

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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

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- (1) **Gail Walker** **So, Professor Hawking, is Israel worse than China, US or Russia?**
Belfast Telegraph, 15 May 2013

Steven Hawking is either a hypocrite or a fool. How else would one explain his decision to go with a boycott of Israel?

(Interesting piece given Ireland's consistently negative attitude towards Israel – and the author is the article isn't even Jewish.)

- (2) **Khaled Abut Toameh** **al-Qaradawi and the new religious conflict with Israel**
Gatestone Institute, 14 May 2013

al-Qaradawi is a hero in the eyes of many Palestinians and Muslims because he views Jews as the "enemies of Islam and treacherous aggressors." In a January 2009 sermon, al-Qaradawi prayed [according to a translation by MEMRI] that "Allah take this oppressive, Jewish Zionist band of people. Oh Allah, do not spare a single one of them. Oh Allah, count their numbers, and kill them, down to the very last one." His visit and statements serve as a reminder that the Israeli-Arab conflict is centred, more than ever, around religion

- (3) **Margaret Wente** **What Israel can teach Canada about education**
The Globe and Mail, 14 May 2013

The Hemda Centre for Science Education in Tel Aviv is one of the world's great schools for bright kids. It recruits fantastic teachers to give them advanced instruction in physics and chemistry. It is unabashedly merit-based. Its most advanced course, a program in computational science, is called "MOAH" – a Hebrew word for "brain."

- (4) **Jonathan Adelman & Asaf Romirowsky** **Asia is becoming Israel's new frontier – here's why**
Forbes, 14 May 2013

Israel has developed strong relations with the two Asian countries in the BRICs - China and India. Both of these countries, which had no diplomatic relations with Israel before 1992, now have major Israeli embassies in their capitals (Beijing and New Delhi) as well as consulates in their leading cities (Shanghai and Mumbai).

(5) Robert Fulford The 'rabid' rage of Israel's enemies
National Post, 11 May 2013

Stephen Harper is cool and careful. He speaks quietly of Israel, noting that Canada doesn't endorse all of Israel's policies. He finds it unfair that so much criticism is directed by others against "the one country of the global community whose very existence is threatened." He also draws a lesson from history: Those who choose the Jewish people "as a target of racial and religious bigotry will inevitably be a threat to all of us."

(6) Raymond Ibrahim The mass exodus of Christians from the Muslim World
Middle East Forum, 7 May 2013

A mass exodus of Christians is currently underway. Millions of Christians are being displaced from one end of the Islamic world to the other. We are reliving the true history of how the Islamic world - much of which prior to the Islamic conquests was almost entirely Christian - came into being.

(7) Jay Famiglietti Political currents of water management: challenges in Israel, Palestine and Jordan
National Geographic, 13 May 2013

The geopolitics of water management in the Middle East are primarily governed by the basic distribution of freshwater resources: there are vast differences between the naturally available water resources in the region. Layer to this the additional complexity of political stability, financial assets, and other socioeconomic factors, and the potential for improved trans-boundary water management in the Middle East becomes vastly complicated.

So, Professor Hawking, is Israel worse than China, US or Russia?
Gail Walker, Belfast Telegraph, 15 May 2013

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/gail-walker/so-professor-hawking-is-israel-worse-than-china-us-or-russia-29264084.html>

Stephen Hawking is either a hypocrite or a fool. How else can you explain his decision to boycott Israel?

Either it's because Jews – sorry Israelis – are uniquely beyond the pale of humanity or Hawking is morally, er, dyslexic.

After all, he seems happy to use Israeli technology – Intel – in his communications system so obviously "disinvestment" isn't to be taken that seriously.

But all that is small ethical bagels. Professor Hawking was more than happy to visit China in 2006 and sing the country's praises despite the quasi-genocide of Tibet, the crushing of its culture, exiling of its leadership, the systematic use of torture, the seizure of the land of the indigenous people and vast settlement by colonising Chinese.

Any of that sound vaguely familiar, Mr Hawking?

Will you be boycotting Russia over Chechnya?

But let's go for bigger fish, shall we? Professor Hawking is worried about Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Detention without trial, the assassination of leaders etc. So different to all those orange boiler-suited detainees in Guantanamo and Obama drawing up presidential death lists.

Did Hawking protest? No, he didn't – he accepted the Medal of Freedom from President Obama's hands. Will Hawking be telling fellow professors at Yale, Harvard and MIT where to go? If not, why not? China, Russia and the US – perhaps they're just too darn big to ostracise? Is Israel "just the right size"? In a world filled with misery, moral complexity, political folly, cruelty and injustice, why is it only the 'crimes' of a democratic Jewish state that call for boycott? After all, it is Professor Hawking making a distinction between Israel and China (not to mention Iran, visited 2007).

We have a right to know exactly how Israel is morally more repugnant than China. (Something only a fool, a hypocrite or an anti-Semite could believe.)

It's been more than a week since Hawking announced his support of the boycott of Israel. Despite many column inches pointing out his apparent inconsistencies, we've only been offered deafening silence.

al-Qaradawi and the new religious conflict with Israel
Khaled Abut Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 14 May 2013

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3714/qaradawi-israel>

As US Secretary of State John Kerry pursues efforts to resume peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, the world's leading Islamic scholar of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, arrived in the Gaza Strip to express support for Hamas.

The Egyptian-born al-Qaradawi, who has in the past justified suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, came to the Gaza Strip at the head of a delegation consisting of some 50 senior Islamic figures from 14 countries.

The high-profile visit is seen as a major victory for Hamas and its supporters and a severe blow for Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas and his "moderate" Fatah faction.

Al-Qaradawi, who heads the International Union of Muslim Scholars, came to the Gaza Strip to urge Palestinians to continue the struggle against Israel.

During his visit, al-Qaradawi also urged Palestinians not to give up one inch of land to non-Muslims. He also warned against making any concessions on the "right of return" of millions of Palestinians to their pre-1948 villages and towns inside Israel. "Palestine was never Jewish," the 86-year-old sheikh told Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. "Palestine has always been Arab and Islamic."

Although al-Qaradawi did not mention Abbas, his comments were seen as directed against the Palestinian Authority president's readiness to engage in peace talks with Israel.

When someone as senior and influential as al-Qaradawi tells Palestinians that it is forbidden to make concessions to Israel, he is sending a warning message to Abbas and other Arabs that *jihad* [holy war], and not negotiations, are the "only way to restore our rights."

Although the Palestinian Authority had called on its supporters in the Gaza Strip to boycott al-Qaradawi, thousands of Palestinians turned out to give him a hero's welcome.

His anti-Semitic remarks and support for suicide attacks have earned al-Qaradawi the respect and admiration of many Palestinians, especially those who seek to destroy Israel.

Had the Muslim Brotherhood's al-Qaradawi visited the Gaza Strip to urge Palestinians to recognize Israel's right to exist, he would have been received with shoes and rotten eggs.

But al-Qaradawi is a hero in the eyes of many Palestinians and Muslims because he views Jews as the "enemies of Islam and treacherous aggressors."

In a January 2009 sermon, al-Qaradawi prayed [according to a translation by MEMRI] that "Allah take this oppressive, Jewish Zionist band of people. Oh Allah, do not spare a single one of them. Oh Allah, count their numbers, and kill them, down to the very last one."

Al-Qaradawi's visit has further bolstered Hamas's standing, enabling it to tighten its grip over the 1.5 million Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. Moreover, the visit has granted legitimacy to Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip and turned it, in the Arab and Islamic countries, into an acceptable Islamic party.

But more importantly, al-Qaradawi's visit and statements also serve as a reminder that the Israeli-Arab conflict is centered, more than ever, around religion. The sheikh's message to the Palestinians and Muslims is that this is a religious conflict and not a political issue.

This is an unequivocal message that stresses that no Muslim is entitled to give up Muslim-owned land to non-Muslims. As far as al-Qaradawi, Hamas and their followers are concerned, the conflict is not about a settlement or a checkpoint. Rather, it is about Israel's presence -- its right to exist at all -- in the Middle East.

What Israel can teach Canada about education

Margaret Wente, *The Globe and Mail*, 14 May 2013

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/what-israel-can-teach-canada-about-education/article11897974/>

The Hemda Centre for Science Education in Tel Aviv is one of the world's great schools for bright kids. It recruits fantastic teachers to give them advanced instruction in physics and chemistry. It is unabashedly merit-based. Its most advanced course, a program in computational science, is called "MOAH" – a Hebrew word for "brain."

Outside of Silicon Valley, Israel probably has the greatest concentration of innovators and entrepreneurs in the world. One reason is that it really prizes brains. Israel can survive only by using its brainpower, and everybody in the country knows it.

Canada has nothing like Hemda. That's too bad, because we could use a lot more of the creativity and innovative mindset that Hemda fosters.

"We recruit for the ability to solve problems," Tehilla Ben Gai, the school's director, told me as she showed me around the bright and airy school. Its 1,100 students, who are in Grades 10 to 12, have all been assessed in person to see if they have the right stuff. "B and C students are sometimes smarter than A students," she says. "We're looking for students who are creative – and we teach them that science is fun."

The students attend Hemda only for their science classes; they take their other courses at their neighbourhood schools. Forty per cent are disadvantaged, and some of their parents are illiterate. A third are girls, and some are Israeli Arabs. There are no traditional classrooms – all the learning is lab-based and hands-on. The teachers (some don't look much older than the students) encourage teamwork. All are qualified to teach at university, but they love the challenge of working here. "These kids have skills that nobody else has," one of them told me. Another thing that makes this school stand out – its classes run for 50 weeks a year.

The kids vibrate with enthusiasm. "I'm really into science and math because it connects to life," one student told me. Every year, they are divided into teams and given a zany practical problem to solve. (One was: Devise a way to walk on water.) There's also a yearly safe-cracking competition, in which teams of students construct computer-protected boxes and other teams have to figure out how to break into them. It's no surprise to learn that two of the school's graduates helped develop Stuxnet, a computer worm that has been used to attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

Israel needs technology for prosperity as well as for security. Unlike Canada, it has no natural resources to sell. Nor can it depend on friendly neighbours for its export markets. It has to search for markets around the world. Those are two of the challenges that make the culture so entrepreneurial, argue Dan Senor and Saul Singer in their bestselling book, *Start-Up Nation*. Two other essential factors are what they call "mission orientation and a cultural acceptance of the need to take risks." Part of that mission orientation comes from compulsory military service, where men and women just slightly older than these students are given very large responsibilities. Military service produces young adults who are strikingly more goal-directed and mature than their counterparts in North America. And, as Mr. Senor and Mr. Singer point out, in Israel launching a start-up or going into high tech is almost a standard career track.

Every nation has its own distinct DNA. Canada can't turn into Israel, nor would we want it to. But we could be far more ambitious about developing our talent. Our own version of Hemda would be a great place to start.

Asia is becoming Israel's new frontier – here's why
Jonathan Adelman & Asaf Romirowsky, Forbes, 14 May 2013

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/05/14/asia-is-becoming-israels-new-frontier-heres-why/>

When we think of Israel, we usually think of the Middle East (its neighborhood), North America (its close ally the United States) and Europe (the long history of Ashkenazi Jews). Rarely do we think about Israel and Asia, even less about Asia as Israel's new frontier. We don't think of Asia as playing any significant role in Israel's evolution given the tiny Asian Jewish population, the lack of significant Jewish history in Asia, and minimal relations between Israel and most Asian countries for the first 40 years (1948-1988) of Israel's existence.

Yet, last year Israel called 2012 "the year of Asia in Israel." The Israeli government sponsored an Asian Science Camp attracting over 220 Asian students to join nearly 40 Israeli students for a week long program of lectures by world class Israeli researchers

How did such a gathering ever happen? Many factors propelled Israel-Asian relations to the forefront. Historically, Asia largely lacks the anti-Semitism that was so prominent in Europe and also the Middle East. Geographically, Israel is in West Asia, only four hours by air from India and 11 hours by air from China. Historically, Israel, like most Asian states, is a new state born after World War II after a struggle with a Western colonial power, in this case Great Britain.

Economically, Israel's rapid transition from Third World power to First World "start-up nation" echoes the great transformation underway in such Asian countries as India, China and the Four Tigers. Scientifically, Israel has emerged as a high-tech superpower (with Tel Aviv rated #2 in the world for its startup companies, thereby very attractive to Asian high tech [powers in Bangalore, Xinchu Park and Beijing Silicon Valleys]). Politically, the growing threat of Islamism in the regime draws many of these countries towards a country that is in the forefront of fighting this threat to governments around the world. And, militarily, the Israeli military, a world leader in anti-missile technology (Iron Dome), UAVs (which they sell even to the Russians) and 5 billion dollars of military exports, is attractive to Asian countries developing their own militaries as they rise economically. Finally, in intelligence matters, which are so critical to many developing countries, Mossad, with its strong human intelligence capabilities, is attractive for helping these countries overcome foreign threats to their rise to power.

Most of all, Israel has developed strong relations with the two Asian countries in the BRICs—China and India. Both of these countries, which had no diplomatic relations with Israel before 1992, now have major Israeli embassies in their capitals (Beijing and New Delhi) as well as consulates in their leading cities (Shanghai and Mumbai).

Militarily, Israel is the second biggest arms exporter to India today, and sold it the Phalcon AIWACS system for a billion dollars back in 2004. In turn India in 2004 launched a 300 kilogram Israeli satellite in orbit which dramatically increased Israeli intelligence gathering capabilities against the Iranian nuclear program with clear images in all kinds of weather. At one time in the '90s Israel was the second biggest arms exporter to China (4 billion dollars worth of exports). In turn Israeli intelligence works closely with Indian intelligence against radical Islamic threats and is on friendly terms with its Chinese counterparts.

Economically, Israel can claim \$5 billion worth of trade with India and over \$8 billion dollars with China. It hopes to boost trade with the world's second largest economy by GDP to \$10 billion in the coming years. Back to India, Israel is working with it on the framework for a Free Trade Zone that within five years could triple annual exchange between producers in each country to \$15 billion. Politically, Israel supports India in its fight over Kashmir and against Pakistan, while China also battles Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang Province.

Outside the two BRIC members, Israel has developed diplomatic relations with a large range of Asian countries. It has extensive trade with a number of these nations—ranging from \$2 billion with Japan and South Korea, to several hundred million dollars worth of trade with Vietnam. It also has growing economic and educational ties with Singapore. Israel has developed strong relations too with a series of newly independent states formerly part of the Soviet Union, including Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

Not all of these relations have been easy. Few Asian states face serious existential threats as Israel has and continues to face. And it can't be forgotten that some of them are Muslim states (as Pakistan and Indonesia), plus very few have attained Israel's strong First World economy (\$33,000 GNP/person) status.

But it seems as China and India have risen economically, so has Israel's global status. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's four day visit to China this week highlights the importance of China to Israel. Excitingly for Israel, the importance is mutual. As Chinese Ambassador to Israel Gao Yanping stated ahead of the visit, "China views its relationship with Israel with tremendous importance." Truly Asia is the new frontier for Israel in the 21st century.

The 'rabid' rage of Israel's enemies

Robert Fulford, *National Post*, 11 May 2013

<http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2013/05/11/fulford-2/>

A word jumped off the page when I was reading Haroon Siddiqui's column in the *Toronto Star* the other day: "rabid." Describing Qatar's attempt to steal the International Civil Aviation Organization headquarters from Montreal, Siddiqui wrote: "There's speculation that the bid is also politically motivated, in retaliation for Stephen Harper's rabid pro-Israeli stance."

Siddiqui is an important *Star* personage, routinely billed as the paper's "editorial page editor emeritus," a title claimed by no other Canadian journalist. He ran the editorial page in the 1990s, and the *Star* apparently wants to recall those glory years every time he appears in print. What in the world makes him call the prime minister rabid?

Oxford defines that word as "Furious, raging; wildly aggressive." Doesn't sound like Stephen Harper. He's cool and careful. He speaks quietly of Israel, noting that Canada doesn't endorse all of Israel's policies. He finds it unfair that so much criticism is directed by others against "the one country of the global community whose very existence is threatened." He also draws a lesson from history: Those who choose the Jewish people "as a target of racial and religious bigotry will inevitably be a threat to all of us." He believes those who target Israel also threaten "all free and democratic societies."

Perhaps Siddiqui, in using that strange word, "rabid," unconsciously projects his own feelings of rage and frustration onto his subject. For the left and the leftish, such as Siddiqui, a furious opposition to Israel has become a sacred duty. When the anti-Israel forces assemble, usually in a university, they have wonderfully peaceful meetings. Everyone agrees on all major points. Everything said against Israel is greeted with cheers. (One meeting I recently attended as a

journalist was close to a pep rally.) Opposing Israel has become the favourite struggle of the left. Nothing else in world affairs is considered so important. In Canada, it's the left's only foreign policy (well, name another one). It is also a major source of their intellectual comfort and self-satisfaction.

Leftists are natural conformists who like to travel in packs and love political abstractions. In the UN, the most persistent gang is the anti-Israel cabal, which pours out millions of words about Israeli imperialists oppressing the Palestinians. Students, listening to Arab politicians tossing around terms such as colonialism and racism, feel a warm sense of recognition: Why, that's just what our professor is always talking about.

In North America or Europe, holding this position demonstrates an absurd thoughtlessness. It implies that we should punish Israel, the only real democracy in the Middle East, while ignoring Syria, Iran, North Korea, China, and many other despotic states. This a remarkable but widespread form of blindness. I have acquaintances, including feminists, who never utter a word against Saudi Arabia or Pakistan but nevertheless wish everyone to know that they disagree strongly with Israel's policies.

CJPME urges the public to stay away from Indigo stores because the principal owners started a foundation that offers scholarships for veterans of the Israeli Defense Forces

The boycott movement, a favourite technique of the anti-Israel movement, can create a sensation when Stephen Hawking decides he won't attend a conference in Israel, out of sympathy for the Palestinians. On the other hand, consistency is not among his qualities: He's visited Iran and China. It is an ominously meaningful fact that no other country, whatever its sins, is given this pariah treatment. Do the celebrity boycotters understand the company they keep? William Jacobson, a Cornell law professor who blogs on this subject, remarked this week that "The boycott, which singles out only Israel, attracts open and de facto anti-Semites and those in the leftist-Islamist coalition who seek Israel's destruction."

But the larger and more ambitious boycott, of Israeli products and services, has struggled along for years, and accomplished approximately nothing. Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) urges its followers to boycott Sears, Home Depot, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Pizza Hut and several other companies; they all sell goods from Israel or have interests in Israel. The CJPME urges the public to stay away from Indigo stores because the principal owners, Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz, started a foundation that offers scholarships for veterans of the Israeli Defense Forces.

CJPME can provide many details about the source of the products it wants to boycott, like Dead Sea beauty products. But their publicity says nothing about the futile effect of their campaign, apparently because the truth would be too painful.

Think how hard this must be for Siddiqui and people like him. Not only do the masses ignore their duty to boycott Israel, but their own country defends the state they want to see defeated and isolated. It would make anybody rabid.

The mass exodus of Christians from the Muslim World ***Raymond Ibrahim, Middle East Forum, 7 May 2013***

<http://www.meforum.org/3504/christians-exodus-muslim-world>

A mass exodus of Christians is currently underway. Millions of Christians are being displaced from one end of the Islamic world to the other.

We are reliving the true history of how the Islamic world—much of which prior to the Islamic conquests was almost entirely Christian—came into being.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recently said: "The flight of Christians out of the region is unprecedented and it's increasing year by year." In our lifetime alone "Christians might disappear altogether from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Egypt."

Ongoing reports from the Islamic world certainly support this conclusion. Iraq was the earliest indicator of the fate awaiting Christians once Islamic forces are liberated from the grip of dictators.

In 2003, Iraq's Christian population was at least one million. Today fewer than 400,000 remain—the result of an anti-Christian campaign that began with the U.S. occupation of Iraq, when countless Christian churches were bombed and countless Christians killed, including by crucifixion and beheading.

The 2010 Baghdad church attack, which saw nearly 60 Christian worshippers slaughtered, is the tip of a decade-long iceberg.

Now as the U.S. supports the jihad on secular president Assad, the same pattern has come to Syria: entire regions and towns where Christians lived centuries before Islam came into being have now been emptied, as the opposition targets Christians for kidnapping, plundering, and beheadings, all in compliance with mosque calls that it's a "sacred duty" to drive Christians away.

In October 2012 the last Christian in the city of Homs—which had a Christian population of some 80,000 before jihadis came—was murdered. One teenage Syrian girl said: "We left because they were trying to kill us... because we were Christians.... Those who were our neighbors turned against us. At the end, when we ran away, we went through balconies. We did not even dare go out on the street in front of our house."

In Egypt, some 100,000 Christian Copts have fled their homeland soon after the "Arab Spring." In September 2012, the Sinai's small Christian community was attacked and evicted by al-Qaeda linked Muslims, Reuters reported.

But even before that, the Coptic Orthodox Church lamented the "repeated incidents of displacement of Copts from their homes, whether by force or threat. Displacements began in Ameriya [62 Christian families evicted], then they stretched to Dahshur [120 Christian families evicted], and today terror and threats have reached the hearts and souls of our Coptic children in Sinai."

Iraq, Syria, and Egypt are the Arab world. But even in "black" African and "white" European nations with Muslim majorities, Christians are fleeing.

In Mali, after a 2012 Islamic coup, as many as 200,000 Christians fled. According to reports, "the church in Mali faces being eradicated," especially in the north "where rebels want to establish an independent Islamist state and drive Christians out... there have been house to house searches for Christians who might be in hiding, church and Christian property has been looted or destroyed, and people tortured into revealing any Christian relatives." At least one pastor was beheaded.

Even in European Bosnia, Christians are leaving en masse "amid mounting discrimination and Islamization." Only 440,000 Catholics remain in the Balkan nation, half the prewar figure. Problems cited are typical: "while dozens of mosques were built in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, no building permissions were given for Christian churches."

"Time is running out as there is a worrisome rise in radicalism," said one authority, who further added that the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina were "persecuted for centuries" after European powers "failed to support them in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire."

And so history repeats itself.

One can go on and on:

- In Ethiopia, after a Christian was accused of desecrating a Koran, thousands of Christians were forced to flee their homes when "Muslim extremists set fire to roughly 50 churches and dozens of Christian homes."
- In the Ivory Coast—where Christians have been crucified—Islamic rebels "massacred hundreds and displaced tens of thousands" of Christians.
- In Libya, Islamic rebels forced several Christian nun orders serving the sick and needy since 1921 to flee.
- In Muslim-majority northern Nigeria, where nary a Sunday passes without a church bombing, Christians are fleeing by the thousands; one region has been emptied of 95% of its Christian population.
- In Pakistan, after a Christian child was falsely accused of desecrating a Koran and Muslims went on an anti-Christian rampage, an entire Christian village—men, women, and children—was forced to flee into the nearby woods, where they built a church, permanently resided there.
- In Somali, where Christianity is completely outlawed, Muslim converts to Christianity are fleeing to neighboring nations, including Kenya and Ethiopia, sometimes to be tracked down and executed.
- In Sudan, over half a million people, mostly Christian, have been stripped of citizenship in response to the South's secession, and forced to relocate.

To anyone following the plight of Christians under Islam, none of this is surprising. As I document in my new book, *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam's New War on Christians*, all around the Islamic world—in nations that do not share the same race, language, culture, or economics, in nations *that share only Islam*—Christians are being persecuted into extinction. Such is the true face of the global Islamic resurgence.

Often forgotten is that, in the 7th century, half of the world's entire Christian population was spread across what is now nonchalantly called the "Muslim world." Then, Islam, born in the deserts of Arabia, burst out in a series of world-altering jihads, conquering and slowly transforming these once Christian nations into Islamic nations.

In order to evade sporadic persecution and constant discrimination, over the centuries most Christians converted, while others fled. A few opted to remain Christian and live as barely tolerated third-class subjects, or *dhimmis*, according to Sharia law.

They eventually experienced something of a renaissance during the colonial and post-colonial era, when many Muslims were Westward-looking.

But today, with the international resurgence of Muhammad's religion, these remaining Christians are reaching extinction, as Islam's 1400 year mission of supremacy and global hegemony continues unabated—even as the West looks the other way, that is, when it's not actually supporting it in the context of the so-called "Arab Spring."

Political currents of water management: challenges in Israel, Palestine and Jordan

Jay Famiglietti, National Geographic, 13 May 2013

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/05/13/political-currents-of-water-management-challenges-in-israel-palestine-and-jordan/>

The geopolitics of water management in the Middle East are primarily governed by the basic distribution of freshwater resources: there are vast differences between the naturally available water resources in the region. Layer to this the additional complexity of political stability, financial assets, and other socioeconomic factors, and the potential for improved transboundary water management in the Middle East becomes vastly complicated.

Simply, some nations have few water resources and a lack of capabilities to effectively manage their limited resources – their water security is at risk. Other nations, those with more technological and economic capacity to maximize their limited resources, have less at stake. Our recent trip to the Middle East in February underscored the well-known perspective that while Israel is making great advances in water management in the region, Palestine and Jordan are simply further behind.

The actions, decisions, and processes that led to this imbalance are complex. While Israel is currently a regional (and global) leader in water management strategies, the nation has faced many challenges with competing user-groups, made trade-offs between short-term economic investment versus long-term sustainability, and leveraged its economic and political clout to ensure that the financial assets were in hand to prioritize water management solutions.

Israel's path to achieve water management success was not simple or easy. At the same time, while Jordan and Palestine have historically encountered many struggles to manage their incredibly scarce water resources, which for Palestine includes the challenge of being land-locked (save its Dead Sea access), making autonomous desalination impossible. Water managers in Palestine and Jordan are actively striving to improve the technological capacity and policy portfolio to optimize water use in the future.

Israel's Geopolitical Advantages

As described in our previous post in Water Currents, Israel is a regional and global leader in water management strategies. Israel has a diverse portfolio of water sources that includes an extensive supply of desalinated water and recycled wastewater and, consequently, puts less pressure on its limited, natural freshwater sources from surface water and groundwater. Israeli water managers have detailed knowledge and data about how much water they have, the precise source of that water, how much water is being used at any given moment, and specifically who is using that water and for what purpose. Every last drop of water is accounted for. There is a direct line of communication between the Water Authority and Mekorot, the national water utility company, which allows for the supply and demand as well as the pricing of water in Israel to be meticulously monitored and regulated. Israel's water management system is a well-oiled, robust machine.

Israel's detailed understanding of its water resources has allowed the nation to strategically invest in new technology and solutions that allow for more stable and sustainable water planning. Furthermore, the economic and political clout that Israel can leverage to finance such solutions is significant. Without investment, political commitment, and long-term planning, Israel's water success would not exist. In addition, Israel's geographic assets – mainly its shoreline on the Mediterranean Sea – are essential to its success. The Mediterranean provides Israel an unlimited supply of water as long as the investment for infrastructure and energy costs for desalination are met. With new natural gas reserves discovered off the coast, once prohibitive energy expenses

will now be obsolete. Armed with detailed knowledge about its water resources, new energy sources, and a strong sociopolitical backing, Israel's water future looks bright.

Tapping the Root of Jordan and Palestine's Struggle

Yet while Israel is leading the world in innovative water strategies, its neighbors, Palestine and Jordan, are clearly struggling. The core differences in the naturally available water resources as well as the social, economic, and political capability to address water resource management challenges was staggering. Before meeting with water management officials in Jordan, we had the opportunity to drive beyond the sprawl of Amman and into the surrounding desert.

The land outside the city boundaries is vast, dry, and desolate – there are no water resources to speak of. Communities that dot the highway are dependent on either dwindling groundwater reserves or weekly water tankers. The situation is dire. Without proactive efforts to find and transport new sources of water, many of these communities will probably cease to exist, leaving only the shadow of a civilization, akin to the ancient ruins of Petra.

Jordan's water managers are trying their best to develop innovative, long-term solutions to its water crisis. The pioneering solutions from Israel, such as desalination or wastewater recycling, may have a place in Jordan's water strategy, but even those options are difficult to acquire. Wastewater recycling necessitates steep financial investment, as does desalination, and these solutions often force Jordan to place its water security in the hands of another nation. Neither option is perfect. Consequently, long-distance conveyance alternatives from friendly neighbors, such as pumping groundwater from Saudi Arabia or tanking water from Turkey, do not seem obscure when forced to cope with a physical water scarcity emergency.

Jordan's dire water situation is not for lack of effort or vision, but mainly a lack of resources. Few natural water assets combined with a weak socioeconomic foundation makes investment in long-term water strategies incredibly difficult. In Palestine, the situation is similar. According to a World Bank report from 2009, "economic disparities between West Bank Gaza (WBG) and Israel are large – in 2005, Israel's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita was almost eighteen times the Palestinian GNI per capita. Water resources availability in the two neighbors is likewise far apart, with fresh water per capita in Israel is about four times that of WBG. Whereas Israel is known for efficient water infrastructure and management, Palestinians are struggling to attain the most basic level of infrastructure and services of a low income country." Add to the weak economy the fact that water rights in Palestine are directly linked to the broader conflict between Palestine and Israel, particularly in the West Bank, and water management in Palestine becomes more convoluted and challenging. Palestine's situation is analogous to Jordan's crisis, but with the added complexity of unclear sovereign rights to access and improve water resources.

Knowledge for a Sustainable Water Future

While visiting with water management officials in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, we discussed the shared need for better monitoring — a need that the U.S. has in common with the Middle East — in order to have essential, baseline data for characterizing regional water availability. Based on this information, water managers can develop short- and long-term strategies that are rooted in the reality of actual water availability and use. Without this information, any decisions or solutions are based on speculation, at best, and politics at worst.

As previously mentioned, Israel has a stronger foundation in data and monitoring than either of Palestine and Jordan. That said, water managers in Palestine and Jordan are actively making substantial efforts to lay the framework for an improved water monitoring system and are beginning to collect core data on their native resources. With clear evidence about their changing water availability, water managers will hold more power to leverage for the political and economic

support they need to create actual change. In the future, our hope is that we at UCCHM will be able to support these efforts by providing training workshops based on our research, to provide the capacity for water managers in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan to utilize new advances in satellite data to monitor and manage their water.

With these fundamental data and information in hand, water managers in Palestine and Jordan can begin to close the gap on their investment needs and to implement their own innovative solutions to tackle their water challenges. For Israel, there are clear economic and political benefits for improved water management in Palestine and Jordan. With any luck, water management will come forward as an issue of mutual interest for regional cooperation. This will, of course, necessitate strong political, economic, and social backing from national, regional, and international leaders.

Throughout the Middle East we heard that “water cannot be removed from politics” in this region. Consequently, the broader political and socioeconomic intricacies must be incorporated into water management and vice versa. With this complexity in mind we can only hope that the political currents of the region lead to improved water management and that, collectively, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan can see the benefit of sustainable solutions for their shared water future.

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

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