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LETTER DATED 1 JUNE 1973 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF EGYPT TO  
THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In connexion with the coming discussion in the Security Council regarding a full review of the situation in the Middle East since June 1967, and upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to request that this letter and the enclosed copy of the article on Israel's "Occupied Territories", which appeared in The Daily Telegraph Magazine, No. 448, 1 June 1973, be circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) A. Esmat Abdel MEGUID  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative

## THE FIGHT FOR A HOMELAND

The Occupied Territories are zones on a political map, the main root of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But they are also home to thousands. What of the Arabs - many in refugee camps - living under an alien, unsympathetic regime? What of the Israelis, temporary colonists of barren lands? JOHN BULLOCH gives his firsthand account of the West Bank, Sinai, the Golan Heights and the people who live there

"Roads," he said bitterly. "That's all they do, build roads. Not for our good, certainly not, but so that their tanks and patrols can come and keep us quiet. They must be the greatest road builders since Hitler."

Instantly, the Israeli girl flared up: "And I suppose there are crematoria being built too," she said.

And that was the end of another attempt at dialogue between Arab and Israeli. For the conversation was taking place in the Gaza Strip, that tragic, defeated, bitter plot of land which is one huge refugee camp. A symbol of the despair and powerlessness of the Arabs and, for the Israelis, the most intransigent problem they acquired by the force of their arms in 1967, and have since chosen to keep.

But Gaza is only one problem among many. In the Six Day War, Israel increased its land area three and a half times, added a million Arabs to the number within its borders, and saddled itself with the role of an occupying power, a role which, according to many Arabs, is one the Israelis are prepared to play for ever. From the ski slopes of Mount Hermon, where Israel, Lebanon and Syria now have their joint frontiers, over the barren Golan Heights, along the fertile West Bank of the Jordan river and down through Sinai to the burning desert heat of Sharm el Sheikh, the Israeli Army administers a vast territory and holds sway over all the inhabitants. According to the Israelis, it is a mild, benevolent, occupation.

But to the Arabs the occupation is a constant burden, a reminder of defeat, and a denial of their right to live their lives in their own way. In every part of the occupied territories I found resignation, but no acceptance. "We are a patient people," says Dr. Amin Majajj at his family home at Herod's Gate in Old Jerusalem. "We can wait, that is all we can do. But we will never forget."

Peasant, priest, or politician, every Arab living under Israeli rule is waiting for the day it will end. Few expect that moment to come soon. Time after time I was told: "The Israelis have a plan, a long-term time table. They have no intention of getting out of the lands they occupied. What they want is to get us out." And in Tel Aviv a suave General of the Israeli Army said: "Why not write about the occupied territories in another 19 years when they celebrate their 25th anniversary, just as Israel is this year."

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Source: The Daily Telegraph Magazine, Number 448, 1 June 1973.

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A tour of the frontiers shows why Army men think like that. Up in the North, the border with Syria is still the most precarious, for Syria is the fieriest of the countries surrounding Israel. But from the Israeli point of view the 440 square miles of land they seized there in 1967 is vital. The Golan Heights form a bleak upland plateau, where the wind whistles over stunted grass which can support no more than the lean goats of the wandering herdsmen, and in winter snow blankets the ground. But on the western side the ground falls away in a dramatic escarpment, and spread out below is that land of milk and honey, Galilee. Before 1967 the Syrian gunners were up on the plateau; their guns could deal death up to a range of 20 miles. No fishing was possible on the Sea of Galilee, farmers had armour plating on their tractors, and children slept in shelters at night.

Today, the pretty, red-roofed village of Ramot Moshav, a co-operative settlement built in 1970 on a site formerly used as a Syrian outpost, is to be turned into a holiday resort, and the co-operators are moving higher up on to the plateaux. Dogs and children abound in their community, and all the young women seem to be pregnant. "You can see we are very confident about the future," said the Moshav secretary.

Roads built at immense cost and at a vast expense of labour wind up on to the Heights, and there 17 new Israeli settlements have been established. Three of them are nahalim, military strong points manned by paratroopers and Israeli Army girls who farm as well as fight. The others are kibbutzim, civilian communal settlements. Typical is Hagolan, eight miles from the Syrian frontier, which was shelled early this year. Some 200 people live there, among them two British families. Construction is going on around the clock, and eventually the settlement will become a small town.

In Golan it is easy for the Israelis to establish themselves, for there is hardly any local population. In 1967 most of the Syrians living in the villages on the Heights fled before the advancing Army, as did the Circassians who also lived there and often acted as servants to the Syrians. Only the Druse remained in five separate villages. These 7,500 people, who belong to a breakaway Moslem sect, are friendly and co-operative according to the Israelis. But the Syrians have some Druse officers in their Army. And now more than 20 young men from the Druse village of Majdal Shams are in prison accused of passing on information "to the enemy" - their cousins two miles away across the artificial border.

It is no accident that the Golan Heights remain unpopulated. If the Syrian villages were not damaged - or not damaged enough - during the brief 1967 fighting, tank shells, explosives and bulldozers were used to raze them. After only five years, no trace now remains of some of the small hamlets which were home to the simple people of Golan. But the main town of the area, Kuneitra, is still there. It is occupied by a company of Israeli troops, the regional Army command, and three Arabs. The houses, mosques, and shops of this once bustling town of 20,000 people lie ruined, roofs off, walls down, windows gaping. But there was no fighting at Kuneitra; the Syrian population fled, and the Syrian Army made a stand some way from it. Kuneitra was deliberately, systematically and efficiently wrecked to prevent people returning to it.

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Miles away in the West Bank town of Nablus Dr. Hatem abu Ghazaleh nodded understandingly as I described the scene in the Golan Heights. "Of course," he said. "That is just what the Israelis want. Their aim has always been to gain territory but not people. They would like to see a new empty quarter here on the West Bank, and they are doing all they can to induce us to go. But here we are too many for them."

The largest concentration of Arabs "captured" by Israel live on the West Bank, some 600,000 in the 2,300 square miles of the provinces of Samaria and Judaea. Before 1967, this was part of King Hussein's Jordan, with the best and the richest farming areas, and, on the hills marking the Western border, orchards of olives, fields of vines separated by the dry stone walls painstakingly built with rock taken from the ground, and the towns of Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron.

Israeli occupation of this area is as low key as they can make it. In the village of Deir Dibwan, the former Mayor, Mr. Youssef Chanem, told me: "Some of the peasants here who do not go outside the village or their fields may never see an Israeli. Usually an officer comes just once a month to drink a cup of coffee with us. But we get sheafs of new regulations every week. Before, they used to come in cyclostyled sheets. Now they come as printed booklets... one more mark of permanence."

Unobtrusive as the Israeli presence is, the Arab population is continually aware of it. In Salfit I drank coffee in the village pharmacy and talked to the young dispenser who had trained in Pakistan. "Yes, they are unobtrusive here," he said, "and certainly they have improved our economy. But tell me, what do you do if you keep a sheep? You feed it, yes? And why do you feed it? That's right, you fatten it to slaughter it...."

Dr. Ghazaleh had the same view: "We are labourers and consumers for Israel, and nothing more," he said. "Under the Hashemite King we were neglected, and all development went to the East Bank, so there was a vacuum here which Israel could have filled, industrial, agricultural and social. They chose to do nothing, so now there are no new factories, and they have seen to it there is no market for our produce. All that has happened is our men go as labourers to Israel."

Some 25,000 workers from the West Bank go into Israel proper each day, mostly to jobs as building labourers. They bring a massive injection of capital into the area with their wages, but prices have gone up at the same time - 300 per cent, since 1967.

The result is that those unable to go to Israel to work are worse off, and the farmers are in trouble because they cannot get the casual labour they need at sowing and harvest times.

Down in the Jordan Valley there are other troubles. The Israeli Army is thick the ground there, and farmers complain of orange groves occupied and damaged, "accidentally" sprayed with pesticides, buildings knocked down and wells filled in. Up until the 1970 ceasefire this was a hot front line, with constant

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incursions by Palestinian commandoes from Jordan, and artillery duels across the river. Now, all is quiet, but Israel has established a chain of 11 settlements, with two more planned.

Usually the settlements are on what was previously land owned by the Jordan government and let to farmers, but often the kibbutzim encroach on farms still owned and used by people living in the region. Then their land is expropriated and compensation is fixed by the Israelis. There is a right of appeal to Israeli courts, but few avail themselves of it. The more prominent do not want to be seen acknowledging Israeli sovereignty, others expect less than justice from people who would be judges in their own cause.

There was a time when there was real resistance to Israeli rule in the West Bank. There were strikes, protests, acts of sabotage as infiltrators from Jordan came across the river to stir up the people. The reply of the occupying authority was careful and effective. As a senior Israeli put it: "They can say Golda must go, they can say Moshe is a fink. But if they throw one stone...."

When "incidents" occurred, areas were cordoned, people searched, and life generally made unpleasant. In some instances, arbitrary curfews were imposed on whole villages, not because they were necessary, but as a collective punishment. Preventing villagers from going out of their houses meant their livestock died and their fields were untended.

Even more drastic was the punishment still used: blowing up houses. If a man was reasonably thought to have helped what the Israelis call "the terrorists", the house he occupied was immediately blown up. It makes no difference if the suspect concerned is the owner or merely the occupier; house and contents go up. This "administrative" punishment, as it is called, is much hated and much criticised on the grounds that action is taken when there is only suspicion. The Israeli reply is that retribution must be swift if it is to deter; that there are detailed checks before demolition, which must be authorised at the highest level; finally, the Israeli administration says, out of the thousands of houses blown up over the past five years, only two errors have been found, and in both cases the owners were compensated.

From the Arab side the picture is very different. They tell of whole villages being demolished to make way for Israeli settlements, houses razed because the fedayeen passed by, or lonely buildings blown up merely because they might be used by infiltrators. Best estimates are that outside Jerusalem more than 3,000 buildings and houses have gone.

One place on the West Bank where the Israeli presence is strikingly evident, in contrast to the situation in Ramallah or Nablus, is Hebron, most devoutly Moslem of all the string of towns along these Biblical hills.

The heart of Hebron, a town of about 35,000 people, is the Mosque of the Tomb of Abraham. Since the Arabs rid their land of the invading, heretical Crusaders, this has been one of the most revered Moslem holy places of the West Bank. But it

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is also holy to the Jews, containing the burial place of their patriarch. So after the 1967 war a group of religious Jews went to Hebron and set themselves up in a hotel there. The Military Governor decided they were too obvious and provocative, and moved them to a makeshift site above the town. At the same time, or perhaps in return for their move, they obtained the right to go into the mosque to pray at certain times.

Now, the Moslem parts of the building are roped off, and the remainder is a synagogue. Israeli soldiers guard the entrance, and Israeli troops with machine guns mounted on their jeeps patrol the streets surrounding this mosque. And above the town looms the multi-storey apartment blocks of Kiriat Arba, the Jewish settlement in Hebron. It is surrounded by a wire fence, with watch towers at each corner, and an army camp within its compound. Permission has been given for 300 more apartments to be built, to raise the total to 500. The eventual aim of the settlers is a Jewish population in Hebron of 10,000, a quarter of the total of Arabs living in the town.

The Mufti of Jerusalem, that other troubled city, sighs gently over the situation in Hebron. The Mufti, Sheikh Aluddin Alami, has a white beard and twinkling blue eyes. I asked him why he and his fellow Moslem priests did not preach resistance to such Israeli acts as the taking over of the Hebron mosque. Instructions from the Sheikhs at the Friday noon prayers would have a tremendous effect on the faithful, so why did he not use this power? The Mufti laughed gently: "The bridge," he said, "it would be the bridge for us if we did that. They would not interfere with us in the mosques, but that night there would be a knock at the door, soldiers would be waiting with lorries, and off we would go to the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan. We would be pushed over to the East bank, never to return.

"For a priest to leave his congregation is no use. To be put on trial, yes, or to go to prison and let people know you are in prison. But to be pushed out of the country, deprived of a voice, that is not useful."

Conservative estimates are that more than 300 prominent Arab personalities have been deported to Jordan since 1967, though the Israeli authorities admit to only 70. Among those turned out have been lawyers and doctors, a mayor, and other community leaders. There is no appeal against a deportation decision by the military commander of an area.

The gentle and charming Mufti of Jerusalem worries about the Moslems outside the city, the third holiest of Islam after Mecca and Medina, as well as about his own people.

Before 1967, he said, up to a quarter of a million of the faithful would crowd the courtyard surrounding the sacred Al Aqsa mosque for Friday noon prayers during the holy month of Ramadan. Last Ramadan no more than a few thousand were there, for the Israelis are very willing to let Arabs leave the country, but very reluctant to allow Arab visitors in.

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It is the ancient, long divided and now reunited city of Jerusalem, holy to three different world faiths, which provides the main stumbling block to any negotiated peace. The Israelis have annexed East Jerusalem, the only part of the occupied territories they have taken in this way, and say they will never again allow the city to be split. King Hussein and the other Arab leaders say equally categorically that they will not allow Jerusalem to remain under Israeli rule.

The city itself has changed in the past five years more than any other part of the conquered lands, or of Israel itself. High rise, starkly functional apartment blocks ring the old city, built more with an eye to eventual defence than to aesthetic balance. The city boundaries have been pushed out to include the airport, and Israeli "outposts". Above all, the land in front of the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall most sacred of all to Jews, has been cleared of the houses and buildings which crowded on to it, and laid out in a spacious plaza banked by splendid new apartments built carefully to blend in with the surroundings.

This is admitted by Arabs to be the old Jewish quarter of the walled city, a 35-acre space once filled with huddled buildings, sudden alleys, tiny shops. But they complain that no more than ten per cent was owned by Jews; Arabs owned the rest, and often let to Jews or lived there themselves. Now, they say, the Israelis have paid key money to tenants to obtain possession, ignoring the owners; or during the course of demolition work bulldozers have "accidentally" knocked into adjacent Arab houses, pushing out the Jewish quarter further than ever.

Meron Benvenisti, the Israeli city councillor in charge of planning, is more realistic than many of his colleagues. "We are creating problems," he said. "When the work is finished we shall be criticised because in the Moslem quarter there is still no running water or sewerage. They will not accept it because it would be acknowledging us. I understand it."

Teddy Koller, the Mayor, complains that everyone knows better than the city council what is best for Jerusalem. "There should be no representations without taxation," he says, "then we would either get less advice or more money."

One trouble is that it is the Israeli Government, not the council, which has the last word in everything to do with Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is above all a political fact. The government wants immigrants to go there, so it now has 15,000 more housing units than it needs.

It regards Jerusalem as an integral part of Israel, so it taxes the Arabs like Israelis and builds up resentment from people who object to their money being used to finance the army of their enemies. And it calls Jerusalem the capital of Israel, an affront to every Arab and every Moslem throughout the world.

Mahmoud abou Zalaf, editor of the leading daily Arabic newspaper, sums it up: "We can criticise, but we cannot alter." Abou Zalaf, a quiet, competent man, says his paper is constantly receiving complaints about houses being seized or land expropriated. "The Israelis are getting tougher," he says. "Before, they would discuss compensation. Now, they just say 'security', and that's an end of it. There's no argument about security."

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One trouble in Jerusalem is that the Arabs have no collective voice. The Arab council has refused to meet its Israeli counterpart, and has been dissolved. Now the Moslem religious council is the only collective body. "And the people have lost confidence in the old leaders," Abou Zalaf says. "Every day we get readers' letters urging the notables to unite, to speak with one voice, to give a lead. But they still spend their time quarrelling among themselves."

The West Bank is now the quietest of the occupied territories, but its future is the most uncertain. South to the huge barren Sinai peninsula it is much easier to see Israeli intentions. There in 23,622 square miles of occupied territory, nearly half the total area of England, a road has been built from Eilat to the tip of the peninsula at Sharm el Sheikh, the place which triggered the Six Day War when President Nasser announced his closure of the narrow straits of Tiran, the 100-yard-wide channel under the Egyptian guns at Sharm. Israeli paratroopers occupied Sharm el Sheikh in one of the first offensive moves of the war, and Israel has no intention of ever giving it up and allowing an enemy the opportunity, once again, to deny the seaway to Israeli ships.

As proof of their intentions, the Israelis are building a whole new city at Sharm el Sheikh. It will be the first all-air-conditioned city in the world, with cooling air supplied like electricity or water in more conventional towns, for temperatures here reach 135°F. Today, steel rods and concrete mixers mark the sites of future 14-storey apartment blocks and hotels; building workers brought in from Israel proper sweat through the long days for salaries higher than the Prime Minister's; and already tourists come to stay at the 30-caravan "hotel". Israel is here to stay, and will obviously also intend to keep the 135-mile road link between Sharm and Eilat. This is one of those theoretically "negotiable" places which on the ground do not look negotiable at all.

Up the Western side of Sinai, there is much less evidence of Israeli intentions. Oil is being pumped from the old Egyptian wells at Abu Rudeis, which now supply four-fifths of all Israeli requirements. But the Israeli presence on this coast is minimal - until the canal.

There the fortifications of the Bar Lev line, pounded for months by the Egyptian artillery, are still in place and still in use, though it is words which are hurled from one side of the canal to the other now, not shells. Farther back, on the line of the Mitla Pass, are more defensive positions, and on the north coast an Israeli military settlement at Yam has just been given up. Could the "negotiable" new frontier in Sinai run from El Arish down through the Mitla Pass to North of Abu Rudeis?

If that line was adopted, it would not solve that worst problem of them all - the Gaza strip. With more than 350,000 Arabs crammed into no more than 170 square miles, most of them living in deplorable conditions, Israel should be glad to see this part of the occupied territories handed over to someone else, anyone else.

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Some 200,000 of the people of Gaza are officially classed as refugees, but most of the others too exist on relief from UNWRA. From 1948 to 1967 Egypt administered the area, and with its own problems of overcrowding and shortage of money and skilled men, could do little to alleviate the sufferings of the hopeless people of Gaza. Then the Israelis took over, and Gaza became the hotbed of resistance to occupation. It still preserves that reputation. Rolls of barbed wire ring the base of every electricity pylon, the police station and Israeli administrative centres are heavily fortified outposts in a hostile land, Israeli guards walk warily with their fingers on the triggers of their Uzzi machine guns and walkie-talkies keeping them in constant touch.

Rashad Shawa, deposed as Mayor of Gaza because he refused to allow the Israelis to incorporate a refugee camp into the city - thus depriving it of the protection of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, hopes that one day the strip may be linked by a corridor to the West Bank, and be under Jordanian rule. But that is a dream for the future. "Now," he says, "the way to resist the Israelis is for us to stay here. They would like to get us out, but we will not go. That way we will defeat them yet."

Clearly the Israelis would like to see the refugees go, go anywhere, and do what they can to make them disperse. In 1970 "security roads" were bulldozed through the camps, demolishing any houses in the way. Ostensibly, and certainly partly, these roads were to allow Israeli motor patrols to move freely; but the "boulevards" as locals call them, were made 40 yards wide. Some 15,000 people were displaced.

Many of those homeless people made homeless again doubled up with friends. Now UNWRA has identified 914 families living in sub-standard conditions. In fact, UNWRA classes as normal an occupancy of five people to a room. In Gaza now there are cases of over 20 people living in one room. Demolition has just finished at the camp at Khan Younis, where the homes of 1,000 people were affected. There the people were given the opportunity of tearing down their tumbledown homes themselves, to salvage what they could. The bulldozers rumbled in to demolish completely.

Every day, some 30,000 men leave the Strip to work in Israel, and this has caused one of the more unpleasant manifestations of Israeli-Arab proximity. Along the road from Ashkelon, just north of the Gaza Strip, dozens of young Israeli girls line up to catch the Arabs returning with their pay packets. Orange groves by the road are being despoiled and the VD rate is soaring.

So, at the end of the day, back to the wide streets, ugly buildings, beautiful girls and bustle of Tel Aviv. And, perhaps, to some tentative conclusions about Israeli policy in the lands they have conquered, and Arab attitudes to these new, temporary, rulers.

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First, to dispose of a widely held misconception: the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands is no better and no worse than any other occupation. Sympathisers who believe the Israelis are more benevolent than other countries are wrong; detractors who believe them more ruthless are equally wrong.

The Israeli presence is as unobtrusive as it can be where this is possible, not to spare the inhabitants, but to make life easier for the Israelis. Yet every Arab is aware of the fact of occupation, and as Dr. Majajj said: "It is a daily burden on our shoulders which we all feel." And under this weight of occupation, political differences which so bedevil inter-Arab relations disappear too. Dr. Ghazaleh, who has little love for King Hussein, would be quite willing to see the West Bank under the King's rule again if it meant an end to Israeli occupation. With Rashid Shawa of Gaza he says: "We will link up with any Arab country if it means getting the Israelis out - Jordan, Kuwait, South Yemen. Anything Arab is better than Israel."

Resistance is practically non-existent now in the occupied territories, but this is not out of fear or out of acceptance of the Israeli presence. "Real resistance in Europe in the last war did not begin until the Allies were halfway up Italy," said Dr. Majajj. "If an Arab army had a toe-hold anywhere in Sinai you would see such an upsurge of resistance!"

All agree help from outside, or at least the possibility of help, is vital. "Unfortunately," said Dr. Ghazaleh, "the Arab leaders outside have damaged their cause because what they have on their lips they do not have in their hearts."

There are a million Palestinians outside their land, and they too want a say in affairs, but the people who have remained in Palestine believe they have done more good by staying, and have chosen the braver course, than those outside who have tried to mount guerilla attacks. At some stage the two groups will have to come together.

As to the Israelis, they are thoroughly in command, but they are building problems for themselves. The Arabs brought in to build the new Jerusalem are quietly settling there, while Jewish immigration is lower than had been hoped. If there is a recession in Israel in a year or so, as seems likely, the Arab workers will be the first to go, and the cuts in incomes in the West Bank and Gaza will lead to a situation far worse than there was before when there was no money. Once a person has tasted even meagre additions to his comfort, he will react against any moves to take that little away.

At some stage the Israelis are going to have to reach a settlement with the Arabs if only for their own good. They seem aware of this, and as General Dayan says, are "creating facts" in preparation for that day. Thus the Allon plan which envisages returning the West Bank to Jordan and holding on to a string of fortified settlements along the Jordan River valley is being quietly and unilaterally put into effect. In Golan every effort is being made to see that no local population returns, so that Israel can hold on to this "empty territory", and never in risk being menaced by Syrian guns. Down south at Sharm el Sheikh the new,

grandiosely named city of Ophir is being built as a permanency, but Foreign Ministry men murmur about "a Guantanamo", that is, a sovereign, fortified area in the midst of another country's territory. The appalling Gaza Strip is the worst liability the Israelis have, producing 200,000 tons of oranges a year and nothing else but trouble. To give it to Jordan as that country's outlet to the Mediterranean would be a feasible solution, and already a new Israeli town is being built at Rafah at the southern end of the strip - "the cork in the bottle" as Israelis describe its function.

All that lies well in the future. In the meantime, Israel is able and willing to hold on to what it has. "This land is our land, this land is your land," the posters tell the new Jewish immigrants. This land is also Arab land, a fact which one day Israel will have to acknowledge.

Map appearing with the article

