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***KOSOVO AND ISRAEL: THE IMPORTANCE OF LAND***

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Although the ongoing problems in Kosovo and the former Yugoslavia are complex and multi-dimensional, the underlying issue is straightforward. It is the idea that peoples -- ethnic or national groups -- are tied to their land, and that the land brings them cohesion and unity. This link between a people and their land means that two different peoples cannot occupy the same land.

Milosovic's army thus aims to drive out the Albanians from Kosovo so that the Serbs can develop their peoplehood without competition or interruption. However horrific it may appear, Milosovic follows a time-honored approach to managing potentially difficult or subversive populations. In fact, the nations of the Old Testament, Israel and Judah, were both subjected to similar treatment. And it was only the writing of the Old Testament that saved the Israelites from disappearing altogether.

As the empires of the ancient Middle East grew and acquired more territory, they had a management problem. What if the emperor and his army were at one end of the empire when a people at the other end -- a thousand miles away -- decided to rebel. Even at the fastest speed it would take more than a month to get back to the rebellion. By then, significant losses could have

occurred. To preempt this problem, empires moved rebellious peoples around. By breaking the link between the people and the land, an empire removed their strength to rebel and cause trouble. In the end, the people often disappeared into the mists of time.

This happened to the Kingdom of Israel when it was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 721 BC. The Assyrians moved the Kingdom's

main citizenry hundreds of miles away, thus breaking the ties with their land. In exile, these people, often called the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, vanished from the pages of history. The same thing happened to the Philistines, Israel's neighbors. They were conquered by the Babylonian Empire in the early sixth century BC. Their population was deported to Babylonia and by the mid-sixth century, the Philistines had disappeared from all historical records.

And the same thing might have happened to the biblical Kingdom of Judah, which was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 BC. Jerusalem was destroyed and everyone who was anyone in Judah was taken to Babylon and settled there. That would have been the end of Judah and the Israelites if the Persian Empire had not conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC. The Persians let the Judahites return to Judah and rebuild. This act reestablished the link between the people and the land, and enabled their continuation as a people.

Once a people has been separated from its land, there seems to be only one way to survive as a people for more than a couple generations, namely, by writing religious literature and following its dictates. After the Babylonian exile, the Judahites wrote most of the books of the Old Testament. One key idea was that the Israelites, now becoming known as Jews, had been given the Land of Israel by their God. When the Romans forced the Jews into exile in the first and second centuries AD, the Jews took their Holy Books with them. The books helped preserve the Jews as a people without a land until they returned to it in this century.