

OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 26: 18 October 2012

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local and international writings on the Middle East**

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The Wall Street Journal, 12 October 2012

Arab leaders have insisted for decades that Palestinian refugees who fled their homes following Israel's creation should be allowed to return to their former homes. Now Israeli officials are turning the tables, saying the hardships faced by several hundred thousand exiled Arab Jews, many forced from their homes, deserve as much attention as the plight of displaced Palestinians.

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When the Arab Jews fled

Lucette Lagnado, The Wall Street Journal, 12 October 2012

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443294904578048451218760728.html?mod=wsj_share_tweet

Fortunée Abadie is still haunted by the day in 1947 when mobs stormed the Jewish Quarter of the ancient Syrian city of Aleppo, shortly after the United Nations vote that laid the groundwork for the creation of Israel.

Aleppo, a city where Jews and Muslims had lived together for centuries, exploded with anti-Jewish violence. Mrs. Abadie, now 88, remembers watching attackers burn prayer books, prayer shawls and other holy objects from the synagogue across the street. She heard the screams of neighbors as their homes were invaded. "We thought we were going to be killed," she says. The family fled to nearby Lebanon. Mrs. Abadie left behind all she had: clothes, furniture, photographs and even a small bottle of French perfume that she still misses, *Soir de Paris*—Evening in Paris.

A group of Yemenite Jews, newly arrived to Lod, Israel, in 1948 after being airlifted en masse.

The Abadie family's story is moving from the recesses of history to a newly prominent place in the debate over the future of the Middle East. Arab leaders have insisted for decades that Palestinian refugees who fled their homes following Israel's creation should be allowed to return to their former homes.

Now Israeli officials are turning the tables, saying the hardships faced by several hundred thousand exiled Arab Jews, many forced from their homes, deserve as much

attention as the plight of displaced Palestinians. "We are 64 years late," says Danny Ayalon, Israel's deputy foreign minister. "The refugee problem does not lie only on one side." Mr. Ayalon, whose father is an Algerian Jew, led a U.N. conference last month sponsored by Israel and dubbed "Justice for Jews From Arab Countries."

Before the establishment of Israel in 1948, an estimated 850,000 Jews lived in the Arab world. In countries across the Middle East, there were flourishing Jewish communities with their own synagogues, schools and communal institutions.

Life changed dramatically by 1948 as Arab governments declared war on the newly created Jewish state—and on the Jews within their own borders. At the U.N., an Egyptian delegate warned that the plan to partition Palestine into two states, one for Jews and one for Palestinians, "might endanger a million Jews living in the Muslim countries."

Arab Jewish Life Before - and After - 1948

Jews began fleeing—to Israel, of course, but also to France, England, Canada, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. Yemen was home to more than 55,000 Jews; in Aden, scores were killed in a vicious pogrom in 1947. An airlift dubbed "Operation Magic Carpet" relocated most Yemenite Jews to Israel. In Libya, once home to 38,000 Jews, the community was subjected to many brutal attacks over the years. In June 1967, there were anti-Jewish rampages; two Jewish families were murdered—one family clubbed to death—and schools and synagogues were destroyed, says Vivienne Roumani, director of the documentary "The Last Jews of Libya." "We were there for centuries, but there is no trace of Jewish life," she says.

Among the Jews forced out of their homes was my own Egyptian-Jewish family, departing on a rickety boat in the spring of 1963. Egypt had once been home to 80,000 Jews. My parents, both Cairenes whose stories I chronicled in two memoirs, were especially pained at leaving a country they loved, without being allowed to take money or assets.

Within 25 years, the Arab world lost nearly all its Jewish population. Some faced expulsion, while others suffered such economic and social hardships they had no choice but to go. Others left voluntarily because they longed to settle in Israel. Only about 4,300 Jews remain there today, mostly in Morocco and Tunisia, according to Justice for Jews From Arab Countries, a New York-based coalition of groups that also participated in the U.N. conference.

Many of the Palestinians who fled Israel wound up stranded in refugee camps. Multiple U.N. agencies were created to help them, and billions of dollars in aid flowed their way. The Arab Jews, by contrast, were quietly absorbed by their new homes. "The Arab Jews became phantoms" whose stories were "edited out" of Arab consciousness, says Fouad Ajami, a scholar of the Middle East at Stanford's Hoover Institution. "We are talking about the claims of the Palestinians," he says. "Fine, but there were 800,000 Arab Jews, and they have a story to tell."

Palestinians bristle at the effort to equate the displacement of Arab Jews with their own grievances. Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's

Executive Committee, says Mr. Ayalon "opened up a can of worms for political purposes" with the U.N. conference. She says that Israeli officials are trying to use a "forced and false analogy...to negate or question Palestinian refugee rights." The Palestinians, she says, "have nothing to do with the plight of the Jews or other minorities who left the Arab world." Still, Dr. Ashrawi recently proposed that Arab Jews should also have a "right of return" to the countries they left.

At the U.N. conference, Mr. Ayalon called Dr. Ashrawi's suggestion to have Jews return to Arab countries "totally ridiculous." Mr. Ayalon and the Israeli government are pushing ahead with efforts to raise the profile of Arab Jews. Israel has pledged to establish a national day in honor of Arab Jews and build a museum about their lost cultures. Mr. Ayalon has decided to make the Arab-Jewish refugees part of any negotiations, which has never been the case before. Looking ahead to a settlement, he would like to see both Palestinian and Jewish refugees compensated by an international fund. Meanwhile, the Israeli ambassador to the U.N., Ron Prosor, has called on the U.N. to research the refugees' history.

Mrs. Abadie attended the conference with her son Elie, now a physician and rabbi who leads Congregation Edmond J. Safra, a Manhattan synagogue attended by Lebanese and Syrian Jews. Until 1947, Syria had an estimated 30,000 Jews living in Aleppo and Damascus. But like Mrs. Abadie, many departed in the wake of the violence that left 75 dead and synagogues in ruin.

The Abadies were refugees twice. After leaving Aleppo, the family ended up in Beirut, Lebanon. For a time, life was good in the cosmopolitan city. But by 1970, the climate had turned hostile. Armed militants appeared in the streets. Rabbis, including Elie's father, Abraham, had their pictures posted in the city's mosques, identifying them as "Zionist-Jewish leaders," an act the family took as a death threat. The Abadies decided once again it was time to move.

Some Jewish refugees, like Sir Ronald Cohen, find hope in the new initiatives to call attention to Arab Jews. Mr. Cohen, a London-based businessman, was a student at a French Catholic school in Cairo in 1956, friendly with his Muslim and Christian classmates. His father owned an import-export firm that specialized in appliances, and "Ronnie," then 11, loved to visit him and play with the radios.

Then in October 1956, Israel, France and England waged war against Egypt over the Suez Canal. Mr. Cohen's parents pulled him out of school after another Jewish boy was injured. His mother, a British citizen, was placed under house arrest. His father's business was "sequestered"—effectively taken from him—and he wasn't welcome at his own office. In May 1957, the family left on a plane bound for Europe. Mr. Cohen still remembers his father crying on the plane. "There is nothing left here," he recalls his mother saying. "It is all over."

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jews continued to pour out of the Muslim countries. When Desiré Sakkal and his family left Egypt as stateless refugees in 1962, he says, "there were very few Jews left." Stranded in Paris in a hotel, Mr. Sakkal's little brother was diagnosed with cancer, and he still remembers how his parents went to the hospital every day. The brother died a year later in New York, at the age of 10. Mr. Sakkal went

on to found the Historical Society of Jews from Egypt, which seeks to recall the life left behind.

The Six-Day War of June 1967 brought some of the most violent anti-Jewish eruptions. As Arab countries faced defeat by Israel, they turned their rage on their own Jewish residents—what remained of them. In Egypt, Jewish men over 18 were rounded up and sent to prison. Some were kept for a few days. Others, like Philadelphia Rabbi Albert Gabbai, a Cairo native, remained imprisoned for three years. Rabbi Gabbai was only 18 when he was thrown in jail, along with three older brothers. He still remembers the cries of his fellow prisoners—Muslim Brotherhood members who were being tortured—echoing through the jail. He and his brothers feared that they were going to be killed. After three years of "despair," he says, they were driven to the airport and escorted to an Air France AF.FR +1.66% flight.

Mr. Cohen, who left Egypt in 1957, grew up to become a pioneer in European venture capital and private equity. In recent years, he has worked to develop the Palestinian private sector. He believes that the focus on Jewish-Arab refugees could spur the Arabs and Israelis toward peace. "There are refugees on both sides, so that evens the scales, and I think that it will be helpful to the process," he says. "It shows that both sides suffered the same fate."

Does Israel have no roots there in history?

Richard Elliott Friedman, Huffington Post, 13 October 2012

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-elliott-friedman/does-israel-have-no-roots-there-in-history_b_1941237.html

On Sept. 24, the president of Iran informed reporters that Israel has "no roots there in history" in the Middle East. Now a lot of good jokes come to mind at the expense of this clueless man, but, seriously folks, he has at least conveyed an important truth: he recognizes that Israel's historical presence in that world since antiquity matters -- matters enough to deny it. Now, the Bible pictures an Israelite-Jewish population and government there starting in the 12th century B.C.E. and continuing until the end of the Bible's history about 800 years later. But how do we know if this is true? As scholars, we can't just say, "The Bible tells us so." We need to see evidence that could be presented to any honest person, whether that person be religious or not, Jewish or Christian or from some other religion or no religion, or from Mars.

In the first place, the land is filled with Hebrew inscriptions, so I begin with that. These are not just an occasional inscription on a piece of pottery or carved in a wall. Nor should we even start with one or two of the most famous archaeological finds. Rather, there are thousands of inscriptions. They come from hundreds of excavated towns and cities. They are in the Hebrew language. They include people's names that bear forms of the name of their God: YHWH. This means names like:

- Hoshaiah, which means "YHWH Saved"
- Ahijah, which means "YHWH is My Brother"

- Shemariah, which means "YHWH Watched"

The inscriptions also refer to their kings. They include stamps and seals from official documents. They come from tombs where that land's people were buried. They name people who are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. They include wording that also appears in the Hebrew Bible. They reflect a widespread community whose dominant language was Hebrew, who didn't eat pork and who worshipped a God named YHWH.

I happened to be present at the time of the discovery of another important inscription in Jerusalem. Right below the Church of Scotland in Jerusalem, in a Jewish tomb from the seventh century B.C.E., was a silver cylinder with the words inscribed in it:

"May YHWH bless you and keep you. May YHWH make his face shine to you and give you peace."

It is the words of the Priestly Blessing in the Hebrew Bible (Numbers 6:24-26). That's just one inscription. The distinguished scholar Jeffrey Tigay of the University of Pennsylvania sums up: "The names of more than 1,200 pre-exilic Israelites are known from Hebrew inscriptions and foreign inscriptions referring to Israel." Of these, 557 have names with YHWH as their divine element, 77 have names with El.

As for those foreign inscriptions, texts from the neighboring lands refer to the people, to their kings, to their government, to their armies and to their cities. The basic fact: everybody knew that Israel was there: the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Arameans, the Moabites, the Persians. Pharaoh Merneptah (1213-1203 B.C.E.) refers to the people of Israel in a stone stele. Pharaoh Shoshenq I (c. 945-924 B.C.E.) describes his campaign in which he refers to cities in Israel (including Ayalon, Beth-Shan, Megiddo, Rehob and Taanach). Assyrian King King Shalmaneser III names King "Ahab the Israelite" among his opponents in his Kurkh monument and names and pictures King Jehu on his Black Obelisk. Seven other Assyrian emperors also refer to Israel and Judah and name kings who are also mentioned in the Bible. The Babylonian sources, too, refer to the Jews and their monarchy in the years after the Babylonians replaced the Assyrian empire. And the record continues when the Persians replace the Babylonians, as documented in the Cylinder of Cyrus, the Persian emperor. Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C.E., let the exiled Jews return to their land; it was followed by an influx of Jewish population. There was population growth from the reign of Darius I to Artaxerxes I. The country that the Babylonians had conquered was reestablished as a state of Judah (*yehud medintha*) within the Persian umbrella. You want irony? Persia, now called Iran, the country that re-established the Jews' country in biblical times, now has a president who says that Israel has no roots there.

Also from that period come the Elephantine papyri, a collection of documents that include letters from the Jewish community in Egypt in the fifth century B.C.E. to the Jewish community back in Jerusalem.

Closer to home, right across the Jordan River from Israel was Moab, in what is now Jordan. In the ninth century B.C.E., its King Mesha erected a stele referring to Israel and its King Omri. He also refers to the royal House of David. An inscription erected by an Aramean (what is today Syria) also refers to a king of the House of David. In all, these

ancient texts refer to 15 kings of Israel and Judah who are known from the Bible, and all are referred to in the right periods.

Material culture (in other words: stuff) fills out this picture. Thousands of people have now walked through the Siloam Tunnel under Jerusalem. It is a major feat of engineering. It is a passage nearly six football fields long underground. A tremendous project like this and others that we shall see reflect a major organized society with a government that could bring such an undertaking off. If it were done today, the governor would be there for photo opportunities, and the architect and builder would be honored. When it was done 2,700 years ago, it took a substantial number of workers and tremendous cost.

Likewise, when my students joined in the City of David Project archaeological excavations of Jerusalem under the archaeologist Yigal Shiloh, they uncovered the now visible "stepped stone structure." Whatever purpose it served -- defense, soil or water retention, a platform for some other major structure -- it was a huge project. It wasn't something that a couple of friends assembled. It required community organization, planning, design, a large number of construction workers and funding. The archaeologist John S. Holladay, Jr. thus speaks of the "archaeologically discernible characteristics of a state" from the 10th century B.C.E. on. These include a pattern of urban settlements in a hierarchy of size: cities, then towns, then villages, then hamlets. They have primary seats of government (i.e., capital cities): Jerusalem and Samaria. Then they have major cities as regional centers: Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer and Lachish. They have centralized bureaucracy. They have frontier defenses. They have standing armies. They have economics based on tribute, taxes and tolls. They have a writing system. Holladay lists all of these and more in showing how we know that there was a populous society with a central government from this early stage of the biblical period. Holladay published this in 1995. We can now add more: central planning of the architecture and layout of towns, a distinctive alphabet, standard weights and measures. And we can add that the Israelite sites lack pork bones. The archaeologist Elizabeth Bloch-Smith seconds the point, that the material culture is clearly Israelite starting from the Iron II period (950-600 B.C.E.) at the latest.

We can also see the changes in the Hebrew scripts on the inscriptions developing through time, and we can actually date texts based on this. (An eighth century letter *aleph* doesn't look the same as a seventh or sixth century *aleph*.) The study of these scripts and the inscriptions is called epigraphy. Many biblical scholars go through training in this field. The point is that this doesn't happen overnight. It takes centuries for these scripts to go through all these changes. So (1) we can date texts, and (2) we know that the Hebrew of these inscriptions was the language of the people of Israel and Judah, not just for a year or a decade or a century, but for many centuries.

In parallel, we can trace the development of the Hebrew language as found in the Bible and the other ancient texts. We didn't move from Shakespearean English to Valley Girl English overnight. That takes centuries. Likewise, the Hebrew of the Song of Miriam and the Song of Deborah, which are the two oldest texts in the Bible, is different from the Hebrew of the late book of Nehemiah. Hebrew existed as a language that went through all the natural stages of development that we find in any language that people continuously speak and write over very long periods of time.

And then there is the literature itself. What we now know of who wrote the Bible reflects,

conservatively, that there were 75 to 100 authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible, and quite possibly a lot more. The literary study of the Bible that has blossomed in the last 40 years has revealed the artistry in so many of these works. Such a huge quantity of prose, poetry and law did not pop up overnight. Or in a year. Or in a century. It had to take centuries and a thriving culture to compose. Great literature (like a bacillus) can only develop in a culture. It is not chance that Russia produced so many superior novels, or that the British isles produced so much superior poetry. For ancient Israel to have produced so many fine authors required a culture that welcomed and fostered such literature over centuries. And the linguistic evidence confirms this, and so does the epigraphic evidence, and so does the archaeological evidence.

The point of this is how vast the array of the evidence is. This is not a vague hypothesis. It is not formulated by overestimating or overinterpreting a single little find. It is not like an Indiana Jones movie (though we love them), in which the archaeologist goes looking for a single object. This is a civilization: between 400 and 500 cities excavated, hundreds of years, thousands of items in writing, millions of people. This evidence was not discovered by an individual or even by a small group. It was assembled by hundreds of archaeologists, with tens of thousands of workers, coming from many religions and many countries. Some archaeologists hoped to confirm the Bible. Some seemed to take pleasure in throwing the Bible into doubt. There have been frauds, and there have been mistakes, aplenty, as in any other field. But the mass of the evidence remains available to all. We can see and continually refine a picture of ancient Israel.

We can (and do) have a million arguments about almost every aspect of the Bible. But what we cannot deny is the existence of the world that produced it. That fact is not true just because the Bible says so. It is true because practically everything says so.

We don't all agree on matters relating to the present politics of Israel and its neighbors. That's OK. It's even healthy. But let no one repeat this nonsense about Israel not having its historical roots there. One cannot understand the Jews or Israel if one displaces the first 1,000 years of their history.

Will Jordan be next to fall?

Lee Smith, Tablet Magazine, 11 October 2012

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/113621/will-jordan-be-next-to-fall>

On Wednesday, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced that the United States was sending a small contingent of troops to Jordan in the event that the conflict in Syria spreads across the country's border as it has with Turkey. Even if it doesn't, the Obama Administration is right to be extremely concerned with how events in Syria might affect its longstanding and reliable Middle East ally in Amman.

Should King Abdullah II become the next Arab ruler to fall as part of the upheavals that have swept through the region now for almost two years, it will mark another major setback for the United States in the region. For Israel it's significantly worse news. Jerusalem would lose its remaining strategic partner in the region—having already lost

Turkey and Egypt—and face a possible nightmare on its longest border, exposing the country's center to attacks from the east that might include Sunni Jihadists or Iranian-trained Iraqi agents.

The beleaguered Bashar al-Assad, longtime rival of Syria, has been doing his share to see that this scenario comes to pass: Leaked Syrian government documents show that Assad, suspicious that Amman was siding with Syria's armed opposition, has been preemptively trying to destabilize Jordan's security. But Abdullah's real nightmare scenario isn't Assad meddling in Jordanian politics—rather, it might just be Assad's fall at the hands of Islamist rebels. A Muslim Brotherhood victory in Syria could put wind in the sails of Jordan's own Brotherhood party, the Islamic Action Front, and perhaps inspire them to add another Arab state, along with Tunisia and Egypt, to their collection.

Protests last week in Amman organized by the Islamic Action Front suggest that popular opinion is turning ever more forcefully against Abdullah. “The turnout was much larger than the 8,000 that the government claims attended,” said Hassan Barari, a political analyst at Jordan University. “It wasn't the 100,000 that the Islamists claimed, but something perhaps like 35,000-40,000”—a very large crowd given that Jordan's population is only a little more than 6 million.

Abdullah's response to the protests was to call for elections before the new year and to name a new prime minister. Given that he is tasked with the responsibility of forming the country's fifth government in two years, this is unlikely to calm Abdullah's critics.

“We're in a crisis mode. The state is trying to say that the reform package is good, and the opposition is not convinced,” Barari told me. “The elections will lead to an outcome that can't fight corruption, a parliament with spineless people, who can't stand up to the government or the security apparatus. The king missed an opportunity to implement reforms and instead sided with the corrupt ruling elite. My concern is that with this dissatisfaction, some of the opposition may turn violent.”

Corruption, rising energy costs, and large refugee populations that have entered Jordan in the wake of the Iraq war and now the Syrian conflict are among the chief problems besetting the monarchy. The White House has pledged an aid package totaling \$474 million in 2012, including \$356.9 million signed over earlier this month. But U.S. aid isn't going to solve Jordan's fundamental problems.

First, Jordan has virtually no natural resources. For its energy needs, it depends on its neighbors, like Egypt, from where the flow of natural gas has been regularly disrupted ever since Hosni Mubarak's exit in February 2011. “The Jordanians could get the natural gas from Israel,” said Robert Satloff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “The Israelis would give it to them at cut-rate discounts and there's a short pipeline. But the political environment right now doesn't lend itself to making deals with Israel.”

An even more serious issue is that the country's population is divided against itself. The split here is based not on sectarian fault lines, as in Syria and Iraq, but rather on national, geographical, and historical ones. On the one hand are the Bedouins, also

known as the East Bankers, who fill the ranks of the military and the security apparatus and other public sector jobs. On the other are the Palestinians who constitute a majority—anywhere from 60 to more than 80 percent—of the population.

It is this divide between the Palestinians and Bedouins that has always made Jordan seem an inherently tenuous project to skeptics. And yet the Hashemites have ruled here since 1921 when the British handed the mandate for the emirate of Transjordan over to Abdullah I, the current king's great-grandfather. The Hashemite monarchy survived not only Abdullah I's death at the hands of a Palestinian assassin but also the bloody 1970 war, Black September, when the well-trained Bedouin forces led by Abdullah II's father Hussein drove Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian factions out of Jordan.

The monarchy has always depended on the Bedouins for support and its ultimate security. But it appears they may have turned against their patron, King Abdullah II. East Bankers have joined the Islamists and independent intellectuals like Barari, forming numerous *hiraks*, or street movements, replacing traditional patronage networks that have proved incapable of sustaining East Bank communities.

One former senior Israeli official explained that “there have been problems with the Bedouins going back at least a decade”—or roughly since Abdullah's government moved toward privatization and so-called free zones throughout the country designed to attract foreign investment. “The Palestinians were doing well in the private sector, and there was growing resentment among the East Bankers. The Gulf states recognized the problem and tried to get more money into the Bedouin sector and were disappointed it didn't get into their hands. Who knows how the money was spent?”

The paradox is that it is this corruption—and the subsequent popular protest movement—that appears to finally be constructing a national Jordanian identity, even as it is against the king. Still, the opposition is eventually going to find itself at cross purposes, which the regime could use to its advantage. “Everywhere else in the Middle East what people mean by reform is quite clear,” says Satloff. “But in Jordan, reform means two contradictory things. To the Palestinians, it means opening up the economy, with more room for private sector to grow. If you are an East Banker, reform means the opposite. It means more government jobs.”

Jordan's regional problems are just as daunting as its domestic concerns. “It feels like it's caught between an Islamist Egypt and a potentially jihadist Syria,” Satloff said. This is reminiscent of Jordan's situation in the 1950s and '60s when it was caught between Arab nationalist powers in Egypt and Syria constantly trying to destabilize the kingdom, typically by attacking it for its relationship with the United States and its more clandestine ties to Israel.

The Jordan-Israel relationship was further strengthened with the 1994 peace treaty, institutionalizing a significant security relationship that has benefited both countries. For Jerusalem, explained the former Israeli official, “Jordan is the most critical strategic question. Jordan's army is smaller than Egypt's but it faces a longer border.” And that border, if open or manned by an unfriendly Arab power, would constitute the majority of the Middle East's access route to Israel.

Over the last two years, the Arab uprisings have posed a number of vital questions for Washington and its allies. Where should the United States step in to intervene, and on whose side? What governments and movements should we engage, and which should we isolate or punish? The reality is that there's little the United States can do at this point to protect one of its most steadfast allies in the region. Perhaps Abdullah will prove creative enough to exploit the weaknesses of the growing protest movement, or broker a new national identity that finally binds the East Bankers and Palestinians together and leaves him on the throne. If not, American policymakers will again be scrambling for answers—and Israeli leaders may find yet another border in trouble.

Anti-semitism without Jews in Malaysia

Robert Fulford, National Post, 6 October 2012

<http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2012/10/06/robert-fulford-anti-semitism-without-jews-in-malaysia/>

In Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, politicians and civil servants devote a surprising amount of time to thinking about Israel, 7,612 km away. Sometimes they appear to be obsessed by it. Malaysia has never had a dispute with Israel, but the government encourages the citizens to hate Israel and also to hate Jews whether they are Israelis or not.

Few Malaysians have laid eyes on a Jew; the tiny Jewish community emigrated decades ago. Nevertheless, Malaysia has become an example of a phenomenon called “Anti-Semitism without Jews.” Last March, for instance, the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Department sent out an official sermon to be read in all mosques, stating that “Muslims must understand Jews are the main enemy to Muslims as proven by their egotistical behaviour and murders performed by them.” About 60% of Malaysians are Muslim.

In Kuala Lumpur, it's routine to blame the Jews for everything from economic failures to the bad press Malaysia gets in foreign (“Jewish-owned”) newspapers.

The leaders of the country assume that Jews and Israelis deserve to be humiliated as often as possible. In 1984, the New York Philharmonic cancelled a visit because the Malaysian information minister demanded that a composition by Ernest Bloch, an American Jewish composer who died in 1959, be eliminated from their program. In 1992, an Israeli football player with the Liverpool team was refused permission to play in Malaysia; the team cancelled the visit. The government banned *Schindler's List*, calling it anti-German and pro-Jewish propaganda. The same government later decided it could be shown if seven scenes were cut. Steven Spielberg refused, so the government removed all his films from Malaysia's screens.

In 2003, the prime minister's political party gave delegates to the United Malays National Organization copies of Henry Ford's anti-Semitic book from the 1920s, *The International Jew*, a favourite of Hitler, translated into Bahasa Malay.

For half a century, Israel has tried to establish diplomatic relations, but Kuala Lumpur has always replied that Muslim opinion makes that politically impossible. Instead, Malaysia has joined the Arab campaign to defame Israel. Trade with Israel is officially banned — but goes on nevertheless, through covert arrangements with third countries. (Sales of products from Israel's Intel computer chip factory to Malaysia amount to many millions of dollars a year. Malaysian policy softens temporarily when confronted with certain products at the right price.)

It's only when we grasp the unremitting and mindless hostility of countries such as Malaysia that we begin to understand the pain and difficulty of Israel's place in the world. This is the context in which we should think about the Harper government's pro-Israel policy. Israel faces automatic enmity from all the Arab nations, most other Muslim-dominated states and the many organizations in democratic countries that dedicate themselves to showering abuse on Israel (and no one else) in the name of human rights.

Except during civil wars, no other state, not even the worst dictatorship, not even Iran or China, is so badly and so often maligned. Now only Canada and the United States (in certain moods) give Israel the benefit of the doubt.

Yet many Canadians apparently believe that there is something unfair in this situation, not in the invective heaped on Israel but in Canada's habit of friendship with the only democracy in the Middle East. It's argued that this policy has done harm to Canada. Jeffrey Simpson of *The Globe and Mail* says that because of our attitude to Israel, "Canada's reputation in the Arab world is mud." Tony Burman, of the *Toronto Star*, former head of Al Jazeera English, and now a journalism teacher at Ryerson University, says that our government's "passionate pro-Israeli stance" has damaged Canada's reputation throughout the Middle East "after decades of being one of the world's respected 'honest brokers' on Mideast issues."

That phrase "honest broker" seems to me one of the most dubious of Canadian clichés. I have not once in several decades seen it applied to us by a citizen of some other country. In my experience, it's one of those compliments many Canadians, and only Canadians, pay to Canada. Burman expresses nostalgia for an attribute that hasn't existed, so far as I'm aware, since the 1950s.

Simpson says the Harper government's policy is based on a simple-minded black-and-white view, on the evangelical Christian streak among Conservatives, on the idea that Israel is a democracy and Arab countries are not and on a hope of prying Canadian Jews away from the Liberals.

Or, just possibly, there might be another reason: Because it's the right thing to do.

Cuba 50 years on, and the lessons for Iran

Julian Border, The Guardian, 14 October 2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2012/oct/14/cuba-nuclear-iran-lessons?INTCMP=SRCH>

A half-century ago this month, on October 22 1962, President John F Kennedy went on television to reveal the presence of Soviet missiles on Cuba and his decision to impose a blockade on the island to stop more Soviet deliveries getting through.

The more we find out about this perilous face-off, the closer it appears we were to a nuclear catastrophe. New research by Robert Norris and Hans Kristensen for the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, found that there were 158 Soviet nuclear warheads of five types already in Cuba by the time the military blockade was imposed on October 24. The crisis, they conclude, was "even more serious and dangerous than previously thought".

The Bulletin has published another article to mark the fiftieth anniversary, lauding the largely unsung role of the UN secretary general at the time, U Thant, in finding a compromise between the US and Soviet Union.

Thant's role was better recognised at the time, but has since been buried in American histories of the stand-off. Authors Walter Dorn and Robert Pauk write:

Certainly Kennedy's resolve played a role in this conflict, but his appreciation of the need to give his opponent an honourable way out was crucial. He wisely used an internationally prominent and skilled mediator to do so. Thant was the consummate diplomat, humble and self-effacing. Less than a year in office, he had already gained Khrushchev's trust on a visit to the Soviet Union that included a friendly swim with the Soviet leader at his Crimean dacha. Kennedy also trusted Thant and later praised his efforts to end the Cuban Missile Crisis. But Thant did not seek recognition; rather he practised quiet diplomacy and wanted the parties to take the credit.

What would U Thant do now? Graham Allison, author of *Essence of Decision*, calls the Iran situation *"the Cuban missile crisis in slow-motion"*.

This same process is looming on the current trajectory, inexorably, toward a confrontation at which an American president is going to have to choose between attacking Iran to prevent it becoming a nuclear weapons state or acquiescing and then confronting a nuclear weapons state.

The best course, Allison argues, is not to get to that point of confrontation in the first place. Easier said, of course. It would be interesting to perform a comparison between Nikita Khrushchev and Ali Khamenei, as an adversary at nuclear chess. One obvious difference is that Iran's Supreme Leader doesn't actually have any real pieces, just stocks of black and white wood, so to speak, which could be turned into pieces.

What the Cuban and Iranian crises have in common is that, now as then, it is reasonable to assume that both sides would like to find a way out of the impasse, as the CIA veteran, Paul Pillar, recently argued in the *National Interest*. The US and Iran (and it is ultimately about these two nations coming to an agreement) have both signalled at various times that they would be open to a compromise which left Iran able to enrich uranium below 5% purity in return for stricter international controls. Israel, Saudi Arabia and possibly France would have problems with such an outcome, but they would presumably be ready to live with it with suitable US assurances and cajoling.

The problem is how to get from here to there. That is the goal of the next diplomatic push after the US elections. But there are questions over whether it will take off at all. Would a Mitt Romney victory lead to a long pause in real negotiations while the incoming administration worked out what its real (as opposed to its campaign) position is? And does the aged, ailing, chronically indecisive Khamenei, have what it takes to make such a far-ranging strategic decision?

The right answer to both questions is: Who knows? But even if Obama gets a second bite of the cherry after November 6, and it turns out that the Supreme Leader has indeed been waiting all this time to find out who will be in charge in the Oval Office next year before getting into serious negotiations, there is still a lot of diplomacy to be done.

The impact of sanctions, undeniable though it is, may not work in favour of a compromise, if the West puts off a deal from a position of strength because it believes it will get a better one if it waits another week or month, while Tehran puts off a deal on the grounds you should never agree a price at your weakest moment. It will take an awful lot of vision all round to land this crisis safely. And, just as in Cuba, a good deal of luck.

Is Israel leading the US into war?

Ali Gharib, The Daily Beast, 16 October 2012

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/15/is-israel-leading-the-u-s-into-war.html>

Is Israel leading the U.S. into war? A retired top former Israeli general seems to think that perception could, if the U.S. goes to war with Iran, do damage to the Israeli-American relationship. "What I am mainly concerned of is a scenario where the United States is dragged into a war with Iran and the perception in the United States is that Israel dragged it into this war," said Israeli Brig. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Brom at a Friday event at the Center For American Progress (where I used to work) in Washington.

It's hard not to see why Americans might have this perception: for months now, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu led a very public campaign to push the U.S. to shift its trigger for war on Iran to a nuclear weapon "capability." Capability is ill-defined, but this much seems clear: it is a lower threshold for war than Iranian weapons production, where the Obama administration has its red line.

US President Barack Obama speaks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House. (Jim Watson / AFP / Getty Images)

In an earlier comment, Brom seemed to suggest that such an American perception could be appropriate: "Israel has a limited capability in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program in the sense that it can only delay it," he said. "The most important measure for the success of an Israeli military strike is if it is succeeding in drawing the U.S. into the fight."

Brom, for his part, didn't seem to think the public debate about red lines—nor red lines at all—were very productive. "Basically, I oppose red lines," he said, remarking that red lines invite provocations at their margins and, furthermore, must be flexible as circumstances change.

Michael Singh, an analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), took a more hawkish position on red lines than the Israelis on stage. "You need to be clear with yourself about your red lines are," he said, emphasizing that talks between Israel and the U.S. on the matter should be private.

Of course, these talks are far from private. Netanyahu used his U.N. speech to seemingly admonish the Obama administration for not having adopted his own red lines. Likewise, the Romney campaign has solidified its position in line with that of the Israeli government—feeding the perception that by publicly flogging his ask, Netanyahu is interfering in U.S. elections. And American officials—notably top military officer Gen. Martin Dempsey—have publicly commented about Israeli-American relations with regard to Iran as well.

Perhaps the most stark contrast between Singh and the Israelis on stage came on a final deal with Iran. The other Israeli analyst, the Iranian-born Meir Javedanfar, said the sanctions were working and needed more time. Both Jafedanfar and Brom thought the pressure should be used to extract a deal from Iran. Though they differed on how exactly to get there, both agreed that a final deal that allowed Iran's leaders to "save face"—by having a limited amount of closely monitored nuclear enrichment, which Iran states is its right as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"In Israel, there is a word that is used, *bitachon*, that means 'security.' *Bitachon bitachon bitachon*," said Javedanfar. "In Iran, there is a word that is used, *haq*—this is 'our right.' *Haq haq haq*. So we have to reach a point where Iran has its *haq* and Israel has its *bitachon*."

Singh demurred: "I think it's bad policy to allow Iranian enrichment," he said. "Frankly, I don't see why we should trust Iran with any enrichment program, and I don't see why Iran needs an enrichment program either." This, of course, is demanding total capitulation from Iran with regard to what it regards as a right (which may be disputable, but Iran asserts nonetheless). That's a recipe for no deal, which, in turn, can only lead further down the road to confrontation.

What Iran needs is beside the point; what it wants is to bolster its image as a power in the region through defiance of the West. Advocates for hardline positions like Singh would do well to listen to their Israeli colleagues, who understand that Israel's image may be at stake too.

Prime Minister David Cameron
UJIA Annual Dinner, 15 October 2012

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/ujia/>

This is a written version of the speech given by David Cameron.

This is a check against delivery version of the Prime Minister's speech

"With me, you have a Prime Minister whose belief in Israel is unbreakable and whose commitment to Israel's security is non-negotiable.

I will always stand by the Jewish people. And it is humbling to be here tonight and to be called a friend.

Here in this room, we have many of the people who are determined to build the strongest possible relationship between Britain and Israel.

The business leaders who have taken our trade to well over \$8 billion a year and made Britain the second biggest export market for Israel in the world.

The scientists who are taking forward an ambitious programme of joint research as part of the UK-Israel Life Sciences Council, which includes no less than four Nobel Prize winners.

The leading academics who are helping to forge new partnerships between Manchester and the Weizmann Institute, Oxford and Ben Gurion, Cambridge and Tel Aviv.

The hi-tech specialists who are making a reality of the UK/Israel Tech Hub – the first of its kind in the world.

And, of course, our two ambassadors – Matthew Gould and Daniel Taub who are doing so much to help build this partnership between our countries.

UJIA

Mick, Doug – you have made an inspirational contribution and I am sure that everyone will want to join me in paying tribute to your leadership and hard work over these past few years.

I am a big admirer of what the UJIA does both here in Britain and in Israel. Let me explain why.

First, the Jewish community in Britain is a role model for successful integration because you understand that as well as being part of a community with a common faith you are also part of a wider community – that of our country.

You epitomise the philanthropic spirit that is so central to Jewish teaching and which sees so many Jewish people give generously – not just to Jewish charities but to all charitable causes.

And through your support for Jewish youth movements and educational programmes for young people at both Jewish and mainstream schools and through your Summer Tours to Israel for 16 year olds and gap year students you continue to show each new

generation that it is possible to be both a proud Jew steeped in the values of the Jewish people and a proud British citizen.

Yes, you can love this country, take pride in its history, celebrate its Olympics, even cry with its football fans every other year. There is no contradiction between being a proud Jew, a committed Zionist and a loyal British citizen.

In the past, governments allowed a flawed state multiculturalism that said we should encourage different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream.

I don't subscribe to that. And neither do you. I believe we have to end the passive tolerance of segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.

Let's be clear what that means. It means getting preachers of hate out of our country. It means proscribing organisations that incite terrorism. And it means zero tolerance for any form of anti-Semitism, especially on our campuses.

And to those in Britain's universities and trades unions who want to boycott Israel and consign it to an international ghetto, I say not only will this Government never allow you to shut down 60 years worth of vibrant exchange and partnership that does so much to make both our countries stronger but I also say this: we know what you are doing – trying to delegitimise the State of Israel - and we will not have it.

SECURING ISRAEL'S FUTURE

I'm a fan of what you do in Israel too. The focus you have given to the Galilee has ensured that UJIA's funding reaches those communities that most need it.

And the projects you've supported touch the lives, not just of those directly involved, but of all Israel. The medical school in Safad which teaches Jews and Arabs alike. Western Galilee College, where more than 30 per cent of the intake is Arab, and almost half of that Arab women. Or, of course, the high school in Shlomi. There in the shadow of the hills from which Hezbollah launched its missiles you brought an army of teachers and the hope of a new generation.

That is the vision, strength and courage on which our future depends. And that is what the UJIA is all about. Now, tonight I want to talk about three key steps to secure Israel's future.

Standing up to Iran.

Seizing the opportunities presented by the Arab Spring and the spread of democracy in the wider region. And making the hard choices needed to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians.

Let me take each in turn.

IRAN

First, Iran. Let's be clear about the facts. Iran is flouting six United Nations resolutions. The Regime's claim that its nuclear programme is intended purely for civilian purposes is not remotely credible.

And it has shown its violent agenda by exporting terror and violence to Iraq, to Syria, to Gaza, to Lebanon and to many peace-loving countries across the world.

Iran is not just a threat to Israel. It is a threat to the world. Now there are some who say nothing will work – and that we have to learn to live with a nuclear armed Iran.

I say we don't and we shouldn't.

But at the same time I also refuse to give in to those who say that the current policy is fatally flawed, and that we have no choice but military action. A negotiated settlement remains within Iran's grasp.

But until they change course, we have a strategy of ever tougher sanctions. Just today, Britain has secured a further round of new sanctions through the EU Foreign Affairs Council. And these relentless sanctions are having an impact no-one expected a year ago.

They have slowed the nuclear programme. Iranian oil exports have fallen by 45 per cent. That's 1 million fewer barrels a day and \$8 billion in revenues lost every quarter.

The Rial has plummeted – losing around half its value between May and September. Inflation is soaring – thought to be as much as 50 per cent. And the Iranian Regime has had to establish an economic austerity taskforce to manage the pressure they have brought on their own people.

Most significantly, there are signs that the Iranian people are beginning to question the Regime's strategy with even pro-regime groups protesting at the actions of the Government.

It's mind boggling that the leaders of a nation so rich in oil have succeeded in turning their country into a banana republic desperately trying to put rockets into space while their people suffer.

The Iranian regime is under unprecedented pressure and faces an acute dilemma. They are leading their people to global isolation and an economic collapse. And they know it.

They know too that there is a simple way to bring sanctions to an end. By giving the international community the confidence we need that they are not and will not develop a nuclear weapon.

I have said to Prime Minister Netanyahu that now is not the time for Israel to resort to military action. Beyond the unpredictable dangers inherent in any conflict, the other reason is this:

At the very moment when the Regime faces unprecedented pressure and the people are on the streets and when Iran's only real ally in Syria is losing his grip on power a foreign military strike is exactly the chance the Regime would look for to unite his people against a foreign enemy.

We shouldn't give them that chance. We need the courage to give these sanctions time to work. But let me also say this. In the long term, if Iran makes the wrong choice, nothing is off the table. A nuclear armed Iran is a threat to Israel. And a threat to the world. And this country will work unwaveringly to prevent that from happening

Open societies

Let me turn to the changing events in the wider region. I have no illusions about the dangers that political transition can bring in the Arab spring countries.

And I understand why instability can be a great cause for concern. I understand how dark things were for Israel when surrounded by enemies on every border. And I understand how Israelis feel when gas masks are handed out to families; and car parks are converted into bomb shelters.

But I passionately believe that what we are seeing through the Arab Spring need not be a new threat to Israel's security. Democracy and open societies are not the problem – they can be a big part of the solution.

Yes, there are those who believe that in a volatile region only an authoritarian strong man can maintain stability and security. But when brutal dictators suppress their people in the name of stability, the end result is a region is that more dangerous – not less.

More dangerous because these regimes abuse the Palestinian cause to smother their own people's hopes and aspirations, dealing with frustration at home by whipping up anger against their neighbours, Israel and the West. And more dangerous too, because people denied a job and a voice are given no alternative but a dead end choice between dictatorship or extremism.

Now, of course, many fear that elections can open the door to Islamist parties whose values are incompatible with truly open societies. But the answer is not to oppose elections. The answer is to respect the outcome of elections. And then judge governments by what they do.

For example, there are big questions facing President Mursi in Egypt. We want to know if he will live up to his commitments to protect the rule of law for all citizens, defend the rights of minorities and allow women to play a full in society. And I challenged him personally on these points when I met him in New York last month.

But when he re-launches Operation Eagle to try and do something about the lawlessness in the Sinai, we should welcome that. And when he goes to Tehran and speaks the truth to that regime about its despicable actions in Syria in support of Assad, we should welcome that too.

But if the Islamists attempt to undermine the stability of other countries or encourage terrorism instead of peace and conflict instead of partnership then we must and will oppose them. And that is why we will not waver from our insistence that Hamas gives up violence and that the rockets from Gaza must stop. Hamas must not be allowed to dictate the way forwards for Israelis and Palestinians.

Of course, the Arab Spring presents huge challenges. But if we can show the strength and courage to engage with new democratic governments, their chance to establish the building blocks of democracy, fair economies and open societies offers the greatest opportunity for stability and peace in a generation.

MEPP

That brings me to the Palestinian Territories and the peace process. We can't advocate democracy and open societies in one breath and then cite the need for stability as an excuse for why the Palestinians shouldn't renew their democracy too.

It's now seven years since Palestinians voted for a President and six since parliamentary elections. The Palestinian leadership needs to refresh its mandate and show it has the consent of its people, starting with municipal elections later this month. And it needs to resolve the situation in Gaza and restore to Palestinians a unified, leadership able to deliver peaceful resolution of the conflict with Israel.

So Palestinian reconciliation and Palestinian elections are key points on the path to peace – because without consent there can never be credible negotiation.

It will require great strength and courage to take the hard choices needed to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians.

And let me say this: I know it takes two to negotiate. So let me tell President Abbas something very clearly there is no path to statehood except through talks with Israel.

So if the Palestinian plan is simply posturing with the UN rather than negotiating with Israel, Britain will never support it.

And let me say this to the Palestinians too. Britain will never support anyone who sponsors a football tournament named after a suicide bomber who killed 20 Israelis in a restaurant. We will not tolerate incitement to terrorism.

But in the search for peace both sides have to make hard choices. And just as President Abbas has followed through his commitment to non-violence with real progress on the West Bank so Israel needs a real drive to improve life for ordinary Palestinians.

That means more support for economic development in the West Bank, relaxing restrictions on Gaza, ending the demolition of Palestinian homes, and yes, it means meeting Israel's obligations under the Roadmap and under international law to halt settlement building.

Britain's position will not change. Settlements beyond the green line are illegal.

I know how hard the concessions needed for peace can be. But the truth is, time is running out for a two state solution – and with it Israel's best chance to live in peace with its neighbours.

CONCLUSION

Brett, in your introduction you said that support for Israel was in the DNA of the political party I lead. It is. But I believe it is in the DNA of the country I lead too.

That is why Britain will always stand by Israel, protect Israel, and work with Israel on the path to peace.

I long for the day when I can come to a dinner like this and not have to talk about the threats to Israel. I long too for the day when making statements in support of Israel is as unnecessary as going to see President Obama and saying I support America's right to exist.

For now, Israel will continue to face acute threats and a hard road to peace. But with strength and courage we can, together, stand up to Iran. We can, together, seize the opportunities presented by the spread of democracy in the wider region. And we can together take the hard choices needed to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians.

So let me conclude by wishing you all a slightly belated shana tova and let us hope that it will be a sweet year for the British Jewish community and the Jewish people in the State of Israel. And one which brings us closer to the peace and security for Israel that its people so richly deserve."

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

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