



OPINION and ANALYSIS

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A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East

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Ben-Dror Yemini, Times of Israel, 8 January 2013

The only place in the Middle East where Christians are prospering and thriving has been turned by the industry of lies into a place where they are in trouble.

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-case-for-christians-in-israel/>

2. Clear stand on any peace agreement

Editorial, The Jordan Times, 7 January 2014

Jordan has hosted millions of Palestinian refugees on the understanding that one day they will be granted the right to return, in accordance with all the relevant UN resolutions.

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Judea Pearl, The Times of Israel, 6 January 2014

There are many good reasons to oppose the American Studies Association (ASA) decision to boycott Israeli universities. But there are some bad reasons as well. Many arguments against the boycott play exactly into the hands of the pro-boycott propagandists and give them the ammunition they need to continue their poisonous campaign with renewed vigor and self-righteousness.

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/boycott-israel-not-on-my-campus/>

4. The Jordan Valley: Israel's security belt

Prof. Efraim Inbar, Israel Hayom, 6 January 2014

Maaleh Adumim serves as the linchpin in establishing an effective line of defense along the Jordan Valley against aggression from the east. Building a Jewish populated corridor in the 5-kilometer-wide E1 area between Jerusalem and Maaleh Adumim will secure the road to the Jordan Valley and prevent the division of Jerusalem

http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=6929

5. Winning the BDS battle

Dr Rynhold, BESA, 5 January 2014

The BDS movement is driven by anti-Zionism, but its ability to generate support depends on casting Israel as undemocratic and solely responsible for the lack of peace. Consequently, the proposed law targeting pro-BDS NGOs does more harm than good by eroding Israel's image as a democracy. To defeat society-led BDS, the government should let Israeli society and pro-Israel groups abroad take the lead. To do otherwise would inflate the standing of the boycotters and allow them to deflect attention from their own extremism.

<http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/winning-the-bds-battle/>

6. Power vacuum in Middle East lifts militants

Ben Hubbard et al, the New York Times, 5 January 2014

The bloodshed that has engulfed Iraq, Lebanon and Syria in the past two weeks exposes something new and destabilizing: the emergence of a post-American Middle East in which no broker has the power, or the will, to contain the region's sectarian hatreds.

<http://www.cnn.com/id/101310386>

7. Jordan is part of the solution

Guy Bechor, YNet News, 3 January 2014

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be solved when West Bank's Arab residents regain their Jordanian citizenship.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4472454,00.html>

8. Two states is common sense

Hitham Kayali, Fathom, 12 September 2013

The one-state solution is a mirage. Only the two state solution can meet the national aspirations of both peoples. It is time to give common sense its day.

<http://www.fathomjournal.org/policy-politics/two-states-is-common-sense/>

1. Jews, lies and Christian victims

In late December, *The Independent* published an article about the bleak situation of the Christians in the Middle East. It had the right idea. The Christians in the Middle East are in trouble. They're being slaughtered in dozens of different places and millions have become refugees or been forced to flee. Amazingly enough, however, the article was devoted almost entirely to their sad situation in Israel, of all places. "Will Prince Charles, the 'Defender of Faiths,' stand up for Christians in Israel?" read the astonishing headline.

Blogger Elder of Zion has enumerated lies so egregious - and there are many - in this manifest masquerading as an article. They saved me the trouble of having to refute the lies myself. Not a single Christian in Israel is being persecuted because of his religion. There has been no pogrom. Israel's Christians are fully integrated at the top of their professions as physicians, lawyers and judges. The Israeli Christian community is a minority that in many

areas, such as higher education, has made remarkable achievements. Even more so than the Jews. They do not need any Prince Charles or *The Independent* to defend them. But somehow, the author of the article and the newspaper have managed once again to turn the situation on its head and make truth lies and lies truth.

They have created a new reality: The only place in the Middle East where Christians are prospering and thriving has been turned by the industry of lies into a place where they are in trouble. I have to admit that there is something deeply discouraging about articles such as these, which are no more than modern sequels to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

What is intriguing, however, is that the author of the article in the British newspaper is named Mira Bar-Hillel, a Jewish woman and former Israeli. It turns out that she belongs to a not-new breed of Jews. One may not criticize Israel, she once complained, because any such censure is immediately perceived as anti-Semitism. This is a familiar argument, one that is even justified in some cases. The problem is not with criticism. The problem is with lies. And her "article" is an outstanding example of the fact that the problem is just the opposite: The anti-Semites want to spread blood libels and escape attack with the claim that they are merely criticizing.

Bar-Hillel, as shown by CIF Watch, a media watchdog organization, is one of the few Jews that identifies with the self-declared anti-Semite Gilad Atzmon, another former Israeli who is doing his best to warn the world of the dangers of international Jewish conspiracies.

There have always been Jewish anti-Semites. Now some Jewish-Israelis have also joined the list. Serious mental illness can probably be found among all human communities. The problem is that one of those suffering from the illness is publishing her drivel in a newspaper that purports to be normal. It's no secret that *The Independent* is an anti-Israeli newspaper. That's no news to us. The problem is that giving a platform to Bar-Hillel so that she can publish a manifest that is one big lie makes it clear that the newspaper is not only anti-Israeli. It is already drawing dangerously close to an old and well-known disease. Anti-Semitism.

2. Clear stand on any peace agreement

His Majesty King Abdullah, in his meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry in Amman on Sunday, reiterated Jordan's support for an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians as long as it safeguards the Kingdom's legitimate interests.

Jordan's concerns in the context of any peace agreement that could be brokered by these two sides are obvious. Foremost among them are the rights of the refugees, which the Palestinian leadership cannot relinquish and which Israel should not attempt to solve at the expense of the countries hosting them.

Jordan's special role in East Jerusalem are cemented not only in the 1994 peace treaty signed with Israel, but also in last year's agreement the King reached with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, which accords the Monarch a special role in protecting the holy places in East Jerusalem.

Any understanding on East Jerusalem must therefore comply fully with this special status accorded to the Hashemite family, that of custodian of its holy places.

One other issue of concern in case an agreement is reached by Palestinians and Israelis is the status of the River Jordan, which Israel wishes to have as a “security” frontier and, as such, along which it wishes to deploy its army.

Jordan has its own armed forces to protect its side of the Jordan River and the Palestinians can be expected to do the same to protect their border with Jordan.

An Israeli force along this border line would be tantamount to interference; it would strengthen its grip on Palestinians’ lives and would show lack of trust in a nation with which it signed a peace agreement.

The most critical issue, one cannot stop reiterating, is that of Palestinian refugees who should be allowed to exercise their legitimate right to return to their homeland, should they so wish, or seek compensation.

Jordan has hosted millions of Palestinian refugees on the understanding that one day they will be granted the right to return, in accordance with all the relevant UN resolutions.

Therefore, understandably, Jordan cannot but reject any framework for a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians that ignores this basic right.

The Kingdom’s rights, its security and stability, cannot be sacrificed to serve the interests of others.

3. How not to fight an anti-Israel boycott

There are many good reasons to oppose the American Studies Association (ASA) decision to boycott Israeli universities. But there are some bad reasons as well. Many arguments against the boycott play exactly into the hands of the pro-boycott propagandists and give them the ammunition they need to continue their poisonous campaign with renewed vigor and self-righteousness.

The two most dangerous “objections” to the boycott consist of these arguments:

- 1) There are worse violators of human rights in the world, so why pick on Israel?
- 2) Israel is aware of her “crimes,” and is about to repent and behave.

These two arguments have been used as a crutch by many commentators, including several academics who wrote articles in the Jewish press, ostensibly opposing the proposed boycott. I consider such arguments damaging.

Proclaiming: “You caught me stealing, but there are bigger thieves in town” is precisely what the boycott cronies want to hear, and the ASA president’s response, “We have to start somewhere,” sounds more compelling than the plea for first chasing after the other thieves in town. After all, once we admit to being part of the Mafia, we have no business telling the police, or even self-appointed vigilantes, how to go about fighting crime, and we should not be surprised if we are the first to be arrested.

My purpose in this article is to assure students and readers that the case against academic boycott is not as flimsy as these arguments make it sound, and that the vast majority of faculty and researchers in American universities do recognize both the anti-academic character of the boycott campaign and the distorted substance of its allegations.

They recognize that Israel did not choose to occupy another people and that her forced presence in the West Bank cannot end unilaterally, without an end-of-conflict agreement.

The majority of faculty recognizes that, obviously, the occupation “has a negative impact on the working conditions of Palestinian researchers and students” (this is a quote from the ASA resolution). But it is also obvious that Israel cannot lift movement restrictions in the West Bank while she is intimidated daily, both rhetorically and physically, with existential threats; normalcy has its price — it must be symmetrical.

They recognize that while occupation is ugly and unsustainable, the Arab side shares (at least) equal responsibility for prolonging this conflict by nourishing a culture in which coexistence is a sinful thought.

In particular, Palestinian educators, researchers, students and academic institutions who now call for boycotting Israel are greatly responsible for perpetuating this culture of anti-coexistence, hence no less deserving of a boycott than their Israeli counterparts. Most academics would agree that, by any reasonable criterion, denying peoplehood to a people, for more than 65 years, is no less a crime than causing students at Nablus University to be late to class.

What ASA members should be most concerned about is their professional reputation, having let their organization be hijacked by the rhetoric of the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement and its radical supporters. While the resolution itself may sound benign, ASA members should have taken a hard look at the purpose for which this document will be used in the future.

The leaders of the BDS movement do not hide that purpose: In every conversation with them, they make it crystal clear that their ultimate goal is not to end the occupation, nor is it to achieve a peaceful solution in the Middle East, but rather to defame Israel in the public eye, to choreograph an arena where Israel's criminality is debated, to intimidate pro-coexistence voices into silence, if not shame, and eventually bring about Israel's isolation, if not her demise.

Omar Barghouti, the key ideologist of BDS, stated publicly (Sept. 29, 2013), “Colonizers [read: Zionists] are not entitled to self-determination, by any definition of self-determination.”

ASA members should also take a hard look at what this resolution would do to campus climate, how it would alienate faculty members who choose or need to collaborate with Israeli universities and what it would mean to the posture of Jewish students on campus once BDS supporters sense the smell of victory, however mild.

A special breed among BDS supporters is the one called “history professors.” These tenured enigmas are as quick to desecrate the word “apartheid” as they are to rewrite new chapters of Jewish history. Some of these “history professors” can preach for hours and hours on the moral right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and, at the same time, ignore or deny the right of their neighbors to the same self-determination.

In the old days we used to label such professors “racists,” but nowadays this label is reserved strictly for Islamophobes and “white settlers’ colonial societies,” so, on a technicality, a racist can pose as a human rights activist. One of Israel's painful misfortunes is that so many history professors formed their worldview at a time when the only villains in town were “white settlers.”

Today, when there are no such settlers in existence (except perhaps the British settlers in the Falkland Islands), history professors must invent them, to fit the script, no matter how absurd the resemblance. And you can guess whom they chose for the honor — the only functioning society in the Middle East that speaks the language of its historical birthplace.

On the positive side, we should not forget that despite its symbolic victory in the ASA case, the BDS movement has given the Jewish people two important gifts. First, support of BDS has become a crisp and visible litmus test by which to distinguish potential discussants from hopeless bigots, and by which to determine whom to include and whom to exclude from the big tent of “Jewish conversation.” Drawing such red lines was one of the smartest things our sages enforced to preserve Jewish identity. At times it involved painful decisions, which left the Karaites, the early Christians, the Shabtaim, the Spanish Conversos and “Jews for Jesus” out of the community. These were necessary, life-saving decisions. Today, as if by divine supervision, BDS supporters find themselves excluded from the tent of Jewish conversation — a life-saving demarcation line has been drawn, and a stronger, more united community has emerged.

The second blessing has been a miraculous awakening and an unprecedented galvanization of Jewish students and faculty to confront the dangers of the BDS assault. It is still too early to assess, but I would nevertheless venture to predict that next year will not be an easy one for Israel's enemies on campus.

4. The Jordan Valley: Israel's security belt

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is once again in town trying to reach a framework agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. One of the issues of dispute is the fate of the Jordan Valley, which is indispensable for Israel's national security. The Jordan Valley is the only available defensible border on the eastern front, which is the closest border to Israel's heartland -- the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv-Haifa triangle -- which holds 70 percent of its population and 80% of its economic infrastructure.

Many pundits claim that Israel no longer needs the Jordan Valley as a shield against aggression from the east. They argue that the demise of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the weakening of civil-war-torn Syria, and the impressive stability of Jordan in light of the turmoil of the Arab world renders the threat of the eastern front and its proximity to Israel's center a thing of the past. Yet this is a very short-term perspective, motivated by the desire to convince the Israeli public opinion that the Jordan Valley is militarily dispensable. Such a view ignores the immense potential for political upheaval in the Middle East, as recently demonstrated during the Arab Spring. The destabilization of Hashemite Jordan and Saudi Arabia and a radical jihadist Syria are not far-fetched scenarios for the near future. The re-emergence of the eastern front as a security threat could soon follow.

Moreover, the U.S. decided to cut its losses and leave Iraq and Afghanistan, which constitutes a victory to all radical forces in the Middle East. A more energy-independent America might decide that it has less of a stake in the Middle East, allowing greater freedom of action to Islamist elements to take over American allies. Israel cannot count on the U.S. to always lend its weight to Arab moderates. Under President Barack Obama, Washington supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and might make the same strategic mistake in Jordan.

Advocates of turning over the Jordan Valley to the Palestinians also discount its topographical importance by referring to current military technology, which allows precision

strikes from a distance. They argue that the ability to launch defensive strikes from the coast eliminates the strategic need for the Jordan Valley as a means of defense. Yet, these armchair strategists overlook the history of military technology, which shows a clear oscillation between the dominance of offensive and defensive measures over the centuries. The belief that the technology of today -- which indeed temporarily reduces the importance of topography -- will remain unchallenged constitutes a dangerous strategic fallacy.

Designing stable defensible borders in accordance with the current, but transient, technological state of art and political circumstances is strategically foolish. Therefore, if Israel wants to maintain a defensible border along the Jordan Valley it also needs to secure the road from the coast to the Valley, via an undivided Jerusalem and via Maaleh Adumim -- 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the river. This is the only west-east axis with a Jewish majority and the only safe route via which Israel can mobilize troops from the coast to the Jordan Valley in a case of emergency.

Maaleh Adumim serves as the linchpin in establishing an effective line of defense along the Jordan Valley against aggression from the east. Building a Jewish populated corridor in the 5-kilometer-wide E1 area between Jerusalem and Maaleh Adumim will secure the road to the Jordan Valley and prevent the division of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's importance to the Jews is not only historical and religious, but also strategic. There is great importance in controlling the only highway from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River Valley along which Jews can travel with little interference from concentrations of the Arab population.

The Palestinians plan to populate E1 with Arabs to create demographic contiguity between Samaria and east Jerusalem, thereby facilitating the division of the city. Such a development would also isolate Maaleh Adumim and undermine Israeli claims to the Jordan Valley. Settling Jews in E1 is an imperative to keep Jerusalem united and to consolidate Israel's defensible border along the Jordan Valley.

The U.S. seems to understand Israel's strategic need for the Jordan Valley, but is opposed to linking Maaleh Adumim to Jerusalem as a vital component of the eastern defensible border. Yet, we should remember that the U.S. has opposed Israeli settlement efforts since 1967 and only rarely did American objections have an impact on Israeli decisions on this issue. Moreover, the Americans can be persuaded to tacitly go along with linking Maaleh Adumim to Jerusalem if a clear strategic vision based upon the principle of territorial compromise is presented.

While the wisdom of indiscriminately settling the Land of Israel is not strategically compelling and is a hard sell diplomatically, a selective settlement policy focusing on areas within the Israeli consensus, including Maaleh Adumim and the Jordan Valley, can be pursued with less foreign opposition. Willingness for a territorial compromise in Judea and Samaria is also the position of most Israelis. The government must act to reflect this preference to convince the Israeli public that it is seriously pursuing peace. Israelis need such an assurance to support the government in case of international pressure to make dangerous concessions, or to fight a war if necessary. A selective settlement policy that distinguishes between important and less important strategic areas requires a gradual freeze in building and allocations to isolated settlements, and should be complemented with the removal of illegal posts located outside the areas of consensus.

Building in E1 and the Jordan Valley will thus become easier in domestic and international terms. It is imperative to build homes for Jews there to establish a defensible line along Israel's eastern border. Hopefully Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will finally implement the announced plans.

5. Winning the BDS battle

The recent Association of American Studies (ASA) boycott of Israel is the latest chapter of a general campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against the State of Israel. In examining BDS there are three key questions one needs to answer: Who and what is behind this? What is the extent of the threat? And how should Israel respond?

The BDS Threat

The hard-core elements behind this campaign hail from the radical Left and are anti-Zionist – that is, they oppose the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. The good news is that the overwhelming majority of the public in the West oppose this position. The bad news is that the BDS hard-core recognizes this and focuses publicly on the issue of settlements and the “disproportionate” use of force by Israel in order to broaden their support. Indeed, they have had some success in this regard, as the consensus in the West feels that settlements are wrong or at least counterproductive.

One should not exaggerate the significance of the ASA boycott. The American public’s support for Israel over the Palestinians is overwhelming and despite their criticism of settlements, more American liberals sympathize with Israel than with the Palestinians. With the exception of the mainline Protestant Church in America, the real battlefield for BDS is in Western Europe; right now none of the boycotts have had much practical effect.

However, it would be grossly misleading to take this as a sign that all is well, because the goal of society-led BDS is to create a hostile political environment; the material consequences are secondary. The struggle is over political legitimacy and symbolism. BDS is not going to bring Israel to its knees, but it has the potential to inflict substantial diplomatic, economic, and even military damage on Israel over time. If the current peace talks collapse, the Palestinians will seek to impose sanctions against Israel at the UN and in other international bodies. In addition, they will seek to have Israeli army officers tried at the International Criminal Court, a threat which could have negative consequences for Israeli deterrence. Society-based boycott initiatives play into this strategy by allowing the Palestinians to claim that there is widespread support for sanctions among Western publics.

Responding to BDS

How should Israel and its friends abroad respond to this threat?

First, it is critical to divide up the responsibility appropriately. Government institutions should lead the interaction with foreign governments and international organizations like the UN. There are many things foreign governments can do to dis-incentivize society-led BDS, and the Israeli government is best placed to make the case. Indeed, it is already doing this.

In terms of political symbolism, the government needs to remember two things. First, especially if the peace process collapses again, it is very important that Israel be viewed as willing *in principle* to agree to a two-state solution involving extensive territorial concessions in exchange for peace and security. Concern about BDS should not trump Israel’s vital and legitimate interests on issues such as refugees and security. However, pointing out Palestinian extremism or recalcitrance will not suffice to deflect BDS, as the retort will simply be that pressure is needed on both sides. Without Israeli credibility on this score, BDS has the potential to move from the leftist periphery to the liberal mainstream and beyond.

Second, a major bulwark against BDS is the fact that Israel is a democracy, not simply in terms of voting and majority rule, but also in terms of liberal rights such as freedom of

speech and freedom of association. This is the critical point for most of those who support Israel in the West and it is a major weapon in the symbolic struggle over BDS. Therefore, attempts to combat BDS by passing laws that are seen to significantly curtail those democratic freedoms are entirely counterproductive.

The latest initiative in this vein is a government-approved bill to restrict funding to NGOs that support BDS, which is opposed by the Attorney-General on the grounds that it will have a chilling effect on free speech. Such anti-Zionist NGOs need to be combatted, but this must occur within the context of democratic norms. Making such NGOs suffer by imposing financial penalties is populism that will boomerang and erode the resonance of Israel's most important asset in the war over political symbolism. The supposed remedy will inflict more damage than the disease itself.

Combating Society-Led BDS: Government Support, Not Control

In terms of dealing with society-led BDS abroad, the lead must come from Israeli society and Israel's friends in the West. The government should facilitate and cooperate, but not lead. For Israel to directly enter a fight with various pro-boycott organizations abroad simply raises their status. It will be viewed as inappropriate even by members of those organizations who oppose BDS. Israeli academics, trade unionists, and religious leaders should engage their foreign counterparts. In order to be listened to and have the required legitimacy and standing to act, it is critical to have the appropriate partner.

In addition, it is crucial to recognize that local activists opposed to BDS are best placed to take the lead, since they know the environment best and have the appropriate standing. They also have the advantage of not being bound to defend every policy of the Israeli government. Being able to differentiate between the legitimacy of the State of Israel and the policy of this or that Israeli government is critical to ensuring widespread disdain for BDS. It is the government's job to defend its policy; it is therefore unsuitable for the government to take the lead. Taking the lead will play into the boycotters' hands by allowing them to make Israeli policy the main issue, about which Israelis and Israel's supporters are often divided.

Since this division of labour was put in place by Israel and Jewish Diaspora organizations, the tide of BDS which rose significantly from 2005-2009 has been held back. However, there is now talk of creating a new governmental body to deal with BDS. This would be a mistake. It would shift the strategy from one based on the premise that "it takes a network to fight a network" to one based on the directives of Israeli politicians whose political priorities lie elsewhere. Witness reports of the Knesset committee discussion on the issue, where Right and Left vied to impose their ideological stamp on the issue.

Conclusion

If the anti-BDS cause is blurred and subjugated to other concerns, and the means deployed to combat it are inappropriate and heavy-handed, things will go from bad to worse. If, however, the focus is the legitimacy of Israel itself, and the means employed to combat BDS are appropriate and sophisticated, then Israel is well positioned to defeat BDS efforts.

6. Power vacuum in Middle East lifts militants

The images of recent days have an eerie familiarity, as if the horrors of the past decade were being played back: masked gunmen recapturing the Iraqi cities of Falluja and Ramadi, where so many American soldiers died fighting them. Car bombs exploding amid the elegance of downtown Beirut. The charnel house of Syria's worsening civil war.

But for all its echoes, the bloodshed that has engulfed Iraq, Lebanon and Syria in the past two weeks exposes something new and destabilizing: the emergence of a post-American Middle East in which no broker has the power, or the will, to contain the region's sectarian hatreds.

Amid this vacuum, fanatical Islamists have flourished in both Iraq and Syria under the banner of Al Qaeda, as the two countries' conflicts amplify each other and foster ever-deeper radicalism. Behind much of it is the bitter rivalry of two great oil powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, whose rulers -- claiming to represent Shiite and Sunni Islam, respectively -- cynically deploy a sectarian agenda that makes almost any sort of accommodation a heresy.

"I think we are witnessing a turning point, and it could be one of the worst in all our history," said Elias Khoury, a Lebanese novelist and critic who lived through his own country's 15-year civil war. "The West is not there, and we are in the hands of two regional powers, the Saudis and Iranians, each of which is fanatical in its own way. I don't see how they can reach any entente, any rational solution."

The drumbeat of violence in recent weeks threatens to bring back the worst of the Iraqi civil war that the United States touched off with an invasion and then spent billions of dollars and thousands of soldiers' lives to overcome.

With the possible withdrawal of American forces in Afghanistan looming later this year, many fear that an insurgency will unravel that country, too, leaving another American nation-building effort in ashes.

The Obama administration defends its record of engagement in the region, pointing to its efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis and the Palestinian dispute, but acknowledges that there are limits. "It's not in America's interests to have troops in the middle of every conflict in the Middle East, or to be permanently involved in open-ended wars in the Middle East," Benjamin J. Rhodes, a White House deputy national security adviser, said in an email on Saturday.

For the first time since the American troop withdrawal of 2011, fighters from a Qaeda affiliate have recaptured Iraqi territory. In the past few days they have seized parts of the two biggest cities in Anbar Province, where the government, which the fighters revile as a tool of Shiite Iran, struggles to maintain a semblance of authority.

Lebanon has seen two deadly car bombs, including one that killed a senior political figure and American ally.

In Syria, the tempo of violence has increased, with hundreds of civilians killed by bombs dropped indiscriminately on houses and markets.

Linking all this mayhem is an increasingly naked appeal to the atavistic loyalties of clan and sect. Foreign powers' imposing agendas on the region, and the police-state tactics of Arab despots, had never allowed communities to work out their long-simmering enmities. But these divides, largely benign during times of peace, have grown steadily more toxic since the Iranian revolution of 1979. The events of recent years have accelerated the trend, as foreign invasions and the recent round of Arab uprisings left the state weak, borders blurred, and people resorting to older loyalties for safety.

Arab leaders are moving more aggressively to fill the vacuum left by the United States and other Western powers as they line up by sect and perceived interest. The Saudi government's pledge last week of \$3 billion to the Lebanese Army is a strikingly bold bid to reassert influence in a country where Iran has long played a dominant proxy role through Hezbollah, the Shiite movement it finances and arms.

That Saudi pledge came just after the assassination of Mohamad B. Chatah, a prominent political figure allied with the Saudis, in a downtown car bombing that is widely believed to have been the work of the Syrian government or its Iranian or Lebanese allies, who are all fighting on the same side in the civil war.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have increased their efforts to arm and recruit fighters in the civil war in Syria, which top officials in both countries portray as an existential struggle. Sunni Muslims from Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere have joined the rebels, many fighting alongside affiliates of Al Qaeda. And Shiites from Bahrain, Lebanon, Yemen and even Africa are fighting with pro-government militias, fearing that a defeat for Bashar al-Assad, Syria's president, would endanger their Shiite brethren everywhere.

"Everyone fighting in Syria is fighting for his own purpose, not only to protect Bashar al-Assad and his regime," said an Iraqi Shiite fighter who gave his name as Abu Karrar. He spoke near the Shiite shrine of Sayida Zeinab near Damascus, where hundreds of Shiite fighters from around the region, including trained Hezbollah commandos, have streamed to defend a symbol of their faith.

Some Shiite fighters are trained in Iran or Lebanon before being sent to Syria, and many receive salaries and free room and board, paid for by donations from Shiite communities outside of Syria, Abu Karrar said.

Although the Saudi government waged a bitter struggle with Al Qaeda on its own soil a decade ago, the kingdom now supports Islamist rebels in Syria who often fight alongside Qaeda groups like the Nusra Front. The Saudis say they have little choice: having lobbied unsuccessfully for a decisive American intervention in Syria, they believe they must now back whoever can help them defeat Mr Assad's forces and his Iranian allies.

For all the attention paid to Syria over the past three years, Iraq's slow disintegration also offers a vivid glimpse of the region's bloody sectarian dynamic. In March 2012, Anthony Blinken, who is now President Obama's deputy national security adviser, gave a speech echoing the White House's rosy view of Iraq's prospects after the withdrawal of American forces.

Iraq, Mr Blinken said, was "less violent, more democratic and more prosperous" than "at any time in recent history."

But the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, was already pursuing an aggressive campaign against Sunni political figures that infuriated Iraq's Sunni minority. Those sectarian policies and the absence of American ground and air forces gave Al Qaeda in Iraq, a local Sunni insurgency that had become a spent force, a golden opportunity to rebuild its reputation as a champion of the Sunnis both in Iraq and in neighbouring Syria. Violence in Iraq grew steadily over the following year.

Rebranding itself as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, the group seized territory in rebel-held parts of Syria, where it now aspires to erase the border between the two countries and carve out a haven for its transnational, jihadist project. Sending 30 to 40 suicide bombers a month to Iraq from Syria, it has mounted a campaign of violence that has led to the deaths of more than 8,000 Iraqis this year, according to the United Nations, the highest level of violence there since 2008.

In recent days, after ISIS fighters rode into the cities of Falluja and Ramadi, they fought gun battles with Sunni tribal fighters backed by the Iraqi government, illustrating that the battle lines in the Middle East are about far more than just sect. Yet the tribal fighters see the government as the lesser of two evils, and their loyalty is likely to be temporary and conditional.

As the United States rushed weapons to Mr Maliki's government late last year to help him fight off the jihadis, some analysts said American officials had not pushed the Iraqi prime minister hard enough to be more inclusive. "Maliki has done everything he could to deepen the sectarian divide over the past year and a half, and he still enjoys unconditional American support," said Peter Harling, a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group. "The pretext is always the same: They don't want to rock the boat. How is this not rocking the boat?"

The worsening violence in Iraq and Syria has spread into Lebanon, where a local Qaeda affiliate conducted a suicide bombing of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut in November, in an attack meant as revenge for Iran's support of Mr Assad.

More bombings followed, including one in a Hezbollah stronghold on Thursday, one day after the authorities announced the arrest of a senior Saudi-born Qaeda leader.

"All these countries are suffering the consequences of a state that's no longer sovereign," said Paul Salem, vice president of the Middle East Institute in Washington. "On the sectarian question, much depends on the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Will these two powers accommodate each other or continue to wage proxy war?"

For the fighters on the ground, that question comes far too late. Amjad al-Ahmed, a Shiite fighter with a pro-government militia, said by phone from the Syrian city of Homs, "There is no such thing as coexistence between us and the Sunnis because they are killing my people here and in Lebanon."

7. Jordan is part of the solution

Famous British diplomat and author Harold Nicolson (1886-1968) believed there were two types of negotiators: Warriors and shopkeepers. Warriors use negotiations to improve their position ahead of the next stage of the conflict, while shopkeepers try to reach an agreement which will satisfy everyone. Warriors are here to take, shopkeepers – to give. Warriors see an agreement as a temporary stage, shopkeepers hope to end the conflict through it.

The Palestinian Authority comes to the negotiations as clear warriors. It is interested in going back in time, fixing the past of 1948, expelling 700,000 Jews from Judea and Samaria and replacing them with one or two million Palestinians from Syria, Lebanon and the Arab world. These will be the most dangerous Salafis in the region. Israel wants to end the conflict, but the PA wants to strengthen itself in order to intensify the conflict. Its goal is to go on with the plan to destroy Israel in stages.

The problem begins when the shopkeepers believe they are facing another shopkeeper, and realize that they are facing a warrior – sometimes when it's already too late. Those who understand that these are two forces with opposite intentions and a different language, understand that there is nothing to talk about with what is called "the Palestinian Authority."

This means that in a while we will see the failure of what has been called "negotiations" with that PA, which are entirely based on American naivety in the best-case scenario. A mediator who fails to understand that he is facing warriors against shopkeepers will find it difficult to understand the conflict, and may even be a shopkeeper himself. It's time, therefore, to prepare and come up with a Plan B, after realizing Plan A is impossible. And I mean Jordan.

Just like Egypt was forced to return to the Gaza Strip and to its affairs, the same is expected to happen with Jordan, as it is part of the conflict. It was Churchill who disconnected it from the

western Land of Israel as "the Arab state," but it is part of the solution, and it knows that and is interested in it. After all, the West Bank was part of the Jordanian kingdom in 1967 in the full sense of the word. Jordan completely annexed it, and granted its residents full citizenship. On July 31, 1988, Jordanian King Hussein revoked the full Jordanian citizenship given to the Arab residents of Judea and Samaria and east Jerusalem as part of what he referred to as a "withdrawal." But who revokes his residents' citizenship just like that, and why did it go by peacefully?

The Arab residents of Judea and Samaria will get their Jordanian citizenship back, and Jordan will oversee the civil life in Area A. The IDF will remain militarily in charge of all Judea and Samaria territories, in coordination with the Jordanians, with whom we have a peace agreement, and all the settlement will naturally stay put. The Arabs in Judea and Samaria will vote for the Jordanian parliament, and their passports will be Jordanian. The Jerusalem issue will also be solved quickly, as Israel is committed in the peace treaty with Jordan to giving the kingdom a "special status" in Jerusalem's holy sites.

Israel will be interested in this arrangement, between shopkeepers and shopkeepers. The Palestinians will be happy, as they are being given a desired citizenship, second in its prestige to the Israeli one, and Jordan will be satisfied too. A Palestinian state, which within a short while will be filled with Salafis and al-Qaeda operatives, is a strategic threat to its security. The only one which won't be satisfied is the Palestinian Authority, which was invented out of nothing in Oslo. But it's not our job to worry about that authority.

Jordanian spokespeople reiterate that the United States and Europe are wrong about Jordan not being the desirable solution, while expressing their reservations and remoteness from the "PA." They also know that a Palestinian solution is bad news for everyone, even for the Arabs living in Judea and Samaria, as a peace agreement with warriors is a contradiction.

8. Two states is common sense

Cast your eye over two decades of attempts to turn the two-state solution into a reality since the Oslo Accords and you are confronted with a bleak picture. Many of the initial enthusiasts have come to favour other solutions or have simply chosen to turn a blind eye to the conflict. Within both political elites, and among the two peoples, there does not seem to be much hope.

But despite all, the two-state solution still has one thing in its favor: common sense. For make no mistake, the last 20 years have not produced any better alternatives, nor have they fulfilled the desires of two-state rejectionists. And when we look at the regional picture, it becomes clear that the two-state solution still benefits all neighbours. Moreover, the opportunities for both peoples that the two-state solution offers remain as huge as ever; most obviously, it guarantees the right to national self-determination of both peoples.

It is clear that Israel is not in favor of a bi-national state. The status quo has been, and continues to be, rejected by the world and the occupation affects Israel's standing among nations and the Jewish Diaspora. And with all its consequences, the occupation does not comply with the great values of Judaism.

The status-quo can also not continue for Palestinians either; not only because of the hardships and injustices of living under occupation, but because of the lost opportunities for producing a more enlightened, skillful and ambitious generation that is capable of shaping the future Palestinian state as we would like to see it. Our rejection of a bi-national state was declared with our pursuit of

statehood after Oslo. For let us not forget the peaceful circumstances that existed between Palestinians and Israeli up until the nineties *and why they came to an end*: they did not fulfill Palestinian national aspirations and other demands, such as the right of return among others, hence the two-state solution – it was the common sense approach.

But common sense has had a hard time of it. For Israel, it's hard to understand how the interests of around 500,000 settlers can outweigh the deepest needs of the state and of the Jewish Diaspora, even in the face of a renewed Arab peace initiative that could guarantee normal relations in the region. Of course, it is not easy; the current instability in the Arab world and the disappointing outcomes so far of the Arab Spring makes it understandable that Israel finds it difficult to make peace with an Arab world that cannot seem to make peace with itself.

Common sense should dictate that Arabs look hard at Israel's record-breaking success in building a modern nation that competes at the highest levels of productivity and development. This should be something that Arab states can use to respond to the demands of the eager youth leading revolutions across the region. In fact, the resources available to the Arab nations mixed with Israel's drive for prosperity and its experience in creating fertile start-up environments, should be the perfect formula; the entire Middle East would look very different under conditions of cooperation – a new regional start-up of a unique kind!

Common sense should also guide our attempts to resolve final status issues. The logic of the 'land for peace' formula should remain the basis for resolving the conflict, and yet, standing on the land to be traded to the Palestinians are settlements preventing an agreement on future borders. Israel claims that settlements are not the problem, but if you ask yourself why the occupation exists with all its features – closures, checkpoints, separation wall – you will find it is entirely for the preservation of settlements; their security and the provision of space for them to expand. Hence, while actual settlement building is on only two per cent of the West Bank, they control over 40 per cent of the entire land designated for a future Palestinian state.

The history of the settlements growth illustrates the threat they pose to a two-state solution. After the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel became the occupying power in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, several plans to build settlements were proposed by different Israeli leaders; all were explicitly aimed at *preventing the existence of an Arab state*. The architects of these plans executed their plans rapidly so as to create such a large settlement presence; their hope was that if any future Israeli government decided to concede the land for peace through the creation of an Arab state, it would have to face an Israeli civil war.

Among the first architects of the Israeli settlement plan was Matityahu Drobless, at the time Co-Chair of the World Zionist Organization's Settlement Department, who stated: 'There must not be the slightest doubt regarding our intention to hold the areas of Judea and Samaria for ever ... [t]he best and most effective way to remove any shred of doubt regarding our intention to hold Judea and Samaria forever is a rapid settlement drive in these areas.' (see *The Settlement in Judea and Samaria – Strategy, Policy and Program* [in Hebrew] World Zionist Organization, 1980, p. 3.). Another architect of the settlement plan, Ariel Sharon when Minister of Agriculture and Land, believed that 'it was important to prevent the creation of a contiguous area populated by Arabs on either side of the Green Line, leading to the connection of the area west of Jenin and Nablus, and north of Ramallah, to the Palestinian communities within Israel adjacent to the Green Line, such as Umm el-Fahm and Kafr Qasem.' (see Geoffrey Aronson, *Creating Facts: Israel, Palestinians and the West Bank*, 1987, p. 71.)

While the official Israeli position is that security demanded the introduction of settlements, those same settlements are today a central *reason* for Israel's security quandaries. They are the reason

why Israel remains without internationally recognised borders, even by its closest allies. While the existence of long range missiles means there is very little that settlements can do to guarantee Israel's security in the future, what settlements have been very successful in doing so far is fulfilling their planners' vision of preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Reaching an agreement in the early nineties with less than half the existing settlements was less complicated. Both sides are now striving once more to negotiate a two-state solution, but the settlements still expand. The question one has to ask is: why? Both Israelis and Palestinians know what they want and dream of the same brighter future. Our greatest untapped asset remains: common sense. It is time to give it its day.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF