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Call It Sleep

The Op-Ed article below, reprinted from the New York Times of Jan. 4, provides an excellent and personally experienced perspective to the events now taking place in the Middle East. Sidney Zion, formerly of Passaic, has long written on the Middle East.

By SIDNEY ZION

In 1970, Sheik Mohammed Ali Jaabari, the Mayor of Hebron, had a few of us American journalists to his home for tea. Those were the days when every newspaperman who went to the Holy Land hunted for moderate Arab leaders who might help broker a peace between Israel and Jordan and thus end the three-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Mayor Jaabari seemed the quintessential moderate: He not only was close to King Hussein but despised the Palestine Liberation Organization.

I have reconstructed the interview from memory and from talking with a newsman who was present.

Sheik Jaabari was asked the jackpot question first: What do the Arabs require for peace?

"It is quite simple," he said. "The Jews will have to restore to the Arabs all the land taken from them in the wars."

I said, "Did you say 'wars'? Not the 1967 war, but 'wars'?"

"All the wars — everything since the U.N. partition plan of 1947."

"That would mean Jaffa, for example."

"Yes," Sheik Jaabari said. "There were 70,000 Arabs in

Jaffa in 1947; there will be 70,000 Arabs in Jaffa now."

"And half the Negev, and part of Haifa, all of Jerusalem, Beersheba."

"The whole of the Negev," he said. "And for sure, Jerusalem, and much of Haifa, and Beersheba. Wherever the Arabs were then, the Arabs will be now."

I said, "Mr. Mayor, if the Israelis were to accept this arrangement, would you then recognize them and make peace with them?"

He thought for a moment and said, "I assure you that if the Jews do this, the Arab leaders will be very favorable to them."

"But no guarantees in advance," I said.

"The Arabs leaders will have to meet, of course. But I know them. I know how they think. I tell you they would be very favorable to the Jews."

"First, the Israelis must give back the land and then the Arab leaders meet, is that it?"

"Yes, though it might be simultaneously — that is a detail."

"Anyway, the Israelis must make the offer unconditionally."

"For peace, absolutely."

I said: "Mr. Mayor, I have great respect for you. So please do not take what I

must say as a sign of disrespect."

"Say anything you like. You are my guest."

"My question is, What would your terms be if you won the war?"

So you wake up 17 years later, you read the papers and watch TV, and what do you know! If only the Jews hadn't been so brutish to the fathers, the sons wouldn't be throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli soldiers. What the Jews could have had from the moderate fathers they won't get from the sons. The sons are now filled with fury, rage, frustration and cannot be controlled by their dads, whose compromising ways have proved fruitless. The Israelis missed the boat, media barons say, and when they say it, the consensus lines up around the corner.

The Middle East memory bank is empty again. It goes belly up every time Israel gets rough with its enemies. When this happens, the world is born yesterday, or tomorrow.

In 1981, Israel took out the Iraq nuclear reactor. The Israelis were carpet-bombed by the world media, which had never heard of the hanging gardens of Baghdad: What right did the Israelis have to do this to good old peace-loving Iraq? And how dare they invade Lebanon? That Syria and the P.L.O. had established a police state-within-a-state in Lebanon was forgotten: The Israelis hordes were overrunning a beautiful nation.

Yet none of the foregoing

A HELPING HAND



is as galling as this latest book of genesis, which has it that Israel intransigence is responsible for the West Bank riots. Because now we are told to forget everything: that the Six-Day War was provoked by Egypt; that Hussein fired the first shot in Jerusalem after Prime Minister Levi Eshkol begged him to stay out, in a taped phone conversation — the only war in history where history can prove that history never had to happen; that from that moment on, the Arabs knew only one word, no.

And not just from that moment. Had the Arabs accepted the partition of 1947, Israel would be a fragment of what it is today, and very likely a memory. Had the Arabs been satisfied with the pre-June 1967 boundaries — the boundaries they now say they want — there would have been no

Six-Day War.

The one time an Arab leader said yes — Anwar el-Sadat — Israel gave him everything he wanted.

The critics of Israel pretend to know nothing of this. They mount a moral attack on the Jewish state, many of them equating Israel with South Africa — as if the blacks had gone to war against the whites, had vowed to destroy them. It was a profoundly vicious analogy, without a scintilla of factual basis, but like all big lies it grows and grows.

What if these moral cynics had their way? Suppose there was a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank? Does anybody believe the Arabs would be free? There's not a free Arab state in the world: "Self determination" is nothing more than a code word for the right to be ruled by a dictator of your own race. But then the moral critics of Israel could sleep, close the book on the Middle East — as they have on Vietnam; Cambodia and black Africa. If Israel becomes history — well, that's the price of sleep.