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What Begin and Gantz understand

There is broad and deep support around the world for our national rights in this land - on the condition, however, that Israel respect the personal and civil rights of Palestinians residing and making their lives in these areas.

By Yehuda Ben Meir

The Jewish people has been fighting for 100 years now for the right to have a nation state in the Land of Israel, and it has involved a long battle between the Jewish people and the Palestinian Arab people. Even many of those who, out of a strong desire to head off the prospect of Israel becoming a binational state, advocate a solution providing for two states for two peoples as part of a permanent settlement of the conflict, are convinced that the Jewish people have a national right to the Land of Israel. They also insist that the major Jewish settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria be included in any final agreement within Israel's sovereign territory.

This national struggle is a just one and as a result, we have a chance to win it. There is broad and deep support around the world for our national rights in this land - on the condition, however, that Israel respect the personal and civil rights of Palestinians residing and making their lives in these areas. Unqualified respect for these rights, the assurance of security for the millions of Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria, and protection of their welfare and freedom to go about their lives are essential if we are to have the world's support for our national claims. The burden of proof will always be on Israel. And the day-to-day conduct of the Jews and the Israel Defense Forces with respect to the Palestinians is a decisive factor in the success of our national struggle.

This simple, fundamental fact has been clear over time to all of Israel's leaders, first and foremost to those who have taken the cause of the Land of Israel to heart. Such was the case with Menachem Begin and with the spiritual leader of the Gush Emunim settlement movement, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. And both of them were insistent that settlements not be built on privately-owned Palestinian land. Now, however, the leaders of the right wing live in another world. They

compete with one another over who will be more extreme and who will be looked upon favorably by extremists among the settlers.

The late prime minister's son, Minister without Portfolio Benny Begin, was correct in describing a law that would provide retroactive approval for settlements built on privately-owned Palestinian land as "delusional and unconstitutional." Beyond that however, such legislation, if it passes, would cause immeasurable damage to the State of Israel and the Jewish people's just national battle.

There may be room for special arrangements here or there, where people acted in good faith, but the significance of a comprehensive law on the issue involves not only retroactive approval of what was done in the past. It would also signal to absolutely everyone that the State of Israel is not protecting the property rights of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria.

And Benny Begin, who needs no lessons from other Likud cabinet ministers or Knesset members on what love of the Land of Israel is, understands this. I am also convinced that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu understands it, too.

At the same time, Israel must prove to the world that the conduct of IDF soldiers and their commanders in Judea and Samaria is impeccable. It must be part of our heart and soul, and IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz understood this when he correctly decided to dismiss Lt. Col. Shalom Eisner after he struck a foreign activist in the face in a confrontation in the Jordan Valley.

The villain of the case is not Eisner, whose motivations are understandable and whom we can feel sorry for, but rather the voices on the right who said that Eisner deserved a medal for "carrying out the mission." They also had the chutzpah to take Gantz to task for his purported ethical failure.

Does the State of Israel wish to project to the world that this is how the IDF carries out its missions? We are lucky to have Benny Begin and Benny Gantz.

This story is by:

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