



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

<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

(1) Israel's secret doctors

Robert Fulford, National Post, 7 September 2013

Usually, Israel is glad to announce when it contributes to emergency relief. The case of Syrian aid is different.

<http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2013/09/07/robert-fulford-israels-secret-doctors/>

(2) Assad is adopting Hamas "dead baby" strategy

Alan Dershowitz, Gatestone Institute, 6 September 2013

Force the United States, as Hamas forced Israel, to kill as many civilians as possible by deliberately moving legitimate military targets into civilian areas, or by moving civilians into military areas.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3966/assad-is-adopting-hamas-dead-baby-strategy>

(3) What are we Muslims doing to ourselves?

Raheel Raza, Gatestone Institute, 6 September 2013

My fellow Muslims are *allowing* our faith to be hijacked from us -- into the hands of theocrats and thugs.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3959/hizb-ut-tahrir-canada>

(4) Wall keeping Palestinian ill-treatment out of sight is really in Israeli minds

Giles Fraser, The Guardian, 6 September 2013

Israel refuses to police the refugee camps in its territory, condemning the displaced Palestinians to live in anarchy.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/sep/06/israel-wall-palestinian-ill-treatment>

(5) Pushed on the bandwagon: Obama's Syria plan forced AIPAC's hand

Steven Rosen, Foreign Policy, 4 September 2013

President Barack Obama's decision to make Congress decide on the course of the Syrian intervention has put the pro-Israel camp just where it did not want to be: openly advocating American military involvement in the volatile Middle East.

<http://www.meforum.org/3604/obama-syria-aipac>

(6) Peace on paper is not peace on the ground

Yan Barakat, Jerusalem Post, 2 September 2013

My visit to Israel showed me how much work needs to be done to make one world between us – not merely a bridge. When I crossed the border, I saw the opposite of what people told me. No policeman detained me for hours.

Instead, people were welcoming and one beautiful woman actually said, “Welcome to Israel Habibi.” It was wonderful.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Peace-on-paper-is-not-peace-on-the-ground-325088>

(1) Israel's secret doctors

To help refugees from the Syrian war, Israeli doctors and aid workers must do their work furtively. When they go into refugee camps in Jordan, they change clothes so that they can fade into the background. They must be smuggled in and out. They don't tell others where they're going and when they go home they usually don't say where they have been. Above all, they don't want anyone to know the names of their patients.

They move “under the radar,” in the words of a clandestine organization in this field. When they treat Syrians in Israeli hospitals, they make sure no visiting journalist learns details that will identify the patients to authorities back in Syria.

Usually, Israel is glad to announce when it contributes to emergency relief. The case of Syrian aid is different.

Syria does not recognize Israel and forbids its citizens to go there. Israeli doctors are not welcome in Jordan, where their work has been denounced as a violation of Jordanian sovereignty. And Israel is anxious not to be involved in the Syrian civil war. It does nothing, officially, that could make it look like the medical corps of the rebellion.

For Syrians the possibility that their own government will punish them adds to the horror of their situation. This summer, in Nahariya, Israel, near the Golan Heights, scores of patients have been covertly brought across the border from Syria to be treated by Israeli doctors.

For patients' friends or relatives, Israel becomes a last hope when no Syrian medical help is available. Masad Barhoum, clinical director at Western Galilee Medical Center, recently told an NBC reporter that many patients arrive unconscious. “When they wake up and find that they are in Israel they are anxious and afraid.”

A Syrian woman in the hospital said that she came to Israel because her daughter was hit by a sniper's bullet. "The hospital in my town was destroyed. They saved her here, but now I am afraid to go back. We will be marked."

An Israeli organization, iL4Syrians, operates anonymously in Syria and other desperate countries. Providing food and medical supplies for those who need them, it relies on secrecy to protect both its local contacts and its own practitioners. Its web site identifies no directors or staff but carries a defiant slogan: "Nobody asks permission to kill. We do not ask permission to save lives."

They explain that "We focus on countries that lack diplomatic relations with Israel, transcending differences." They argue that a respect for the sanctity of human life expresses Jewish tradition and culture. As they see it, this applies to Israel's toughest and cruelest enemies as well as anyone else.

Since all of these efforts are unofficial and unrecorded, no one can say how many Israelis are involved. I was alerted to this phenomenon by one of the regular letters of Tom Gross, an astute British-born commentator on the Middle East.

Gross has a 15-minute film showing a couple of days spent by an aid group visiting refugees. The refugees don't expect them to arrive and are surprised when they learn that their benefactors are Israelis. That makes some of them nervous but in the film others say in Arabic "May God bless Israel."

The team takes along a professional clown to perform for the children while food is being handed out; in one camp, however, the adults briefly riot over limited supplies. A journalist asks one of the aid workers, "Do people call you crazy?" She answers: "Not many people know."

Information about this work has to be pieced together from fragments of journalism, like a paragraph in an Israeli/Arabic paper: "The Arab countries offer condolences but the best role is provided by the Israelis because they are crossing the border to provide assistance to the refugees, risking their lives without a word of thank you."

These are dark days for much of the world, dreadfully dark for Syrians. Few can even imagine a solution that does not involve even more tragedy for them. W.H. Auden, in his poem "September 1, 1939" described an even darker time and offered the only advice that made sense to him: "Show an affirming flame."

As Jews celebrate the start of the new year, it's worth noting that these Israeli humanitarians have found a way to make their flame burn with a brave affirmation.

(2) Assad is adopting Hamas "dead baby" strategy

As Congress debates whether to authorize President Obama to engage in a punitive-deterrent military attack on Syria, the Assad regime is adopting what I have called the "dead baby" strategy, perfected by Hamas in its battles with Israel. This approach is as simple as it is brutal: Force the United States, as Hamas forced Israel, to kill as many civilians as possible by deliberately moving legitimate military targets into civilian areas, or by moving civilians into military areas. Democracies, such as the United States and Israel, which care about avoiding civilian casualties, are then put to the tragic choice of either foregoing a legitimate attack against military targets, or by attacking them,

being blamed for the civilian casualties, that were wilfully caused by their enemies' illegal use of human shields.

This strategy can only work in an age of instant and pervasive television coverage of military actions. Syria and Hamas know that every baby killed by a US or Israeli rocket will be paraded in front of television cameras being held by grieving mothers and fathers. It is these vivid and horrifying pictures that are the goal of the dead baby strategy. Syria and Hamas understand that these emotional pictures will mask the reality that these dead babies are not "collateral damage" caused by legitimate military actions, but rather deliberate targets selected by Syria and Hamas in a cynical attempt to shift blame from them onto the democracies that try their best to avoid civilian casualties, even in the face of deliberate efforts by Hamas and Syria to multiply them.

Lest there be any doubt about Syria's intentions, listen to retired American General David A. Deptula:

"The additional time gives Assad the potential advantage of complicating United States targeting by surreptitiously moving people or even chemical munitions into them, aiming to create casualties or chemical release as a direct result of US attacks."

United States General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, confirmed that assessment when he said that American spy agencies are "keeping up with that movement", which includes prisoners who may be used as "human shields."

If there is any doubt that Hamas has used this despicable strategy, listen to Fathi Hammad, a Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council:

"For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry, at which women excel, and so do all the people living on this land. The elderly excel at this, and so do the mujahideen and the children. This is why they have formed human shields of the women, the children, the elderly, and the mujahideen, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine. It is as if they were saying to the Zionist enemy: 'We desire death like you desire life.'"

When Hamas employed this dead baby strategy against Israel, it was a resounding success. Despite the fact that Hamas deliberately fired rockets from schoolyards, hospitals and densely populated civilian areas, the international community blamed Israel for trying to prevent rockets from attacking its civilians by targeting the rockets and occasionally killing civilians. It was Israel, rather than Hamas, that was accused of "war crimes," even though it is clearly a war crime to use civilians as human shields. Israel had little choice but to protect its own citizens against rocket attacks, but the world focused not on the moral correctness of Israel's decisions, but rather on the gruesome pictures of dead Palestinians babies, even though some of them were actually caused by errant Palestinian rockets.

President Assad of Syria has apparently learned this lesson well and is now prepared to act on it. This will once again put a democracy, this time the US, to a difficult choice: forego legitimate military targets, thereby increasing the likelihood that Syria will continue to gas its own citizens; or attack these military targets, inevitably causing some civilian casualties and playing into the hands of Syria's dead baby strategy.

If the media and the international community continue to enable these tyrannical regimes by falling for this cynical dead baby strategy, it will continue and expand in scope. It's a win-win strategy for tyrants who don't care about their own civilians, and a lose-lose strategy for democracies that do.

Another reason why this strategy succeeds is that the world seems to care far less about civilian deaths caused by Arab and Muslim nations against their own citizens than deaths caused by Western democracies. If American bombs were to kill 100 Syrian civilians, there would be more outcry than when 100,000 Syrians, including tens of thousands of civilians, have been killed by Syrian forces on both sides of this civil war. This is pure and simple racism, holding Western democracies to a higher standard than Muslim tyrannies and theocracies. It's an old story, but it will once again rear its bigoted head when and if American forces kill Syrian civilians who were deliberately placed in harm's way as human shields by the Syrian regime.

To stop this once and for all, the international community and the media must place the blame for these dead babies where it belongs: on the shoulders of tyrants who deliberately use their own civilians as human shields.

(3) What are we Muslims doing to ourselves?

An email had come my way saying that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir was planning a meeting at a community centre in Mississauga, Ontario.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir [*Party of Liberation*] is a radical, international pan-Islamic political organization. It is commonly associated with the goal of all Muslim countries: unifying as an Islamic state or caliphate, ruled by Islamic law, and with a head of state (*caliph*) elected by Muslims. Hizb-ut-Tahrir [HT], established in 1953 in East Jerusalem, has been banned in Russia, several Central Asian countries and many Middle Eastern Countries. It has also been banned in Germany on account of its desire to use force for political ends, as well as its anti-Semitism. It is even banned in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, already cauldrons of extremism.

Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects democracy as being un-Islamic and a Western system. But its members seem to have no qualms about using Western freedoms to promote their expansionist agenda and aggressive goals. Article 56 of their draft constitution for the proposed state describes conscription as a compulsory individual duty, for all citizens: "Every male Muslim, fifteen years and over, is obliged to undergo military training in readiness for jihad."

As the leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir America, Dr. Mohammed Malkawi, remarked at a conference in Jordan in June 2013: "Let Britain, America, and the entire West go to hell, because the Caliphate is coming, Allah willing."

It was incomprehensible that they were hosting a meeting in Canada. Media inquiries received wishy-washy answers, as in, "We can't really do anything unless there is proof of violence." Further, as the HT meeting was scheduled to take place on a weekend, it was apparently of no particular interest to the media.

Were they really planning to establish a Caliphate even in the West? As a woman alone would arouse suspicion, my husband accompanied me. I pulled out the burqa I had imported from Afghanistan earlier in the year for a play. It would perhaps be the first and last time I adjusted a burqa around my body and even part of my face, with just my eyes showing – and dark glasses, and my husband in traditional Pakistani garb.

The heavily guarded community centre in which the meeting was held was gender-segregated -- men and women separate. Most of the attendees were young converts, who had brought their

children. When my husband sat with crossed legs, he was told that is not the Islamic way, so he immediately uncrossed them, in order not to attract attention.

Organizations such as HT are careful how they operate; their speakers are known for saying one thing in English and another in their own language. That way they can instil hard-core ideas and an ideology without being accused of using hate speech. At this meeting the message was clear: It is incumbent on every Muslim living in a non-Muslim land to impose sharia law; to work towards an Islamic state, and to convert people as is their mandate. According to the HT website, "The meaning of Jihad being a duty of sufficiency is that we initiate the fighting of the enemy even if he did not attack us. If the Muslims failed to initiate the fighting at any given time, they would all be sinful."

This by the way is totally against the teaching of the Quran, which advises Muslims to follow the laws of the lands in which they live. One young man in the audience asked who the Caliph would be, and was told it would be from among them.

I left the meeting trembling, partly with anger and partly with fear: anger because I saw a straightforward attempt to hijack our freedoms and, by turning them against us, to impose sharia; fear because my fellow Muslims are *allowing* our faith be hijacked from us -- into the hands of theocrats and thugs.

(4) Wall keeping Palestinian ill-treatment out of sight is really in Israeli minds

Most Jerusalemites couldn't find Shu'fat refugee camp on the map or give you any sort of directions. Yet it's less than three miles from the Western Wall, fully within the municipality of Jerusalem itself. And despite many of Shu'fat's Arab residents paying their Arnona (property) tax to the Jerusalem municipality – if they didn't, they would forfeit their precious blue ID card, allowing them to find jobs in prosperous west Jerusalem and elsewhere – they get almost no services. This is land that Israel claims for itself, so the Palestinian police cannot operate here. But the Israeli police refuse to enter the camp, so it's an anarchy zone. Local drug dealers sit in the sun at the entrance, under the gaze of Israeli soldiers who do nothing. The UN runs the schools, collects the rubbish and fights a losing battle to sort out sanitation. The Israelis refuse. It is a place without government, without government services and without much hope. And nobody seems to give a damn.

We visit the local secondary school of 2,000 pupils. There is flurry of temporary excitement as a rumour spreads that the water may be running today. It's a false alarm. There has been no running water in the school for nine months. When we want to visit the loo, the UN man whispers advice: "Pee but don't poo." Poo turns out to be a continuous theme of the visit. The camp is surrounded on three sides by the separation barrier, in the valley of a hill on which the camp is set. The hole in the wall for sewage to escape has recently been blocked, creating what the locals call a "shit lake" up against the barrier and causing those the other side of the wall, in the leafy Jewish settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev, to complain about the smell. Indeed, the smell of shit is the only reason the settlers of Pisgat Ze'ev come into contact with the humanity of those the other side of the wall, fellow members of the same city, a city that is supposed to be one of the holiest places on earth. To say it again: these are people living perfectly properly and legally in an area Israel claims to be within Israel, yet they are still placed behind a concrete cage.

For the last few days, Jews have been celebrating their New Year, Rosh Hashanah. They gather together as families to eat apples dipped in honey and pomegranates. Theologically, this begins a period of penitential soul-searching ending with Yom Kippur. My adopted family

in Jerusalem are wonderful, fully engaged with the Palestinian issue and despairing of wider Israeli indifference. But the violin-maker from Tel Aviv is more representative of the Israeli left: "We just put our heads in the sand like ostriches," he explains. In other words: the situation is too difficult so they give up thinking about it.

Understandably, Israelis hate outsiders like me arriving in their country and talking about the conditions in which Palestinians live. But they are the ones who have to live with constant security worries. And the situation is genuinely complex – especially, perhaps, for Zionists like me. But the wall is not as great a security provider as many assume. It takes under a minute for group of young men to scale it at Shu'fat. Ladders go up one side, a car draws up on the other, also with ladders. In a flash a group of young men are over and speeding off in the car. Thousands do this every day. Only the young, the frail and the elderly are really trapped by the wall. No, what the wall really does is keep the conditions of a place like Shu'fat out of sight and out of mind to the wider Israeli public. It's more a wall of the mind than a wall of security.

(5) Pushed on the bandwagon: Obama's Syria plan forced AIPAC's hand

President Barack Obama's decision to make Congress decide on the course of the Syrian intervention has put the pro-Israel camp just where it did not want to be: openly advocating American military involvement in the volatile Middle East. It's a calculation based on the lesser of two evils, the greater being risking Washington's withdrawal from leadership on global security just as Iran crosses the nuclear threshold. No one has a greater stake in a strong United States -- and the credibility of America's deterrent capability -- than Israel and the Jewish people. Indeed, many of the arguments that motivate the president's opponents on Syria could also apply in the event that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities becomes necessary.

Yet this is a debate about the American national interest, and most American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) supporters do not want it to degenerate into a debate about Israel. Most agree with former Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovitch that, "It's bad for Israel [if] the average American gets it into his or her mind that boys are again sent to war for Israel."

Paralyzed by these fears, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and AIPAC supporters in Washington remained nearly silent for weeks, even after evidence of Bashar al-Assad's murderous chemical weapons attack on Syrian civilians outside Damascus. And they remained quiet even after Obama indicated that he was preparing a military strike. They did not want to be drawn into a political melee in a deeply divided Congress, risking strains in the bipartisan support for Israel that forms the bedrock of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

All that has now changed. Responding to a full-court press by the Obama administration -- a call to Netanyahu, a direct message to AIPAC, and messages via congressional leaders -- AIPAC has weighed in fully in support of the president's call for intervention.

This is a major change in precedent. Ten years ago, AIPAC struggled to stay out of the Iraq War vote when that issue was before Congress, and did not openly endorse that authorization. Neither the Israeli government nor AIPAC supporters in the United States considered Saddam Hussein nearly the threat that Iran was. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon then warned President George W. Bush privately that he thought an attack on Iraq would be a mistake. After the Iraq vote, to prove its innocence, AIPAC organized a letter from 16 Jewish members of Congress stating that "AIPAC as an organization never took a

position on the war and none of us were ever lobbied by the organization on the war in Iraq." It did not work. Israel's detractors never cease asserting that the Iraq War was fought on Israel's behalf, and that belief has eroded support for Israel on the left wing of the Democratic Party.

But now, President Obama is making everyone stand up and be counted, and he is putting maximum pressure on all prospective allies to come out from behind the curtain and speak up. As a White House official told the *New York Times*, AIPAC is "the 800-pound gorilla in the room" because it has close relations with and access to a vast array of members on both sides of the aisle and on all sides of the debate. Simply put, the president has staked a lot of political capital on the gambit to sway Congress on his Syria plan -- and he needs AIPAC's support.

The administration is certainly aware that many of the wavering members in the House and Senate could be influenced if Israel's outgoing but powerful ambassador, Michael Oren, and the pro-Israel lobby joined the fray. Public statements of support are helpful, but the main thing is the mobilization of AIPAC's vast network of trusted "key contacts" to speak privately with members they know well.

AIPAC's leaders, like other Americans, don't see much to support on any side of the civil war in Syria, and in their hearts they would probably like to see both sides lose. But an American military strike that destroys Syria's aircraft and helicopters, degrades its air defences, and disables its runways, would be a benefit to Israel and the region -- no matter who emerges victorious there.

And if, conversely, the red lines that have been declared by President Obama were to be wiped out by an isolationist Congress (much as British Prime Minister David Cameron was repudiated by Parliament), it could begin a wider U.S. retreat in the Middle East. It would certainly undermine the campaign to prevent Iran from completing its nuclear weapons program. Already, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah are boasting about a "historic American retreat," and extremist elements from al Qaeda to North Korea must be rubbing their hands in glee. Without a strong United States, the world of our children will descend into a very dark void, because after America there is no one else waiting in line to assume leadership except these forces of evil and chaos.

If AIPAC sits on its hands, Obama might well lose this historic vote on Capitol Hill. If so, the Rand Paul/isolationist right and the antiwar left may celebrate, and conservative critics can blame it on Obama's feckless leadership. But it will be a disaster for the Middle East and the world, and it may be impossible to contain the damage.

Some can close their eyes to these realities, but Israel and its friends in Washington don't have that luxury. Americans and Brits are far away, but Israel's permanent reality is that it lives in that very bad neighbourhood, faced with an existential crisis and a Syrian civil war in danger of spiralling out of control. That is why, while Americans are divided on the issue, an overwhelming majority of Israelis are hoping President Obama will prevail. And why, in the end, the pro-Israel camp knows it needs to support Obama.

(6) Peace on paper is not peace on the ground

Despite a 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan signed by the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein, this agreement has yet to be put in effect in the hearts of the people of the

neighboring countries.

As a Jordanian, I was taught in school and at university that Israel is our first and last enemy. Why is this? People in Jordan (and almost all Arabs in the Middle East) think that Israel seeks to destroy them. It is common to hear conspiracy theories asserting that the decisions by governments of the United States, Russia and Europe that have adversely affected Arab countries can all be traced back to the Jews. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that if we stop Israel, or expel them from the Middle East, our situation will be better.

In the mosque, a prayer from the Imam asks for God to make widows of Jewish wives and orphans of Jewish children. It is common to hear the Jewish people referred to as “sons of pigs” and “killers of the prophets.” In the street, to call someone “Jewish” is a heinous insult and may well end in violence. In the minds of most, nearly any problem in the Middle East can be traced back to Israel.

One absurdity is that Jordanian cabinet members accused and blamed of corruption were suggested for their positions by Israel. An Israeli can't even drive a car into Jordan without having to change the license plates. A sticker on products that say, “Made in Israel” will always be removed before sale. Any Jordanian looking for a visa to travel into Israel has to wait months, and approval is never guaranteed.

And there are 26 Jordanian prisoners that I don't know when Israel will release, as a gesture of goodwill so they can return to their families.

My question is: How can we make real peace between us? Peace on paper is not enough, it needs to come from our hearts. I don't want to lie again when I introduce Israelis to Arab friends and say that they are American or Dutch. My heart aches for those on both sides who have lost loved ones, but when will we forgive and move on so we do not lose more brothers, sisters, sons and daughters? My visit to Israel showed me how close Jordanians and Israelis actually are – just a couple of hours – but in our hearts, more than 1,000 years. I truly believe that many of my Arab friends have an open mind, but traveling on the bus from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, I posted on Facebook that I was pleasantly surprised for the free WiFi. Within minutes, there were nasty comments below and friends who I'd known for a decade or more blocked me on the site and deleted my mobile number. They called me to ask whether I was a spy and how much Israel paid me to say this.

My visit to Israel showed me how much work needs to be done to make one world between us – not merely a bridge.

When I crossed the border, I saw the opposite of what people told me. No policeman detained me for hours.

Instead, people were welcoming and one beautiful woman actually said, “Welcome to Israel Habibi.” It was wonderful.

I took a taxi into Jerusalem and when I told the driver I was from Jordan, he responded, “Welcome for King Hussein and his people!” I asked him, “Why not King Abdullah II?” He replied, “Why not?” On the way, he invited me to drink a Pepsi and have a chocolate. He told me, “This is a gift from Israel to Jordan.”

I said, “You are smiling and your welcome is a better gift.”

We talked with each other about peace between us. He told me that he did not think there was a

genuine peace if there are people who believe that war is the first and last solution.

I told him that I trust that there are a lot of people who believe in peace from both sides but keep silent because they are timid. We are afraid of the religious and traditional people who think that having a friend from Israel is unpatriotic.

When I arrived in Jerusalem it was Friday night, I had forgotten that it was Shabbat and was surprised over how empty the streets were and that all the stores were closed. I asked one of the few people I saw how I could go about buying a SIM card and they suggested I go to the Israeli Arab neighborhoods. There, I met Arabs who love their country, Israel. After I asked one of them his opinion about racism from Jewish Israelis, he told me, "If I am in an Arab country, I will not have what I have here. If I go to a hospital, I find all the services I need.

I have insurance because of my age. I do not experience discrimination."

The second day, I met Mickey. An Australian Israeli woman and mother with a sense of humor that never failed to lighten the darkest of conversations.

We discussed in depth the history and political issues of the Middle East and she expressed her hope to make peace with Arabs without violence. She said that this generation or a new generation might be able to find a peaceful way.

In a garden in Jerusalem, I met a religious Jewish man. He and his wife have nine children and he described each one as an expression of his faith and a gift from God. He said he loved having so many kids and he would always take care of them. I told him he was just like an Arab! I asked him about the peace agreement between Jordan and Israel and he said it was good but not enough. He said that when he went to Jordan, the police asked him, for his own protection, to change the license plates on his car and remove his hat. He asked them why he had to do this and they simply replied that he could not receive a visa otherwise. I opined that the 1994 Peace Agreement was just between the authorities but that the hearts of the people are still in 1967.

An Israeli peace activist invited me to his home to meet and speak with more than 20 people. He opened the door for me so that I could understand Israeli culture through Israeli eyes and not through religious eyes.

Everyone in attendance welcomed me warmly, saying they had wanted to meet someone from Jordan for a long time and thought that I was their angel. They explained that a majority of Israelis do not seek enmity with Arabs, nor are they racist, but complained about a minority of ultra-religious people who do.

At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem I met with a professor who said he had a wonderful life growing up in Iraq, but being Jewish in that changing society became very difficult.

I expressed my frustration in finding a way to stop this hostility and to accept people as humans.

While there are a large number of people in Israel who want peace, there are those that are still angry with Arabs. An older religious man, who was defiant when he spoke about the grandfathers from Jordan who had fought in Israel, said he will believe in peace when it comes from the heart, when Arabs stop talking and encouraging their children to fight Jews.

There are people who have lost brothers, sisters or children in fighting and still want to make peace

with Arabs. An Israeli named Jonathan said his brother was killed fighting Hamas in the Gaza Strip. "He pleaded not go to Gaza, to not kill anyone," Jonathan said. "But Hamas still fire rockets into Israel. My brother was both religious and peaceful."

Jonathan's father said he lost his own father in the Six Day War of 1967 and is still sad to think of how he was killed, there was no place his body wasn't wounded by bullets. Tears welled in his eyes when he said, "I still pray to God to continue to give me peace in my heart, to forgive, and give my children [the chance] to change this land for the better." Before I said goodbye, he encouraged me to be brave, to not quit, because this land needs peace more than water and food.

I believe the animosity towards Israel is over more than just land.

Arabs are generally happy to introduce friends from the US or England to other Arabs, despite being angry over the actions taken by these countries in the Middle East, but this would rarely happen with Jewish friends. Both sides have lost a great deal. Jewish people in the past could live side by side with Muslims in Iraq, Yemen or Libya, but after 1948, these Jews were blamed for the situation and life in these countries became more and more difficult.

Before 1948, Jewish and Arab negotiations took place between religious or military leaders, which meant that there was inevitably inflexibility on both sides and an inability to compromise.

But in the end, it was the general population that was made to suffer, including women and children.

What can we do in response to this situation? There are many issues that keep our law makers busy today; water resources, environmental issues, agriculture, unemployment, terrorism and border security. It would be better to concentrate our resources on health and science, for example, rather than weapons. We can attempt to heal this pain between us by exchange programs for university and high school students from both countries.

Allow them to visit, to study, to learn from the other. I would like to encourage my friends here in Jordan and cousins from my tribe to visit Israel and to meet real Israelis in everyday life, to break down the stereotypes they hold onto.

I will not be intimidated by organizations which seek to enforce a boycott on those who visit Israel. I plan to visit and meet my brothers and sisters in Israel again and to listen to them, to share with them, to learn from them and to fight with them against evil ideas. Religious and political groups are stuck in entrenched positions and are enslaved by vested interests. We can love each other without signatures on agreements. I have hope that our relations will be normalized in the future because I know many Jordanians, men and women, who greatly desire the relationship between the countries to be better. When we are able to visit each other, to listen with open minds and learn from our history rather than perpetually reliving it, only then can we give our sons and daughters a better future.

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