

Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

A BRIEF GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED



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*The story of Israel is the wondrous realization
of a 3,500-year link among a land, a faith, a language,
a people, and a vision.*

*It is an inspiring story of tenacity and determination,
of courage and renewal, of the ascendancy of hope
over despair.*

David Harris, excerpted from *In the Trenches* (2000)

Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Brief Guide for the Perplexed

The Middle East always seems to be in the news. Hardly a day passes without a story on something going on in Israel or related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unfortunately, given the rapid-fire nature of much reporting these days, the discussion often lacks context.

This essay seeks to provide both historical and contemporary context, though it is not intended as an exhaustive examination of the subject which would require a far larger volume.

The case to be made on behalf of Israel is as strong today as ever.

When presented with the facts, people of goodwill should understand:

- (a) Israel's sixty-seven-year-long quest for peace and security;
- (b) the real dangers faced by Israel, a country no larger than New Jersey or Wales, two-thirds the size of Belgium, and one percent the size of Saudi Arabia, in a tumultuous, heavily armed neighborhood;
- (c) Israel's unshakeable commitment to democracy, including free and fair elections, smooth transfers of power, civilian control over the military, freedom of speech, press, faith, and assembly, and an independent judiciary—all unique in the region;
- (d) the common thread of the threats of extremism and terrorism faced by Israel, the United States, Europe, India, Australia, Russia, Africa, moderate Muslim countries, and others; and
- (e) Israel's impressive, indeed pathbreaking, contributions to world civilization in such fields as science, medicine, technology,

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agriculture, and culture—contributions that are even more remarkable given the country’s relative youth and its heavy defense burden, but that, regrettably, are often neglected in the preoccupation with reporting on conflict and violence.

No country’s historical record is perfect, and Israel, like other democratic nations, has made its share of mistakes. But acknowledging fallibility ought to be seen as a national strength, not a weakness. And Israel’s record can be compared favorably against that of any other country in the region, indeed well beyond the region, when it comes to dedication to democratic values.

Israel has a proud record and the country’s friends shouldn’t hesitate to shout it from the rooftops. And it began long before the establishment of the modern state in 1948.

The Jewish people’s link to the land of Israel is incontrovertible and unbroken.

It spans nearly four thousand years.

Exhibit A for this connection is the Hebrew Bible. The Book of Genesis, the first of the five books of the Bible, recounts the story of Abraham, the covenantal relationship with the one God, and the move from Ur (in present-day Iraq) to Canaan, the region corresponding roughly to Israel. The Book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Bible, includes the following words: “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying send men to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people.” This came during a forty-year-long journey of the Israelites in search not simply of a refuge, but of the Promised Land—the land we know today as Israel.

And these are but two of many references to this land and its centrality to Jewish history and national identity.

Exhibit B is any Jewish prayer book in use over the span of centuries anywhere in the world. The references in the liturgy to Zion, the land of Israel, are endless.

The same strong link is true of the connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem.

It dates back to the period of King David, who lived approximately three thousand years ago, and who established Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Ever since, Jerusalem has represented not only the geographical center of the Jewish people, but also the spiritual and metaphysical heart of their faith and identity. No matter where Jews pray, they always face in the direction of Jerusalem. Indeed, the relationship between Jerusalem and the Jewish people is entirely unique in the annals of history.

Jerusalem was the site of the two Temples—the first built by King Solomon during the tenth century B.C.E. and destroyed in 586 B.C.E. during the Babylonian conquest, and the second built less than a century later, refurbished by King Herod, and destroyed in 70 C.E. by Roman forces.

As the psalmist wrote, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of thee, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.”

One commentary on Hebrew Scripture reads: “You also find that there is a Jerusalem above, corresponding to the Jerusalem below. For sheer love of the earthly Jerusalem, God made Himself one above.”

And for over three thousand years, Jews at the Passover Seder have repeated the words: “Next year in Jerusalem.”

Though in forced dispersion for nearly nineteen hundred years, Jews never stopped yearning for Zion and Jerusalem.

It is written in the Book of Isaiah: “For the sake of Zion I will not be silent; for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still....”

In addition to expressing this yearning through prayer, there were always Jews who lived in the land of Israel, and especially Jerusalem, though there were often threats to their physical safe-

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ty. Indeed, since the nineteenth century, Jews have constituted a majority of the city's population. For example, according to the *Political Dictionary of the State of Israel*, Jews were 61.9 percent of Jerusalem's population in 1892.

The historical and religious link to Jerusalem (and Israel) is especially important because some Arabs seek to rewrite history and assert that Jews are “foreign occupiers” or “colonialists” with no actual tie to the land. Such attempts to deny Israel's legitimacy are demonstrably false and need to be exposed for the lies they are. They also entirely ignore the “inconvenient” fact that when Jerusalem was under Muslim (i.e., Ottoman and, later, Jordanian) rule, it was always a backwater. It was never a political, religious, or economic center. For example, when Jerusalem was in Jordanian hands from 1948 to 1967, virtually no Arab leader visited, and no one from the ruling House of Saud in Saudi Arabia came to pray at the Al-Aksa Mosque in eastern Jerusalem.

Zionism is the quest for national self-determination of the Jewish people.

Although the yearning for a Jewish homeland dates back thousands of years and is given expression in classic Jewish texts, it also stems from a more contemporary reality.

Theodor Herzl, considered the father of modern Zionism, was a secular Jew and Viennese journalist who became appalled at the blatant anti-Semitism fueling the infamous Dreyfus case in France, the first European country to extend full rights to the Jews, as well as in his native Austro-Hungarian Empire. He came to the conclusion that Jews could never enjoy full equality as a minority in European societies, since the sad legacy of centuries of anti-Semitism was too deeply embedded. Therefore, he called for the establishment of a Jewish state, which he set out to describe in his landmark book *Der Judenstaat* (“The Jewish State”), published in 1896.

Herzl's vision was endorsed by the British foreign secretary, Lord Balfour, who issued a statement on November 2, 1917:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

In 1922, the League of Nations, entrusting Britain with a mandate for Palestine, recognized “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine.”

The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi “Final Solution,” spearheaded by Germany and its allies—and facilitated by widespread complicity as well as indifference to the fate of the Jews throughout much of the world—revealed in tragic dimensions the desperate need for a Jewish state. (Apropos, Haj Amin el-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, was among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people.)

Only in such a state, the Zionist movement—and its non-Jewish supporters—believed, would Jews not have to rely on the “goodwill” of others to determine their destiny. All Jews would be welcome to live in the Jewish state as a refuge from persecution or as a fulfillment of a “yearning for Zion.” Indeed, this latter point fired the imagination of many Jews who settled in what was then a generally desolate Palestine, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, out of idealistic convictions, and who laid the foundation for the modern State of Israel.

Speaking of the desolation, the American author and humorist Mark Twain visited the area in 1867. This is how he described it:

... [A] desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse.... A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action.... We never saw a human being on the whole route.... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.

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To fast-forward for a moment, any visitor to Israel can see the miraculous transformation of the land, as forests were lovingly planted, the soil was irrigated and tilled, and cities and towns were built.

Israel's adversaries to this day maliciously twist the meaning of Zionism—the movement for self-determination of the Jewish people—and try to present it as a demonic force. Moreover, they seek to depict the area as well-developed by the local Arabs, who were somehow shoved aside by the arriving Jews. Their larger goal is to undermine Israel's *raison d'être* and isolate the state from the community of nations.

This happened, for example, in 1975, when the UN General Assembly, over the strenuous objections of the democratic countries, adopted a resolution labeling Zionism as “racism.” The resolution was finally repealed in 1991, but the canard resurfaced in 2001 at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The Arab bloc, however, failed in its effort to have Zionism condemned in the conference documents. This time, many nations understood that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is, and has always been, political, not racial.

Incidentally, this recurring attempt to brand Zionism as racism is a telling example of the pot calling the kettle black. The Arab nations formally define themselves by their ethnicity, i.e., Arab, thus excluding non-Arab ethnic groups, such as Berbers and Kurds. The same is true for religion. Islam is the official religion in all but one of the Arab countries (Lebanon), thus perforce marginalizing non-Islamic faiths, particularly Christian minorities.

In this vein, it's well worth remembering the comments of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., on anti-Zionism:

And what is anti-Zionism? It is the denial to the Jewish people of a fundamental right that we justly claim for the people of Africa and all other nations of the Globe. It is discrimination against Jews, my friends, because they are Jews. In short, it is anti-Semitism.... Let my words echo in the depths of your soul: When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews—make no mistake about it.

It is also important to stress that non-Jews have not been excluded from Israel's nation-building. To the contrary. Today one-fifth of Israel's citizens are non-Jews, including approximately 1.7 million Arabs, and Arabic is an official national language.

Moreover, Israel's Jewish population has always reflected enormous national, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, which became even more pronounced in the 1980s, when Israel began rescuing tens of thousands of black Jews from drought-stricken Ethiopia who were dreaming of resettlement in Israel. The eloquent comments at the time of Julius Chambers, the director-general of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, bear repeating:

Were the victims of Ethiopian famine white, countless nations might have offered them refuge. But the people dying every day of starvation in Ethiopia and the Sudan are black, and in a world where racism is officially deplored by virtually every organized government, only one non-African nation has opened its doors and its arms. The quiet humanitarian action of the State of Israel, action taken entirely without regard to the color of those being rescued, stands as a condemnation of racism far more telling than mere speeches and resolutions.

The Arab-Israeli conflict was avoidable.

Shortly after its founding in 1945, the United Nations took an interest in the future of mandatory Palestine, then under British rule. A UN commission (UNSCOP, or the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine) recommended to the General Assembly a partition of the land between the Jews and the Arabs. Neither side would get all it sought, but a division would recognize that there were two populations in the land—one Jewish, the other Arab—each meriting a state of its own.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly, by a vote of 33 in favor, 13 opposed, and 10 abstaining, adopted Resolution 181, known as the Partition Plan.

Acceptance of the Partition Plan would have meant the establishment of two states, but the surrounding Arab countries and

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the local Arab population vehemently rejected the proposal. They refused to recognize a Jewish claim to any part of the land and chose war to drive the Jews out. This refusal has always been at the heart of the conflict—then and now.

(Indeed, some Arab countries and Iran, not to mention Palestinian terrorist organizations like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, still do not recognize Israel's very right to exist, whatever its final borders, even sixty-seven years after the state's establishment.)

On May 14, 1948, the modern State of Israel was founded. Winston Churchill captured its significance:

The coming into being of a Jewish state ... is an event in world history to be viewed in the perspective not of a generation or a century, but in the perspective of a thousand, two thousand or even three thousand years.

Years later, President John F. Kennedy offered his perspective on the meaning of Israel's rebirth nearly 1,900 years after its last sovereign expression:

Israel was not created in order to disappear—Israel will endure and flourish. It is the child of hope and home of the brave. It can neither be broken by adversity nor demoralized by success. It carries the shield of democracy and it honors the sword of freedom.

On the subject of peace, Israel's Declaration of the Establishment of the State included these words:

We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land for the common good of all.

Tragically, that offer, like others before it made by Jewish leaders in the months prior to the state's creation, was ignored.

On May 15, 1948, the armies of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria attacked the fledgling Jewish state, seeking its destruction.

In the course of this war, launched by Arab nations, civilian populations were affected, as in all wars. Controversies continue to this day about how many local Arabs fled Israel because Arab leaders called on them to do so or threatened them if they did not, how many left out of fear of the fighting, and how many were compelled to leave by Israeli forces. Importantly, hundreds of thousands of Arabs ended up staying in Israel and became citizens of the state.

But the central point must not be overlooked—Arab countries began this war aiming to wipe out the 650,000 Jews in the new State of Israel, and in doing so, these nations defied the UN plan for the creation of both Arab and Jewish states.

There have been two refugee populations created by the Arab-Israeli conflict, not one.

While world attention has focused on the Palestinian refugees, the plight of Jews from Arab countries, hundreds of thousands of whom became refugees as well, has been largely ignored. Indeed, many experts believe that the size of the two groups was roughly comparable. But there was one profound difference—Israel (and other Western countries) immediately absorbed the Jewish refugees, while the Palestinian refugees were placed in camps and deliberately kept there generation after generation as a matter of calculated Arab policy—and with the complicity of the UN. Think about this: Israel withdrew entirely from Gaza in 2005, but there are still eight UN-run refugee camps there. Why? Gaza is under Palestinian, not Israeli, control, yet it seems that dismantling the camps would mean abandoning a hallowed symbol of Palestinian “resistance” and replacing it with the normality of everyday existence.

There is no comparable situation in the world today where a refugee population has been cynically exploited in this way.

Until now, only one Arab country—Jordan—has offered citizenship to significant numbers of Palestinian refugees.

The other twenty Arab countries, with their vast territory and sharing a common language, religion, and ethnic roots with the Palestinians, have refused to do so. Sadly, they appear to have little interest in alleviating the plight of refugees living in often squalid camps. Rather, they want to breed hatred of Israel and thus use the refugees as a lethal weapon in the ongoing struggle against Israel.

Parenthetically—just to give a sense of how Palestinians have at times been treated in the Arab world—Kuwait summarily expelled over 300,000 Palestinians working in the country (but never given Kuwaiti passports) when Yasir Arafat supported Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1990-91 Gulf War. The Palestinians were seen as a potential fifth column. There was hardly a peep of protest from other Arab countries, or pro-Palestinian voices in the West, about what amounted to the expulsion of an entire Palestinian community. And, difficult as it is to believe, Lebanon, for decades home to several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees, has legally prevented them from working in many designated professional sectors.

Unfortunately, the story of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries is not often told.

When the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries is raised, Arab spokesmen often feign ignorance or strenuously assert that Jews lived well under Muslim rule (unlike Jews in Christian Europe). Sometimes, they disingenuously argue that Arabs, by definition, cannot be anti-Semitic because, like Jews, they are Semites.

It is true that there was no equivalent of the Holocaust in the Jewish experience in Muslim lands, and it also true that there were periods of cooperation and harmony, but the story does not end

there. Jews never enjoyed full and equal rights with Muslims in countries under Islamic rule; there were clearly delineated rules of behavior for Jews (and Christians) as second-class citizens. Violence against Jews was not unknown in the Muslim world.

To cite but one illustration of the fate of Jews in Arab countries, Jews lived uninterruptedly in Libya since the time of the Phoenicians, that is, many centuries before the Arabs arrived from the Arabian Peninsula, bringing Islam to North Africa and settling—occupying?—lands already inhabited by indigenous Berbers, among others.

The vast majority of Libya's 40,000 Jews left between 1948 and 1951, following pogroms in 1945 and 1948. In 1951, Libya became an independent country. Despite constitutional guarantees, the Jews who remained in the country were denied the right to vote, hold public office, obtain Libyan passports, supervise their own communal affairs, or purchase new property. After a third pogrom in 1967, Libya's remaining 4,000 Jews fled, permitted to leave with only one suitcase and the equivalent of \$50. In 1970, the Libyan government announced a series of laws to confiscate the assets of Libya's exiled Jews and issued bonds providing for fair compensation payable within fifteen years. But 1985 came and went, with no compensation paid.

At the same time, the government destroyed Jewish cemeteries, using the headstones to pave new roads, as part of a calculated effort to erase any vestige of the Jewish historical presence in the country.

There were an estimated 750,000 Jews in Arab countries in 1948, the year of Israel's establishment. Today, there are fewer than 5,000, the bulk of whom live in Morocco and Tunisia.

Where was the Arab sympathy for the Palestinian population from 1948 to 1967?

With armistice agreements ending Israel's War of Independence, the Gaza Strip was in the hands of Egypt. Rather than consider sovereignty for the local Arab population and the Palestinian refu-

gees who settled there, Egyptian authorities imposed harsh military rule. Meanwhile, the West Bank and the eastern half of Jerusalem were governed by Jordan. Again, there was no move to create an independent Palestinian state. To the contrary, Jordan annexed the territory, a step recognized by only two countries in the world, Britain and Pakistan.

It was during this period, in 1964 to be precise, that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded. Its aim was not the creation of a state in the lands under Egyptian (i.e., Gaza) and Jordanian (i.e., West Bank) authority, but rather the elimination of Israel and the founding of an Arab Palestinian state in the whole of Palestine.

Article 15 of the PLO Charter clearly articulated this goal:

The liberation of Palestine, from an Arab viewpoint, is a national duty to repulse the Zionist, imperialist invasion from the great Arab homeland and to purge the Zionist presence from Palestine.

In the ensuing years, PLO-sponsored terrorism took its deadly toll, focusing on Israeli, American, European, and Jewish targets. Schoolchildren, Olympic athletes, airplane passengers, diplomats, and even a wheelchair-bound tourist on a cruise ship were among the murdered targets of the terrorists.

How did Israel come into possession of the West Bank, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the eastern half of Jerusalem, including the Old City?

These days, some people reflexively refer to the “occupied territories” without ever asking how they fell into Israel’s hands in 1967. Once again, there are those in the Arab world who seek to rewrite history and impute expansionist motives to Israel, but the facts are clear. Here’s a quick summary of some of the major events leading up to the Six-Day War:

On May 16, 1967, Cairo Radio announced: “The existence of

Israel has continued too long. The battle has come in which we shall destroy Israel.” On the same day, Egypt demanded the withdrawal of UN forces that had been stationed in Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh since 1957. Three days later, the UN, to its everlasting shame, announced it would comply with the Egyptian demand.

On May 19, Cairo Radio said: “This is our chance, Arabs, to deal Israel a mortal blow of annihilation....”

On May 23, Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser declared his intention to block the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, thus effectively severing Israel’s vital trade links with East Africa and Asia. Israel replied that under international law this was a *casus belli*, an act of war.

On May 27, Nasser said that “our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel.”

On May 30, Jordan’s King Hussein placed Jordanian forces under Egyptian control. Egyptian, Iraqi, and Saudi troops were sent to Jordan.

On June 1, Iraq’s leader added his thoughts: “We are resolved, determined, and united to achieve our clear aim of wiping Israel off the map.”

On June 3, Cairo Radio hailed the impending Muslim holy war.

On June 5, Israel, surrounded by far more numerous and heavily-armed Arab forces likely to attack at any moment, launched a preemptive strike.

Within six days, Israel defeated its adversaries and, in the process, captured land on the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian fronts.

Israel had made strenuous—and documented—efforts, via UN channels, to persuade King Hussein to stay out of the war. Unlike Egypt and Syria, whose hostility toward Israel was unremitting, Jordan had quietly cooperated with Israel and shared concerns about the Palestinians’ aggressive designs. Years later, King Hussein publicly acknowledged that his decision to enter the 1967 war, in which he lost control of the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem, was one of the biggest blunders he ever made.

Another lost peace opportunity

Shortly after the Six-Day War, Israel signaled a desire to exchange land for peace with its Arab neighbors. While Israel was unprepared to relinquish the eastern half of Jerusalem—which contained Judaism’s holiest sites and which, in blatant violation of the terms of the Israeli-Jordanian armistice agreement, had been entirely off limits to Israel for nearly nineteen years (while Jordan desecrated fifty-eight synagogues in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and the world remained silent)—it was eager to exchange the seized territories for a comprehensive settlement. But Israel’s overtures were rebuffed. An unmistakable response came from Khartoum, Sudan’s capital, where Arab leaders gathered to issue a resolution on September 1, 1967, announcing the three noes: “no peace, no recognition, and no negotiation” with Israel.

In November 1967, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242.

This resolution, often cited in discussions about the Arab-Israeli conflict as the basis for resolving it, is not always quoted with precision. The resolution stresses “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which *every* [emphasis added] State in the area can live in security.”

Further, it calls for “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” but deliberately omits use of the word “the” before the word “territories.” The U.S. ambassador to the UN at the time, Arthur Goldberg, noted that this was intentional, so that any final settlement could allow for unspecified border adjustments that would take into account Israel’s security needs. For instance, prior to the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel at its narrowest point—just north of Tel Aviv, its largest city—was only nine miles wide.

The resolution also includes a call for “termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the

sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.”

And, not least, it “affirms further the necessity (a) For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area; (b) For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem [Author’s comment: Note the absence of specificity as to which refugee problem, allowing for more than one interpretation of the intended refugee population.]; and (c) For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones.”

On October 22, 1973—during another Arab-launched war, which came to be known as the Yom Kippur War because it began on Judaism’s holiest day—the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 338. The measure called for a cease-fire, implementation of Resolution 242 in its entirety, and the onset of talks between the parties concerned. Resolutions 242 and 338 are normally cited together in connection with any Arab-Israeli peace talks.

Yes, the settlements have been a contentious issue.

No question, but, like just about everything else associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict, there’s more here than meets the eye.

After Israel’s victory in the 1967 war, and once it became clear that the Arabs were not interested in negotiating peace, Israel, under a Labor-led coalition, began encouraging the construction of settlements, or new communities, in the captured lands. This practice was accelerated under Likud-led governments after 1977.

Whatever one’s perspective on the settlements, it’s important to understand Israel’s motives in moving ahead on this front:

(a) Israel contended that the land was disputed—both Arabs and Jews laid claim to it—and since there was no sovereign authority, Israel had as much right to settle there as the Palestinians (who, it should be remembered, had never had a state of their own);

(b) there had been Jewish communities in the West Bank long before 1948, for example, in Hebron and Gush Etzion, both sites of twentieth-century massacres by Arabs in which large numbers of Jews were killed;

(c) the West Bank, according to the Hebrew Bible, represents the cradle of Jewish civilization, and some Jews, driven by faith and history, were eager to reassert that link;

(d) the Israeli government believed that certain settlements could serve a useful security purpose, given the importance of geography, and especially topography, in this rather confined area;

(e) a number of Israeli officials felt that building settlements, and thus creating facts on the ground, might hasten the day when the Palestinians, presumably realizing that time was not necessarily on their side, would talk peace.

At the same time, polls have consistently found that a majority of Israelis agree that any peace agreement with the Palestinians will necessarily entail dismantling many, though not all, of the settlements. Those settlements which are today quite substantial cities, and which are nearest to Jerusalem and other areas adjacent to the 1967 line, are certain to be retained by Israel in any peace accord. Importantly, the 1967 border was never an internationally recognized boundary, but rather only an armistice line marking the positions held at the end of Israel's War of Independence in 1949.

The United States recognized this critically important fact when President George W. Bush wrote to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, on April 14, 2004, that "it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of the final-status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949."

The possibilities of peace

In 1977, Menachem Begin, Israel's first Likud prime minister, took office. That did not stop Egypt's President Anwar Sadat from making his historic trip to Israel the same year and addressing the Knesset, Israel's parliament. An extraordinary peace process ensued, with all the ups and downs that come with a difficult set of negotiations.

In September 1978, the Camp David Accords were adopted, containing a framework for comprehensive peace, including a proposal for limited self-government for the Palestinians. (The proposal was rejected by the Palestinians.) Six months later, a peace accord was signed, and the thirty-one-year state of war between Israel and Egypt came to an end.

It was a remarkable moment in history. Sadat, virulently anti-Israel and anti-Semitic for much of his life, and the mastermind of Egypt's surprise attack (together with Syria) on Israel that ignited the 1973 Yom Kippur War, teamed up with Begin, the head of Israel's leading right-wing party, to open a new chapter in Arab-Israel relations. It proved that with will, courage, and vision, anything was possible.

But every other Arab country, except Sudan (under far more moderate leadership then than now) and Oman, severed diplomatic ties with Cairo to protest the move. And in 1981 the Egyptian leader was assassinated by members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who would later become brothers-in-arms of Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network.

For its part, Israel yielded the vast expanse of the Sinai (approximately 23,000 square miles, or more than twice the size of Israel proper), which had provided a critical strategic buffer zone between itself and Egypt. Israel also gave up valuable oil fields which it had discovered in the Sinai, a big sacrifice for a country with no other natural resources to speak of at the time. (Thirty-five years later, Israel has discovered major natural gas resources in its territorial waters.) It closed important air force bases that had been constructed. And, despite Begin's staunch commitment to settlements, it dismantled these enclaves in Sinai.

In doing so, Israel demonstrated its unquenchable thirst for peace, its willingness to take substantial risks and make sacrifices, and its scrupulous commitment to fulfilling the terms of its agreements. When else in modern history has a country victorious in a war for its very survival relinquished so much land and other tangible strategic assets in pursuit of peace?

Israel and Jordan reached an historic peace agreement in 1994.

This was a much easier negotiation than with Egypt, since Israel and Jordan already enjoyed good, if quiet, ties based on overlapping national interests vis-à-vis the Palestinians. (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was just as fearful of Palestinian territorial ambitions as Israel.) Israel once again demonstrated its deep yearning for peace and readiness to take the steps necessary to achieve it, including border adjustments and water-sharing arrangements called for by Amman.

Spurred by the examples of, first, Egypt and, later, Jordan, a number of other Arab countries began exploring links with Israel. The most forthcoming was Mauritania, which became the third Arab state to establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel, though a subsequent change in government there brought the ties to an abrupt end. Others, such as Morocco, Oman, Qatar, and Tunisia, stopped short of full recognition, but for a time at least, openly sought political or economic ties. And some other Arab countries, which prefer to operate below the radar, have developed points of contact with Israel. These have taken a variety of forms, especially in recent years and spurred by shared concerns about Iran's regional ambitions and assertiveness, but rarely see the light of day.

Another opportunity for peace was spurned by the Palestinians in 2000-01.

When Ehud Barak became prime minister in 1999, he announced an ambitious agenda. The left-of-center Israeli leader said he would attempt to reach an historic end to the conflict with the Palestinians within thirteen months, picking up where his predecessors had left off, and building on the momentum of the 1991 Madrid Conference, the first peace talks since the Camp David agreement, and the 1993 Oslo Accords, which established a Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestinians. As it turned out, he went

beyond what anyone in Israel might have thought possible in his willingness to compromise in the interest of peace.

With the active support of the Clinton administration, Barak pushed the process as far and as fast as he could, and, in doing so, he broke new ground on such infinitely sensitive issues as Jerusalem, for the sake of an agreement. But alas, he and Clinton failed.

Arafat was not ready to engage the process and make it work.

Rather than press ahead with the talks, which would have led to the establishment of the first-ever Palestinian state, with its capital in eastern Jerusalem, he walked away, after preposterously trying to persuade President Clinton that there was no historical Jewish link to Jerusalem and dropping the bombshell demand of a so-called “right of return” for Palestinian refugees and their generations of descendants. Arafat surely knew that this was an instant deal-breaker, since no Israeli government could ever conceivably allow millions of Palestinians to settle in Israel and thus totally undermine the Jewish character of the state.

In his autobiography *My Life*, Clinton recounts this period and puts the blame squarely on Arafat for the failure of the peace talks.

Tragically, Arafat revealed himself incapable or unwilling, or both, of pursuing peace at the negotiating table. Instead, he returned to a more familiar pattern—on occasion talking peace while consistently encouraging terrorism.

Arafat understood that the media images of heavily armed Israeli troops facing Palestinians in the streets, including children cynically sent to the front lines, would work to his advantage. Israel would be cast in the role of aggressor and oppressor, the Palestinians as downtrodden victims.

It wouldn't be long, he calculated, before the Arab world would angrily denounce Israel, the nonaligned countries would dutifully follow suit, the Europeans would urge still more concessions from

Israel to placate the Palestinians, international human rights groups would accuse Israel of excessive force, and the world, plagued by a short memory, would forget that the Palestinian leader had just spurned an unprecedented chance to strike a peace deal.

Arafat wasn't entirely wrong. Much of the media, many European governments, and the majority of human rights groups played right into his hands. It was only after his death in 2004 that some, though not all, of them finally realized they had been duped by the wily, corrupt leader whom they had inexplicably chosen to trust, if not romanticize.

Moreover, Arafat presumably reckoned, Washington might eventually take a tougher line on Israel as the result of pressure from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two Arab countries that loomed large in the worldview of American policy makers, and from the European Union. And there was the long-term possibility that Israel, a first-world country, would begin to tire of the struggle and its daily toll of military and civilian casualties, the negative impact on the nation's mood and psyche—not to speak of its economy—and the potentially growing international isolation.

But here he grossly miscalculated. Israel didn't tire. Instead, it stayed the course, showing remarkable national resilience in the process. And the United States stood by Israel, recognizing and exposing Arafat for who he was and refusing to have any further dealings with him.

When Mahmoud Abbas succeeded Arafat, there was some hope that, despite his long association with his predecessor and a doctoral dissertation that smacked of Holocaust denial, he might offer a more promising approach to peacemaking. This was buttressed when Salam Fayyad, widely considered a political moderate and voice of pragmatism, became the Palestinian prime minister.

Regrettably, however, Abbas has proved a disappointment, especially when he walked away from a trailblazing two-state offer by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008. The Israeli pro-

posal went even further than Barak's in 2000-1, as Palestinian spokesmen acknowledged as recently as the fall of 2015. And so, yet another chance for peace, based on two states, was lost.

What exactly is Israel expected to do to ensure the safety of its citizens? What would other states do in a similar situation?

Perhaps the most recent jihadist attacks in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East will help the world grasp the true nature of the terrorist threat Israel has been facing and the rationale for Israel's unflinching response.

Unflinching, yes, but also measured. The truth is that Israel, given its military strength, could at any point deliver a much more devastating blow to the Palestinians, but has chosen not to, despite the repeated provocations, for a host of diplomatic, political, strategic, and humanitarian reasons.

Looking back, Jenin was a perfect example. Though Palestinian spokesmen rushed to condemn the Israeli military operation in this West Bank city in 2002 as a "massacre" and "genocide," in reality Israel chose the most risky method of entering the city to search for terrorist hideouts precisely to avoid Palestinian civilian casualties. As a result, Israel suffered twenty-three military fatalities while killing some fifty armed Palestinian gunmen. Israel's alternative might have been to attack Jenin from the air, just as NATO fighter planes repeatedly bombed Belgrade in the 1990s, but that would have resulted in indiscriminate deaths, something Israel desperately wanted to avoid.

Interestingly, many in the West who criticized Israel for its tactics in dealing with terrorism are now adopting those very same methods, including enhanced intelligence, surveillance, penetration, and preemption due to growing fears in Europe about radical Islamist activity, including thousands of "foreign fighters" returning from battle zones in Iraq and Syria.

Judging from the global full-court press against the terrorists, it doesn't look as if "restraint," "dialogue," and "compromise" are currently part of the vocabulary vis-à-vis those who attack us, nor should they be, but these are some of the very words proffered as advice to Israel by the international community for dealing with its threat.

In the final analysis, even though Israel enjoys military superiority, Jerusalem understands that this is not a conflict that can be won exclusively on the battlefield. Simply put, neither side is going to disappear. This conflict can be resolved only at the peace table, if and when the Palestinians finally realize they have squandered nearly seven decades and numerous chances to build a state—alongside Israel, not in its place.

One oft-discussed aspect of Israel's policy has been its defensive fence or security barrier, which opponents falsely call a "wall."

Three things in particular should be kept in mind. First, the barrier, the initial segment of which was completed in 2003, has not eliminated terrorism, as the deadly events in the fall of 2015 underscore, but it has limited the ability of Palestinian terrorists to enter into Israeli population centers and create havoc. Second, the barrier was built only as a result of repeated terrorist activity—an estimated 25,000 attempted attacks against Israelis by Palestinian groups and individuals between 2000 and 2005 alone. And third, barriers can be moved in any direction, or even dismantled, but the lives of innocent victims of terror can never be regained.

Gaza has been a test case of Palestinian intentions.

Israel's total disengagement from Gaza in 2005, the brainchild of Prime Minister Sharon, not only provided a potential new start to the peace process, but also gave the Palestinians, under the leadership of Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas, an histor-

ic opportunity for self-governance. Would they begin to establish a peaceful civil society without the widespread corruption, violence, and anarchy so endemic in the past? Or would Gaza end up as an essentially lawless area, hospitable primarily to terrorists and their friends? Would the Palestinians aspire to build a model state living quietly alongside Israel, or would they use Gaza as a new platform for firing missiles and organizing attacks against neighboring Israel?

A decade later, tragically, the answer is in. Abbas and his allies were violently ousted from Gaza by Hamas, which took over complete control of the area in 2007. Abbas has not been to Gaza since. Hamas, recognized as a terrorist group by the U.S. and E.U., has received support from Iran, diverted supplies to military purposes, launched countless rockets at Israel, built infiltration tunnels, repeatedly angered neighboring Egypt, and denied residents the chance to pursue serious political, social, and economic development.

All along, a key test for the leadership of President Abbas has been the challenge posed by terror groups operating within Palestinian society. Without firm and consistent action in confronting the enemies of an accord, including Hamas with which Abbas forged a coalition in 2014, the chances for moving ahead successfully on the peace front diminish dramatically. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority can never establish its centrality if armed groups have the luxury of operating both as political factions and separate militia groups.

There's one other important point. If, after the 1993 Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority had begun to introduce the values of tolerance and coexistence into the school curriculum, perhaps the generation of young terrorists we have witnessed in recent years might have acted differently. But instead they were fed a steady diet of incitement, hatred, vilification, and demonization of Jews, Judaism, Israel, and Zionism. They were led to believe that there could be no higher calling for Arabs and Muslims than so-called martyrdom through the killing of as many detested Jews—the “sons of monkeys and pigs,” as some spokesmen regularly refer to the Jews—as possible.

And this teaching has been reinforced by the drumbeat of hatred pouring out of mosques during Friday sermons, the popularity of notoriously anti-Semitic books like *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and the use of Palestinian media as a mouthpiece for incitement. When Palestinian schools, the media, and the mosques stop this outpouring of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, then chances for building a foundation of true peace will increase.

And no, despite Palestinian claims, there is nothing comparable emanating from the Israeli side. When lone Israeli voices resort to extremist language (or action), they are quickly condemned by Israeli society, not lionized.

Israel is a democracy and thinks and behaves like a democracy.

That's not always easy to do in light of the situation it faces. But, while Israel gets its share of criticism for allegedly heavy-handed methods, the Palestinians, despite all their shrill rhetoric, understand better than anyone that it is precisely Israel's democratic values and rule of law that they believe could be the nation's Achilles' heel.

The Palestinians know, even if they don't publicly acknowledge it, that the democratic system places brakes and limits on Israel's policy options.

They know that Israel has a multiparty political system, and that these parties include every viewpoint from extreme left to extreme right, from secular to religious, from Russian Jewish to Arab. Apropos, Israeli Arabs currently hold approximately fourteen percent of the Knesset seats (and a few of these parliamentarians have openly identified with Israel's enemies in conflict situations).

They know that public opinion in Israel counts for something and can affect policy.

They know that Israel enjoys a free and inquisitive press.

They know that Israel has an independent judiciary that occu-

pies a respected place in the nation's life and that has not hesitated to overrule government, even military, decisions which are deemed to be inconsistent with the spirit or letter of Israeli law.

They know that Israel has a thriving civil society and numerous human rights monitoring groups.

They know that Israel protects freedom of worship for all religious communities, indeed has gone so far as to limit the access of Jews on the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, specifically to avoid tension with Muslim worshippers at the two mosques built there much later. In fact, since the 1967 Six-Day War Israel has ceded authority for the area to the Waqf, the Muslim religious authority. Could anyone imagine the reverse happening if it were in an Arab country? Yet, Palestinian leaders periodically incite their followers by falsely claiming that Israel seeks to change the status quo.

They know that Israel, based on the core principles of the Jewish tradition, attaches great importance to ethical and moral standards of behavior, even when, at times, it falls short of them.

And, as a result, they know that there are self-imposed restraints on Israeli behavior precisely because Israel is a democratic state and its government is accountable to the will of the people.

If only the Middle East resembled the Middle West!

Wouldn't that augur well for peaceful conflict resolution and regional cooperation? When was the last time that one democratic nation launched a military attack against another democracy? Regrettably, democracy is a rare commodity in the Middle East. The dramatic events that began in Tunisia in December 2010, and subsequently spread to several other Arab countries, led some to believe that the advent of democracy was finally at hand, hence the name "Arab Spring." But with the exception of Tunisia itself, other nations, from Libya to Syria to Yemen, were plunged into chaos, violence, and disintegration, with little to show for overcoming the

democracy and human rights deficits at the root of social problems.

The Palestinians know how Syria's late President Hafez el-Assad dealt with Islamic fundamentalists, killing an estimated 10,000-20,000 in Hama and leveling the city as an unmistakable message to other fundamentalists in the country. And Assad's son, of course, has taken state-instigated violence to an entirely new level in his country.

They know how Iraq's former President Saddam Hussein handled the Kurds, using poison gas to kill thousands and destroying hundreds of Kurdish villages.

They know how Saudi Arabia reacted to Yemeni support for Saddam Hussein during the 1990-91 Gulf War. Overnight, the country expelled an estimated 600,000 Yemenis.

And they know how Egypt has dealt with its own Islamic radicals, thousands of whom have either been killed or locked up in jails without due process, both before and after the Muslim Brotherhood took power from 2012 to 2013. Apropos, this has also translated into Egyptian cooperation with Israel in confronting Hamas in Gaza. After all, Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Palestinians count on the fact that Israel will not follow any of these examples. That is Israel's strength as a democracy, but it comes with a price. The Palestinians seek to take advantage of it. But they have made one fundamental error—they have underestimated Israel's will to survive.

**Israelis desperately want peace.
At the same time, peace at any price
is no peace.**

Israelis want to stop worrying about suicide bombers, attackers wielding knives, cars being aimed at pedestrians, etc. They want to put an end to burying their children, victims of terror or military engagements. In short, they want to lead normal lives, and they have demonstrated their willingness time and again to endorse far-reaching, even potentially risky, compromises in the quest for peace.

Israelis, however, have learned the painful lessons of history. Peace without secure and defensible borders can be tantamount to national suicide. And who knows better than the citizens of Israel, who include Holocaust survivors and their families, as well as refugees from communist lands and Arab extremism, how dangerous it can be to let one's guard down too quickly, too easily?

Are Israelis simply to ignore, say, Iran's repeated calls for Israel's annihilation and its ambition, sooner or later, to acquire weapons of mass destruction; Syria's chaos, death toll, and collapse as a unitary state; Hezbollah's arsenal of tens of thousands of missiles in southern Lebanon capable of reaching most of Israel; and the blood-curdling calls heard in Gaza and the West Bank for "martyrs" to attack Israel?

Our world hasn't been terribly kind to the naïve, the credulous, or the self-delusional. Despite the doubters at the time, Adolf Hitler meant exactly what he said when he wrote *Mein Kampf*, Saddam Hussein meant exactly what he said when he insisted that Kuwait was a province of Iraq, and Osama bin Laden meant exactly what he said when, in 1998, he called for killing as many Americans as possible.

Israel lives in a particularly rough neighborhood. To survive, it has had to be courageous on the battlefield and at the peace table. It has passed both tests with flying colors.

Israel is about much more than conflict and conflict resolution.

While public debate and media attention tend to focus on issues of war, violence, and terrorism in the region, there is another side to Israel which is too rarely discussed, except largely by those fortunate enough to visit Israel and see it with their own eyes.

Israel is an unimaginably vibrant and dynamic country. It is both ancient and cutting-edge. It is a country of Nobel Prize winners in literature and chemistry, of Olympic medalists, of concert pianists, and rap stars. There are more scientists and engineers in

Israel per capita than anywhere else in the world. Newspaper readership and book publishing are also among the highest in the world. Tel Aviv is one of the most LGBT-friendly cities on the planet. The number of high-tech start-up companies and patents issued are astonishingly impressive for a country of just over eight million inhabitants. Medical advances, technological and communications breakthroughs, and agricultural innovations have not only benefited Israel, but also millions of other people around the world.

Next time you enter a chat room, use a mobile phone or voice mail, require color imaging, depend on a Pentium processor chip, need a CAT scan or MRI, or see a farm blooming in the desert due to drip irrigation, there's a good chance that Israel has lent a helping hand.

Israel. The more you know, the more you understand.



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