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Subject: Fw: In praise of oslo - weisglass
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IN PRAISE OF THE OSLO ACCORDS

PAID COEXISTENCE

Yedioth Ahronoth (p. 24) by Dov Weissglas (op-ed) -- The twentieth anniversary of the Oslo Accords passed without producing much in the way of a public debate. It seems to me that the people who created the agreement and the people who recognize its importance speak about it infrequently because of the negative branding that it has received. The Oslo Accords have numerous substantive aspects that are noteworthy, including the practical shelving of the UN partition plan lines and Palestinian recognition of Israel in the 1967 borders. However, I do not wish to address those issues but, rather, a practical question: where would Israel be without the Oslo Accords?

The core of the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol was to establish a state-like Palestinian self-government, which would govern the majority of the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria, and the establishment of economic and administrative relations with Israel. The Palestinian Authority took upon itself absolute responsibility for the administration of civil affairs for the citizens in the areas under its control (some two million Palestinians): policing and internal security, justice, healthcare, education, economy, transport, communications, infrastructure development, construction, the supply of water and electricity and more. The Palestinian Authority found it hard to perform from the day of its inception. It has no money: the economy isn't sufficiently developed; tax collection is meager and partial, revenues from independent sources are non-existent. Complementing all that was wastefulness and a lack of efficiency. The result was an ever-mounting deficit of huge proportions. Were it not for the financial support provided by different countries around the world, the Palestinian Authority would have collapsed.

And that is precisely the trouble that the "Oslo opponents" have yearned for. Imagine if their wish had come true; imagine if there were no Oslo Accords, if there was no Palestinian Authority, and the State of Israel had to administer the lives of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria directly. Israel would have to employ tens of thousands of Palestinian civil servants to operate schools, health clinics, hospitals, police stations and prisons; Israel would have to pave roads and lay water pipes, power lines and communication lines; it would have to provide welfare services. Troops from the Israel Police would have to chase down thieves in the alleyways of the refugee camps.

How is Israel supposed to do all that? Where would the government come up with the funds and manpower to administer the lives of another two million people? And not just any people, but a "weak" population that needs a great deal of support and extensive government services, but which has no ability to pay for them. Israel's ability to levy taxes from the Palestinians is next to nil; everything would have to be paid for by Israel's citizens and at the expense of Israel's own poor.

The huge grants and donations that countries from around the world gave to the Palestinian Authority to balance its budget would stop, since it is hard to imagine any of the donor countries agreeing to finance the Israeli occupation directly. The cost of administering the lives of the Palestinians in the territories would be, from an Israeli budgetary perspective, a cost that yielded no attendant revenues whatsoever. That would be disastrous for Israel.

Let no one delude themselves. The pre-Oslo days in which Israel made do with offering only basic and minimal administrative services to the Palestinians who live in the territories are long gone. From now on the world is sure to monitor with a sour face everything Israel does there. Israel will be called upon to administer those territories in a way that ensures "suitable living conditions" for the population, and it will find itself forced to make up for everything the Palestinian Authority failed to do. The failings of the Palestinian Authority in administering the Palestinians' daily lives is an internal Palestinian affair. Israel's administrative failings in the territories will fall under the rubric of a violation of international law. Or, as one expert on the issue put it to me, "every pothole in the street will turn into an international commission of inquiry."

The formulation of the Oslo Accords frees Israel from the awful economic burden that goes hand in hand with controlling the Palestinians' lives, control that might worsen the crisis with countries around the world over Judea and Samaria. In that sense, at least, Oslo was a huge success.

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