

DEMOGRAPHICS!!

This is REALLY big news, everybody, IF it's correct. But that is a big "IF." The issue is demography in the Israel-Palestinian dispute. Because for as long as I can remember, everybody who loved us and worried about us (and also everybody who hated us and rubbed their hands in anticipation of our downfall) has been telling us that we need to come to some real arrangement with the Palestinians—whether they're interested or not—and make great sacrifices to do so, because time is not on our side.

In the course of the coming years, they have argued (and still do), the demographics would become unstoppable¹. The Arabs would simply multiply faster than the Jews, would out-populate us here in our land, would end up the majority of the population here, and we could no longer be both a Jewish and a democratic state because we would be a minority ruling over a majority, just like apartheid South Africa.

I ALWAYS TOOK A DIM VIEW OF DEMOGRAPHY AS AN ARGUMENT. IT WAS LIKE GLOBAL WARMING FOR ME; CAN'T PROVE IT'S TRUE, AND EVEN IF YOU COULD, THERE'S NOTHING ON EARTH TO DO ABOUT IT SO WHY BOTHER? WELL, THE GREAT CONSENSUS ON GLOBAL WARMING IS BREAKING APART THESE DAYS, AS FAR AS I CAN SEE, AND VARIOUS EXPERTS ARE ARGUING THAT EITHER IT'S NOT HAPPENING, OR IF IT IS, IT'S NATURAL AND NOT OUR DOING. WHATEVER. NOW, **WHAT IF** THE DEMOGRAPHIC ARGUMENT, UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED, AN ARGUMENT OF GREAT WEIGHT EVEN TODAY (PRESIDENT OBAMA USED IT HERE IN MARCH), IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE? THAT WOULD BE (AS THEY SAY THESE DAYS) A REAL GAME CHANGER, WOULDN'T IT!

Now come the caveats.

1) The article I have been reading was written by **Yoram Ettinger**. He is a serious man, has been an adviser to the government, a Consul General, Minister at the Israeli UN Delegation with the rank of ambassador. He is a lecturer and author, and known as a right-wing thinker. Look him up on Google.

2) The article was printed in **Israel Ha-Yom (ישראל היום)**, the free give-away daily newspaper known (and loved or hated) because it supports the right-wing of Israeli politics. Hardly surprising, because it's supporter/patron/backer is

3) **Sheldon Adelson**. If the name means nothing to you, look him up on Google also. He is a casino and gambling magnate, said to be the 24th richest man in the world (and the 12th in America). The wealthier he got, the farther right-wing his politics have become. He tried in the worst way to get Mitt Romney elected, dislikes Obama, is a huge contributor to philanthropic ventures, particularly Yad Va-Shem and Birthright. Many people will automatically disbelieve anything Adelson supports.

¹ There was even a quote from Arafat once, who said that his greatest weapon was the Arab womb!

Have we got the caveats out of the way? Good. Here is what Yoram Ettinger says, and you don't have to believe it. **HE ARGUES, IN SUM, THAT TIME IS WORKING IN FAVOR OF ISRAEL, NOT AGAINST IT.**

1) He says that there are 6.3 million Jews living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, that is, Israel + Judea & Samaria.²

2) 1.65 million Arabs live in Israel proper and another similar number (1.66 million) are in the West Bank – that is, Judea & Samaria.

3) that means that at present there is a 66% Jewish majority in the country as a whole.

4) He argues that this figure of a 66% Jewish majority proves that all of the previous demographic experts—from Simon Dubnow in 1898 through Roberto Bacchi in the 1940s and Sergio Della Pergola today—have been flat wrong in their demographic projections, and he gives examples of their writings to prove it.

5) He argues further that Israel's fertility rate has been the opposite of what the experts always said it was; Jewish fertility rate is going up and the Arab rate is going way down. Our Jewish fertility rate of 3 births per woman (and heading higher) is higher than that of any Arab country except Yemen, Iraq, and Jordan, while the fertility rate of Israeli Arab women has gone down from 6 per woman in 1969 to half a birth per woman in 2012. If one includes the Arab women of Judea & Samaria, the total Arab figure is about 3 per woman, and heading lower.

The argument is confirmed by this weekend's Jerusalem Post. "During 2011," it says, "22,000 babies were born in the capital, of whom 14,000 (63%) were born to Jewish mothers and 7,900 (35%) were born to Muslim mothers. Here again, the tendency has reversed – while in 2001 the Jerusalem birthrate was 3.7 children among Jews compared to 4.3 among Arabs, it changed to 4.2 children among Jews to 3.6 among Arabs."

6) Here's a surprise. The surge in Jewish fertility rates, he argues, is not due to the ultra-Orthodox, whose fertility rate is going down—in a process identical to what's happening to Arab women: education, work opportunities, family planning, etc.—but by secular Israeli Jews and immigrants from the former USSR.

So, all things considered, he argues that a robust majority of 66% Jews and tending to grow is not a demographic time bomb at all but one which we can live with. And Israel can prosper as both a Jewish and a democratic state. And all the arguments about the demographic time bomb are simply, statistically, factually wrong.

If Yoram Ettinger is right, friends, we need to re-think the whole political landscape of Israel. Big news, right? Right. ■

² He leaves out Gaza in all these calculations