given so graphically by the representative of Rakah. No one disputes that two or three days after the fighting began thousands of Egyptian soldiers were in dire straits in the Sinai Desert, but...in view of the anti-Israel propaganda being broadcast from Cairo, we should point out that it is the Egyptian rulers who were responsible for the fact that Egyptian officers abandoned their men and fled, because Egypt stopped the supply of water across the Canal to the desert. Israeli helicopters, on the other hand, located Egyptian soldiers and dropped supplies to them...sometimes at great risk to themselves....I therefore propose that the subject be transferred to the appropriate committee for further discussion....

(MK Wilner's proposal to debate the subject in the plenum is not adopted.)

(MK Mikunis' proposal to transfer the subject to a committee is not adopted.)

Statements by Prominent Persons Regarding the Return of Liberated Territory to the Enemy

Sitting 186 of the Sixth Knesset

21 June 1967 (13 Sivan 5727)

S. Tamir (Free Center): Mr. Speaker, distinguished Knesset, on June 12 this year Israel's ambassador to the U.S., Mr. Harman, is reported as having said: "It will be necessary to hold direct talks between Israel and the Arabs to decide on the future of the territory captured from Egypt, Jordan and Syria." On June 19 the Chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee is reported as having said: "The main point is not territory but peace with the Arabs, and the negotiations with them may oblige us to relinquish territory for permanent peace." On June 10 the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Adi Jaffe, reportedly said: "Apart from Jerusalem and Sharm el-Sheikh, we will agree to discuss all our territorial gains during the war." On the same day the Prime Minister said, in reply to a reporter's question about our retaining the Syrian Heights: "If we were alone in the world it might be possible. But we must remember that there is also New York...and the U.N...." We have also heard various suggestions about granting autonomy to the Arab areas now controlled by the IDF. Adi Jaffe's statement has been denied, though not the others....At the same time the Egyptian tyrant and the Hashemite king...announced unequivocally that their objective still remained the destruction of Israel.

Political statements at a fateful time such as this are acts, just as such important statements as the one made by the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense that the Armistice Agreements have collapsed and will not be restored, and the Minister of Defense's unforgettable assertion that we have returned to united Jerusalem and will never leave it again determine historical facts. Statements such as those reportedly made by Israel's ambassador to the U.S., the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and the Prime Minister take on a significance which I am sure are alien to those who made them and with which most people in this House and Israel disagree. They may also constitute an invitation to pressure from friendly nations...which, with all their good intentions, may constitute a greater threat to us at this point than our enemies. After all, we have proved that we can deal with our enemies....

This motion is being proposed by a party group...which was the first to demand a National Unity Government...and which, although not in