



Opinion and Analysis, Week ending 2 April 2014

1. Peace process as an obstacle to peace

AB Yehoshua, YNet News, 31 March 2014

In recent years, writes novelist A. B. Yehoshua, 'peace process' has become an independent diplomatic entity whose outward appearance conceals not only real inaction but deeds which clearly contradict peace itself.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4504845,00.html>

2. The Palestinians' Real Enemies

Efraim Karsh, Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2014

The actual policies of the Arab states have shown far less concern for pan-Arab ideals, let alone for the well-being of the Palestinians, than for their own self-serving interests. Indeed, nothing has done more to expose the hollowness of pan-Arabism than its most celebrated cause.

<http://www.meforum.org/3766/palestinians-enemies>

3. Israel's big mistake

Yoav Sorek, Mosaic magazine, March 2014

How my countrymen gave up the hope for real peace, and how they can get it back.

<http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2014/03/israels-big-mistake/>

4. War across the borders

Jonathan Spyer, Middle East Forum, 28 March 2014

The entire area between the Iraq-Iran border and the Mediterranean Sea is currently the site of a single war, following a single dynamic, fought between protagonists defined by ethnic and sectarian loyalty.

<http://www.meforum.org/3803/middle-east-borders>

5. Saudi Arabia: A kingdom on guard

Roula Khalaf, Financial Times, 26 March 2014

Alarmed by the rise of political Islam, the House of Saud is increasingly hardline at home and aggressive abroad.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8a965110-b4c0-11e3-af92-00144feabdc0.html?ftcamp=crm/email/2014327/nbe/Analysis/product&siteedition=intl#axzz2rJOvKcWd>

6. Why 'moderate Islam' is an oxymoron
Raymond Ibrahim, CBN News, 24 March 2015

The real question, then, is what do Allah and his prophet command Muslims ("they who submit") to do? Are radicals "exaggerating" their orders? Or are moderate Muslims simply "observing reasonable limits" - a euphemism for negligence? - when it comes to fulfilling their commandments?

<http://blogs.cbn.com/ibrahim/archive/2014/03/24/why-moderate-islam-is-an-oxymoron.aspx>

7. What's left for Israel advocacy?
Neil Lazarus, The Times of Israel, 10 February 2014

If Israel is to remain relevant to this generation of students we must rediscover what is left of liberal Zionist values, because let's admit it – no country is always right.

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/whats-left-for-israel-advocacy/>

8. So what's life really like in the Arab world?
John McHugo and Diana Darke, Readers Digest, 1 January 2014

http://www.ornico.co.za/editorialstream/OwnMediaAttachments/1_1_2014_1363601.pdf

1. Peace process as an obstacle to peace

In the past two years, the "peace process" concept has become a problematic, and perhaps even harmful, phrase. If I may express myself in a slightly absurd manner, I would say that in the past few years the peace process has become the obstacle to peace itself.

The "peace process" has been turned – by the Israelis, Palestinians, Americans and in some sense the Europeans too – into a sort of independent diplomatic entity, whose ethical and political rhetoric is more important than its deeds, whose outward appearance conceals not only real inaction but sometimes even worse – deeds which clearly contradict peace itself. The peace process deludes us, and therefore calms us too, to believe that peace will certainly come. It induces tolerance which is eventually complete passivity.

For the sake of illustration, let us recall the short and efficient peace process between Israel and Egypt, two countries which waged major, bloody wars against each other. This peace process began dramatically with Egyptian President Sadat's visit to Israel in November 1977, and less than a year later the sides already agreed upon the main principles at Camp David. A withdrawal, demilitarization, uprooting communities and opening embassies. The agreement itself was signed several months later. And this peace agreement has lasted more than 35 years now.

On the other hand, while the first contact between Israel and the Palestinians was signed in Oslo in 1993, more than 20 years have passed since then and the peace agreement is still far off. During these years, several interim agreements were signed, most of which were violated, and serious bloody brawls erupted between the two sides, some of which are still ongoing, not to mention the Israeli settlements which have expanded immensely.

Lo and behold, in the years which have passed since Oslo dozens if not hundreds of European and American – and other – mediators and emissaries have been running back and forth between the sides, dozens of different types of summits have been held, direct talks have taken place on all levels, US presidents and foreign and defence ministers from

the US and many European countries have arrived in Jerusalem and Ramallah to talk, persuade and make new offers. American Secretary of State John Kerry has been in Israel and the Palestinian Authority 11 times in the past year in order to advance the peace process, which continues to stay put.

Officially cancel peace process

The most reliable evidence of the lack of hope that the peace process will indeed reach its goal – peace itself – will be provided in random talks on every street in Israel and in every city in the West Bank. Even moderate people on both sides will agree about one thing – their hopelessness that the current peace process will indeed reach its goal. And there are also those, on the left and on the right, who don't see any hope in ever achieving peace.

And yet, the vast majority will still agree that the peace process must not be stopped under any circumstances, out of the sense that after an entire day of deeds contradicting any possibility of an agreement, it would be good to go to sleep at night with the peace process lying restfully by the pillow.

It's interesting that the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians, and all the mediators too of course, will outline more or less the same realistic content of the appropriate and proper peace process between Palestine and Israel; but in the meantime, it is this infinite peace process which is creating all kinds of imaginary fantasies of further possible concessions each side can get from the other side, and so within the infinite and inexhaustible creation of illusions in regards to the concessions each side might be able to achieve in the "peace process" negotiations, peace itself is wearing out and moving farther away.

That being the case, what can we do? In my opinion, only a real dramatic crisis can advance peace. Not necessarily a crisis related to violent outbursts, but a crisis which has to do with breaking off contact and officially cancelling – although temporarily – the peace process. And this applies of course not just to the two sides, but mainly to the different mediators, and especially to the US, which is acting like a spineless social worker in a day-care centre for backward people.

An official US withdrawal from the entire peace process out of despair will create panic among broad circles, both among the Palestinians and among the Israelis, and will perhaps motivate them to take real initiative in a practical and businesslike – and preferably secret – dialogue, ahead of a possible agreement.

2. The Palestinians' Real Enemies

For most of the twentieth century, inter-Arab politics were dominated by the doctrine of pan-Arabism, postulating the existence of "a single nation bound by the common ties of language, religion and history. ... behind the facade of a multiplicity of sovereign states"; and no single issue dominated this doctrine more than the "Palestine question" with anti-Zionism forming the main common denominator of pan-Arab solidarity and its most effective rallying cry. But the actual policies of the Arab states have shown far less concern for pan-Arab ideals, let alone for the well-being of the Palestinians, than for their own self-serving interests. Indeed, nothing has done more to expose the hollowness of pan-Arabism than its most celebrated cause.

Denying Palestinian Nationalism

Consider, for instance, Emir Faisal ibn Hussein of Mecca, the celebrated hero of the "Great Arab Revolt" against the Ottoman Empire and the effective leader of the nascent pan-Arab

movement. Together with his father and his older brother Abdullah, Faisal placed Palestine on the pan-Arab agenda by (falsely) claiming that they had been promised the country in return for their anti-Ottoman rising. In January 1919, he signed an agreement with Chaim Weizmann, head of the Zionists, supporting the November 1917 Balfour Declaration on the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine and the adoption of "all necessary measures ... to encourage and stimulate immigration of Jews into Palestine on a large scale." Yet when the opportunity for self-aggrandizement arose, in March 1920, he had himself crowned king of Syria "within its natural boundaries, including Palestine." Had either option been realized, Palestine would then have disappeared from the international scene.

Nor did Faisal abandon his grand ambitions after his expulsion from Damascus by the French in July 1920. Quite the reverse, using his subsequent position as Iraq's founding monarch, he toiled ceaselessly to bring about the unification of the Fertile Crescent under his rule. This policy was sustained after his untimely death in September 1933 by successive Iraqi leaders, notably by Nuri Said, Faisal's comrade-in-arms and a long-time prime minister. In the summer of 1936, Said sought to convince Palestine's Arab and Jewish communities, as well as the British government, to agree to the country's incorporation into a pan-Arab federation, and six years later, he published a detailed plan for pan-Arab unification (known as the *Blue Book*) that envisaged that "Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan shall be reunited into one state."

The scheme was vigorously opposed by Abdullah, who strove to transform the emirate of Transjordan (latterly Jordan), which he had ruled since 1921, into a springboard for the creation of a "Greater Syrian" empire comprising Syria, Palestine, and possibly, Iraq and Saudi Arabia; and it was the Arab states' determination to block this ambition and to avail themselves of whatever parts of Palestine they could that underlay the concerted attempt to destroy the state of Israel at birth. This, on the face of it, was a shining demonstration of pan-Arab solidarity; in reality, it was a scramble for Palestinian territory in the classic imperialist tradition. As Arab League secretary-general Abdel Rahman Azzam admitted to a British reporter, Abdullah "was to swallow up the central hill regions of Palestine with access to the Mediterranean at Gaza. The Egyptians would get the Negev. [The] Galilee would go to Syria, except that the coastal part as far as Acre would be added to Lebanon if its inhabitants opted for it by a referendum [i.e., the inhabitants of the said coastal strip]."

Had Israel lost the war, its territory would have been divided among the invading Arab forces. The name Palestine would have vanished into the dustbin of history. By surviving the pan-Arab assault, Israel has paradoxically saved the Palestinian national movement from complete oblivion.

Manipulating the Palestinian Cause

Having helped drive the Palestinians to national ruin, the Arab states continued to manipulate the Palestinian national cause to their own ends. Neither Egypt nor Jordan allowed Palestinian self-determination in the parts of Palestine they occupied during the 1948 war. Upon occupying the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria, Abdullah moved to erase all traces of corporate Palestinian Arab identity. On April 4, 1950, the territory was formally annexed to Jordan to be subsequently known as the "West Bank" of the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan. Its residents became Jordanian citizens, and they were increasingly integrated into the kingdom's economic, political, and social structures. And while Egypt showed no desire to annex the occupied Gaza Strip, this did not imply support of Palestinian nationalism or of any sort of collective political awareness among the Palestinians. The refugees were kept under oppressive military rule, were denied Egyptian citizenship, and were subjected to severe restrictions on travel. "The Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are," President Gamal Abdel Nasser candidly responded to an enquiring Western reporter. "We will always see that they do not become too powerful. Can you

imagine yet another nation on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean!" Had these territories not come under Israel's control during the June 1967 war, their populations would have lost whatever vestiges of Palestinian identity they retained since 1948. For the second time in two decades, Israel unwittingly salvaged the Palestinian national cause.

Nor was Syria more sympathetic to the idea of Palestinian statehood. During his brief presidency (April-August 1949), Husni Zaim proposed the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Syria in return for financial and political gain while Hafez Assad (1970-2000), who as late as September 1974 described Palestine as "a basic part of southern Syria," was a persistent obstacle to Palestinian self-determination. He pledged allegiance to any solution amenable to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) - appointed by the Arab League in October 1974 as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" - so long as it did not deviate from the Syrian line advocating Israel's destruction. Yet when in November 1988, the PLO pretended to accept the November 1947 partition resolution (and by implication to recognize Israel's existence) so as to end its ostracism by the USA, Syria immediately opposed the move. The PLO then took this pretence a step further by signing the September 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-government Arrangements (DOP) with Israel. This provided for Palestinian self-rule in the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip for a transitional period of up to five years, during which Israel and the Palestinians would negotiate a permanent peace settlement. But the Syrian regime strongly condemned the declaration while the Damascus-based Palestinian terrorist, Ahmad Jibril, threatened PLO chairman Yasser Arafat with death.

A no-less instrumental approach was exhibited by Saddam Hussein, another self-styled pan-Arab champion whose professed allegiance to the Palestinian cause was matched by a long history of treating that cause with indifference, if not outright hostility. Saddam stood firmly against Iraqi intervention to aid the Palestinians in Jordan during the "Black September" of 1970 and subsequently sought to exclude Palestinians from coming to work in Iraq's booming, oil-rich economy. Though a vociferous critic of Egypt's Anwar Sadat for reaching a separate peace with Israel in 1979, Saddam quickly reconsidered when he needed Egyptian military aid in his war against Iran (1980-88), toiling tirelessly for Cairo's readmission into the Arab fold. Nor was Saddam deterred from collaborating with Israel against Syrian interests in Lebanon (to punish Assad for his support of Tehran in its war against Baghdad), or from seeking sophisticated Israeli military equipment. In 1984, at a time of pressure due to the war with Iran, he went so far as to voice public support for peace negotiations with the Jewish state, emphasizing that "no Arab leader looks forward to the destruction of Israel" and that any solution to the conflict would require "the existence of a secure state for the Israelis."

This support, to be sure, did not prevent Saddam from attempting to link his August 1990 invasion of Kuwait to the Palestine problem. During the months of negotiations with the Kuwaitis before the invasion, Saddam made no mention of Palestine. Once confronted with a firm international response, he immediately opted to "Zionize" the crisis by portraying his predatory move as the first step toward "the liberation of Jerusalem." But this pretence made no impression whatsoever on most Arab states, which dismissed the spurious link as the ploy it obviously was and fought alongside the West to liberate Kuwait.

Nor did the anti-Iraq coalition collapse when Saddam, in a desperate bid to widen the conflict, fired thirty-nine Scud missiles at Israel - a move cheered by the Palestinians and by demonstrators in marginal states such as Yemen but otherwise greeted with conspicuous calm by the proverbially restive "Arab street." Not a single Arab regime was swept from power following its participation in the war, with the war even producing an ad hoc tacit alliance between Israel and the Arab members of the anti-Saddam coalition: Israel kept the lowest possible profile, eschewing retaliation for Iraq's missile attacks while the latter

highlighted the hollowness of Saddam's pan-Arab pretences by sustaining the war operations against Baghdad.

If anything, it was the Palestinians who paid a heavy price for their entanglement in the conflict as the PLO's endorsement of the Iraqi occupation led to its ostracism by the Arab world and the post-war expulsion of most of the 400,000 Palestinians who had been living and working in Kuwait. So much for pan-Arab solidarity with "the sole representative of the Palestinian people."

Unwanted Guests

The political manipulation of the Palestinian cause was mirrored by the dismal treatment of the Palestinian refugees based in Arab states since the 1948 war. Far from being welcomed, the new arrivals were seen as an unpatriotic and cowardly lot who had shamefully abdicated their national duty while expecting others to fight on their behalf, and this attitude was entrenched and institutionalized over time. Yet with their desire to offload their Palestinian guests matched by the lingering dream of Israel's destruction, the Arab states as well as the Palestinian leadership rejected U.N. General Assembly resolution 194 of December 11, 1948, which conditioned repatriation on the attainment of comprehensive peace and partial refugee resettlement in the host Arab states. The resolution's subsequent transformation into the cornerstone of an utterly spurious claim to a "right of return" has only served to perpetuate the refugee problem as the Arab states used this "right" as a pretext to prevent Palestinian assimilation into their societies in anticipation of their eventual return to their homeland.

Nowhere has this state of affairs been more starkly illustrated than in Lebanon, the most liberal Arab state up until the mid-1970s. Fearful lest the burgeoning and increasingly radicalized Palestinian population (which grew from 100,000 in 1948 to about 500,000 in 2012) undermine the country's fragile confessional edifice, the authorities barred its incorporation into Lebanon's social, political, and economic structures. As a result, the vast majority of Palestinians have remained stateless refugees with more than half living in abject poverty in twelve squalid and overcrowded camps (another five camps were destroyed during the Lebanese civil war of 1975-90), administered by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), created in 1949 for the exclusive relief of Palestinian Arab refugees.

Camp residents or not, Lebanese Palestinians have been excluded from numerous walks of life and spheres of activity due to their alien status; and unlike other foreign residents who can evade this discrimination by virtue of their countries' reciprocity treaties with Lebanon, the stateless Palestinians can claim no such rights and have consequently been singled out for distinct mistreatment including severe restrictions on travel, property ownership, and ability to work. For decades, they were barred by government decree from more than seventy professions, from doorkeepers, to mechanics, to file clerks, to schoolteachers, to personnel managers; and while the ministry of labour lifted the ban on fifty professions in June 2005, the actual application of this measure has been haphazard at best. Likewise, only 2 percent of Palestinians took advantage of the August 2010 legislation aimed at improving their access to the official labour market and the social security benefit system with Lebanese law still barring Palestinians from at least twenty-five professions requiring syndicated membership (such as law, medicine, and engineering) and discriminating against their work and social conditions (e.g., Palestinians are underpaid in comparison to Lebanese workers for performing the same jobs and overpay for their pensions). Palestinian refugees are still prevented from registering property in accordance with a discriminatory 2001 law.

While Lebanon may offer the starkest example of abuse, nowhere in the Arab world have the Palestinians been treated like "brothers." In accordance with Arab League resolutions, all

Arab states reject naturalization and/or resettlement as solutions to the refugee problem and refuse as a matter of principle to contribute to UNRWA's budget or to assume responsibility for any of its functions; and all restrict the freedom of movement of their Palestinian residents as well as their property rights and access to such government services as health, education, and social benefits. When in 2004 Saudi Arabia revised its naturalization law allowing foreigners who had resided in its territory for ten years to apply for citizenship, the estimated 500,000 Palestinians living and working in the kingdom were conspicuously excluded. The pretext: the Arab League's stipulation that Palestinians living in Arab countries be denied citizenship to avoid dissolution of their identity and protect their "right to return" to their homeland.

Even in Jordan, where most Palestinians have been naturalized and incorporated into the country's fabric, they remain largely marginalized and discriminated against. Between 1949 and 1967, when Jordan was in control of the West Bank, some 250,000-500,000 Palestinians moved across to the East Bank or migrated abroad in search of a better life. But even East Bank Palestinians have been subjected to systematic discrimination. They pay much heavier taxes than their Bedouin compatriots; they receive close to zero state benefits; they are almost completely shut out of government jobs, and they have very little, if any, political representation: Not one of Jordan's twelve governorships is headed by a Palestinian, and the number of Palestinian parliamentarians is disproportionately low.

The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that more than 2-million Palestinians, most of whom have full Jordanian citizenship, are registered as UNRWA refugees with some 370,000 living in ten recognized camps throughout the country. This has in turn resulted in the perception of the kingdom's entire Palestinian population as refugees who would eventually depart to implement their "right of return."

This outlook can be traced to the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, which quickly challenged Jordan as the focus of Palestinian national identity. The situation came to a head in the autumn of 1970 with the organization's attempt to overthrow the Hashemite dynasty. This forced King Hussein to drive the PLO out of the country, gaining traction in July 1988 when hundreds of thousands of West Bankers lost their Jordanian citizenship as a result of the king's severance of "administrative and legal ties" with the territory. After the signing of the DOP and the July 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, the process shifted to the East Bank where thousands of Palestinians were stripped of their Jordanian citizenship. "For East Bankers, the right of return is often held up as the panacea which will recreate Jordan's Bedouin or Hashemite identity," read a 2008 confidential memo by the US ambassador to Amman:

At their most benign, our East Banker contacts tend to count on the right of return as a solution to Jordan's social, political, and economic woes. But underlying many conversations with East Bankers is the theory that once the Palestinians leave, "real" Jordanians can have their country back ... In fact, many of our East Banker contacts do seem more excited about the return [read: departure] of Palestinian refugees than the Palestinians themselves.

Brotherly Massacres

Not only have the host Arab states marginalized and abused their Palestinian guests, but they have not shrunk from massacring them on a grand scale whenever this suited their needs. When in 1970 his throne was endangered by the Palestinian guerilla organizations, the affable and thoroughly Westernized King Hussein slaughtered thousands of Palestinians during a single month, now known as "Black September." Fearing certain death, scores of Palestinian fighters fled their Jordanian "brothers" to surrender themselves to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Civilian casualties were exorbitant with estimates ranging from three thousand to fifteen thousand dead - higher than the Palestinian death toll in the 1948 war.

In the summer of 1976, Lebanese Christian militias, backed by the Syrian army, massacred some 3,500 Palestinians, mostly civilians, in the Beirut refugee camp of Tel Zaatar. Six years later, these very militias slaughtered hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, this time under the IDF's watchful eye. None of the Arab states came to the Palestinians' rescue.

When in 1983 the PLO tried to re-establish its military presence in Lebanon, having been driven out the previous year by Israel, it was unceremoniously expelled by the Syrian government, which went on to instigate an internecine war among the Palestinian factions in Lebanon that raged for years and cost an untold number of lives. So much so that Salah Khalaf (aka Abu Iyad), the number two man in the PLO, accused Damascus of committing worse crimes against the Palestinian people than "those of the Israeli enemy."

In the summer of 2007, the Lebanese army killed hundreds of Palestinians, including many civilians, in the north Lebanese refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared, inflicting widespread environmental damage and driving some 30,000 persons to seek refuge in a nearby camp.

Thousands of Palestinians have been killed in the ongoing Syrian civil war, and tens of thousands have fled the country with refugee camps subjected to military attacks and prolonged sieges that reduced their inhabitants to destitution and starvation. The large Yarmuk camp south of Damascus, once home to some 250,000 Palestinians, including 150,000 officially registered refugees, is now "nothing but ruins, and houses only around 18,000 residents who couldn't escape to Lebanon, Jordan, or elsewhere."

Brotherly Nakba

Much has been made of the Palestinian exodus of 1948, but during their decades of dispersal, the Palestinians have been subjected to similarly traumatic ordeals at the hands of their Arab brothers. As early as the 1950s, the Arab gulf states expelled striking Palestinian workers while the Black September events led to the expulsion of some 20,000 Palestinians from Jordan and the demolition of their camps. And this tragedy pales in comparison with the eviction of most of Kuwait's 400,000 Palestinians after the 1991 Kuwait war. "What Kuwait did to the Palestinian people is worse than what has been done by Israel to Palestinians in the occupied territories," Arafat lamented, as if it were not the PLO's endorsement of Iraq's brutal occupation (August 1990-February 1991) that triggered this deadly retribution.

It mattered not that this community had nothing to do with the PLO's reckless move. Within months of the country's liberation, only 50,000-80,000 Palestinians remained in the emirate, and by the end of the year, the number had dwindled to some 30,000. Most of these were holders of Egyptian travel documents, originally from Gaza; they were unable to obtain visas to anywhere in the world, including Egypt, the governing power in their homeland at the time when they left for the gulf. By contrast, as noted in *The Palestine Yearbook of International Law*, "Israel generally placed no obstacles on the post-war return to the territories of Palestinian families from the West Bank," repatriating some 30,000 West Bankers and 7,000

Gazans with valid Israeli identity cards who had been living and working in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

No sooner had the dust settled on the Kuwait exodus than the Palestinians experienced yet another expulsion, this time from Libya. In a speech on September 1, 1995, as Israel was about to surrender control of the Palestinian populated areas in the West Bank to Arafat's Palestinian Authority (control of the Gaza population had been surrendered the previous year), Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi announced his intention to expel all Palestinians living and working in the country, urging the Arab states to follow his lead so as to expose the hollowness of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. He argued,

Since the Palestinian leaders claim they have now got a homeland and a passport, let the 30,000 Palestinians in Libya go back to their homeland, and let's see if the Israelis would permit them to return. That's how the world will find out that the peace it's been advocating is no more than treachery and a conspiracy.

While no Arab state took up Qaddafi's advice and some implored him to rescind his decision, none opened their doors to the deportees. Lebanon denied entry to several thousand arrivals without Lebanese travel documents and banned maritime transport from Libya to pre-empt the possible flow of deportees while Egypt allowed Palestinians with Israeli permits for entry to Gaza or the West Bank to cross its territory - under escort - to the Palestinian-ruled areas, leaving thousands of hapless refugees stranded in the Egyptian desert for months. Holders of residence permits elsewhere were gradually able to move out; the rest were eventually allowed to remain in Libya when Qaddafi rescinded his decision in early 1997.

Last but not least, the toppling of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 unleashed a tidal wave of violence and terror against Iraq's 34,000-strong Palestinian community, driving some 21,000 people to flee the country in fear for their lives. Yet far from protecting their long time "guests," the internationally-propped Iraqi government was implicated in the arbitrary detention, torture, killing, and disappearance of Palestinians while none of the neighbouring Arab states (with rare, temporary exceptions) opened their doors to fleeing Iraqi Palestinians. "It's hard to understand why Syria has provided refuge to nearly a million Iraqi refugees but is shutting the door on hundreds of Palestinians also fleeing Iraq," commented a leading human rights watchdog. "The Syrian government's mistreatment of these Palestinian refugees contrasts sharply with its declarations of solidarity with the Palestinian people." A few years later the same watchdog voiced the same grievance vis-à-vis the Lebanese government for preventing Palestinian refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war from entering its territory.

No Love Lost

In fairness to the Arab states, their animosity and distrust were more than reciprocated by the Palestinians. As early as the 1948 war, the pan-Arab volunteer force that entered Palestine to fight the Jews found itself at loggerheads with the community it was supposed to defend. Denunciations and violent clashes were common with the local population often refusing to provide the Arab Liberation Army, as this force was ambitiously named, with the basic necessities for daily upkeep and military operations; for their part, Arab army personnel abused their Palestinian hosts of whom they were openly contemptuous.

This mutual animosity was greatly exacerbated in subsequent decades by the recklessness of the Palestinian leadership, headed from the mid-1960s to November 2004 by Arafat, which turned on Arab host societies whenever given the opportunity. As noted above, it was the PLO's subversive activities against the Jordanian regime that set in train the chain of events culminating in the Black September massacres. Likewise, the PLO's abuse of its

growing power base in Lebanon, where it established itself after its expulsion from Jordan, and its meddling in that country's internal politics, helped trigger the Lebanese civil war that raged for nearly two decades and cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

"I remember literally screaming at him in my own house," the Palestinian academic Walid Khalidi, then based in Beirut, said, recalling his desperate attempt to dissuade Arafat from taking sides in the nascent civil war. "I was really very angry because it just didn't make sense for him to say that. I told him that we as Palestinians had no business calling for the ostracism of the Phalangists, and that it would drive them all the way into the hands of the Israelis." This point was not lost on ordinary Palestinians, who often blamed Arafat for their Lebanese misfortunes. When in summer 1976 the PLO chairman visited survivors of the Tel Zaatar massacre, he was treated to a barrage of rotten vegetables and chants of "traitor" by the embittered refugees who accused him of provoking the camp's blood-drenched fall.

This political meddling was accompanied by wanton violence wreaked by the PLO on its host society. In a repeat of their Jordanian lawlessness, Palestinian guerrillas turned the vibrant and thriving Lebanese state, whose capital of Beirut was acclaimed as the "Paris of the Middle East," into a hotbed of violence and anarchy. Several districts of Beirut and the refugee camps came under exclusive Palestinian control, so much so that they became generally known as the Fakhani Republic, after the Beirut district in which Arafat had set up his headquarters. Substantial parts of southern Lebanon or "Fatahland" also were under Palestinian control. In flagrant violation of Lebanese sovereignty, the PLO set up roadblocks, took over buildings and drove out local residents, operated extortion rackets, protected criminals fleeing from Lebanese justice, and committed countless atrocities against Lebanese civilians, notably the January 1976 massacre of hundreds of residents of the Christian town of Damour, south of Beirut, and the expulsion of the remaining population.

Conclusion

Self-serving interventionism under the pretence of pan-Arab solidarity has transformed the bilateral Palestinian-Israeli dispute into a multilateral Arab-Israeli conflict, thereby stirring unrealistic hopes and expectations in Palestinian political circles and, at key junctures, inciting widespread and horrifically destructive violence. The consequence has been to increase the intensity of the conflict and make its resolution far more complex and tortuous, leaving the Palestinians stateless for over six-and-a-half decades.

The sooner the Palestinians reject this spurious link and recognize that their cause is theirs alone, the sooner are they likely to make their own peace with the existence of the Jewish state - as stipulated by the 1947 partition resolution - and win their own state at long last despite their Arab "brothers."

3. Israel's big mistake

These words are printed in three languages, loud and clear, on big red signs beside Israeli roads leading to Palestinian-governed territories:

This road leads to Area "A" under the Palestinian Authority. Entry for Israeli citizens is forbidden, life-threatening, and against Israeli law.

The warning is unlikely to shock anyone familiar with Israel today. As those of us who live here know all too well, a trip inside one of these areas can indeed prove fatal.

Yet the term "Israeli citizens" belies a deeply unsettling truth: not all Israelis need avoid entering these areas. Israeli Arabs come and go freely, and are even encouraged to conduct

business in the territories. Only Jewish Israelis are at risk of death. No less unsettling is that one encounters such signs not at distant outposts, far from densely populated Jewish towns, but on the fringes of Jerusalem and the outskirts of Tel Aviv, just a few miles from Ben-Gurion International Airport.

Israeli Jews have resigned themselves to this reality. Under the laws of our own government, areas within what we consider our ancient national homeland are simply off-limits to Jews. We are not taken aback by this circumstance, not even disturbed. When the Palestinian Authority names central streets after suicide bombers with Jewish blood on their hands, we don't think twice about it. And when we talk about a Palestinian state, we take it for granted that Jews will not be allowed to live there - or that, if allowed, they would never feel safe enough to do so.

To be sure, in the latest round of negotiations headed by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, all sorts of suggestions have been floated for normalizing relations between Israelis and Palestinians. At the end of January, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went so far as to raise the prospect of Jewish settlers having the right to remain in a future Palestinian state. But the outcry of protest from his own coalition partners, together with the longstanding stony refusal of Palestinian leaders even to consider the notion of a single Israeli Jew living in their prospective state, has only underlined the grotesque *abnormality* of our situation.

Correcting this fundamental abnormality is what lies behind Netanyahu's repeated demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the Jewish state. Maintaining it in place is what lies behind their repeated rejection of the same demand. This - not territory - is the essence of the conflict. Just as the very existence of a sovereign Jewish state in the Middle East has been the root cause of the long-running Arab war against that state, accepting its existence will be the root cause of any future peace.

Unfortunately, we Israelis have stopped hoping for such a peace. In the disastrous aftermath of the Oslo accords, having awakened from a false dream, we have become realistic. We don't talk much about peace - tellingly, what in the 1990s was called the "peace process" is now routinely referred to as the "political process" - and even when we use the term, we mean something different by it. We speak not of Arab acceptance of our legitimacy and our national aspirations but of how to arrange affairs so that the Jewish state can be kept safe, and the conflict confined. The hope that our neighbors will put aside their animosity and accept our presence here as right and natural—the hope, that is, for true peace—is something we have abandoned.

In doing so, we have also lost something that is key to our sense of ourselves, and to our future.

1. The phone call that never came

The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, entails more than the absence of violence; the verb from which it is derived means to complete an action, and the term itself connotes wellbeing and tranquillity. In the Bible, *shalom* is the stage that follows victory. Once the Israelites repulse their enemies and are able to "dwell in the land safely," they will also be blessed with "peace in the land" (Leviticus 26:5-6). King David is forced to fight wars throughout his life, but receives God's promise that his son will reap the benefits: "I will give him rest from all his enemies all around . . . and confer peace [*shalom*] and quiet on Israel" (1 Chronicles 22:9).

Thus, the original Hebrew definition of peace involves more than a cessation of hostilities. Peace is the state in which one's neighbours and rivals recognize that one's presence is a fact and start cooperating instead of fighting.

This was the original Zionist vision as well. Even those who acknowledged that the Jewish homeland could not be built without bloodshed looked forward to the day when Israel would become a steady reality, accepted by all of its neighbours. Indeed, when the state of Israel was established, “in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months” (in the words of the 1948 declaration of independence), the new government took pains to “extend our hand to all neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness.” The declaration proceeded to visualize the days after the war, when the young state would “do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.”

At the time, few if any Zionists foresaw the Jewish state as a permanently isolated enclave, under unrelenting threat from hostile neighbours. The image of “a villa in the jungle,” in the vivid coinage of former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, was emphatically not the Zionist dream. Instead, surveying the Middle East, the early Zionists saw the potential of a regional transformation, effectuated through cooperative efforts by Jews and Arabs together. Theodor Herzl inscribed this vision in his fictionalized *Altneuland* (1902), picturing the Arab residents of Palestine as proud future citizens of the Zionist state. A half-century later, David Ben-Gurion reiterated the same vision, extolling Israel’s promise of bringing comity and prosperity to all.

History, of course, proved otherwise. Arab opposition to a Jewish homeland, strong from the beginning, proved unrelenting. In response, the Zionist movement eventually adopted Vladimir (Zev) Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall” strategy: forge ahead, abandon vain efforts at appeasement, and build up the strength of the state against the day when none could dispute its permanence and there would be no choice but to accept it.

The Jewish state’s resounding victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967 convinced many Israelis that that longed-for day had come. Seven years earlier, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had proclaimed to the UN General Assembly that the “only solution” to the Arab-Israeli conflict was “the annulment of Israel.” But now, so sweeping was the young state’s lightning triumph over the massed forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan that in the aftermath it didn’t even seem necessary to draw up peace proposals. A full and genuine peace seemed inevitable: “Tomorrow,” in the words of a wildly popular song by Naomi Shemer, “we will maybe sail/ from Eilat to the Ivory Coast; and on the old destroyers/ golden oranges will be loaded.” Moshe Dayan, then minister of defence, said he was waiting for a phone call.

But the phone call never came. Instead, that same summer, the Arab League convened in Khartoum and issued its famous three “no’s”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel.

In practice, as time went on, the “no’s” took on a somewhat softer tone. Most Arab states did, at least formally, accept UN Resolution 242 with its acknowledgment of the “sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area.” Domestically, victory in 1967 also convinced many of Israel’s own Arab citizens that the state was here to stay; a process of genuine integration between the Arab and Jewish communities began, however haltingly, to unfold. In later years, after two additional wars, Israel would sign peace treaties with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) and thus, in at least two cases, win formal, bilateral recognition of the Jewish state’s right to exist.

2. Accepting Arab rejectionism

But not so fast. If the treaties with Egypt and Jordan were not enough to bring peace - and they manifestly were not - it was because even in those two cases the recognition was grudging; diplomatic relations were accompanied by official coldness and, especially in Egypt, the continued encouragement of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic incitement. Elsewhere, the Arab and Muslim refusal to accept the legitimacy of a sovereign Jewish state in the region persevered and, if anything, intensified as the burden of battle shifted from states to their terrorist proxies and to the sphere of international politics. In the latter arena, an early and enduring Arab victory was the infamous 1975 UN resolution condemning Zionism as a "form of racism and racial discrimination"; ever since that time, and despite the resolution's repeal in 1991, denigration of the Jewish state in the world body has been obsessive and unceasing.

What did change over the years was the rhetoric of the anti-Israel campaign. No longer portrayed as an alien speck in the Arab Middle East that had only to be pulverized and excised, Israel post-1967 came to be depicted as a monstrously aggressive, expansionist, imperialist power that had viciously seized and occupied Arab territories and had set about abusing and victimizing their inhabitants.

The main carrier of this narrative on the ground was Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, founded by the Arab League in 1964 - the most ruthless and intransigent of Israel's enemies and the chosen vehicle of the larger political, diplomatic, and terrorist war waged globally against the Jewish state. Financed lavishly by Arab and, later, European and other international donors, the PLO, headquartered first in Jordan, after 1970 in Lebanon, and after 1982 in Tunisia, also operated freely in the Israeli-administered territories of the West Bank and Gaza, where it controlled much of everyday life.

Meanwhile, an arguably larger change was occurring within the psyche of Israel's political and intellectual elites. Weary of policing the West Bank and Gaza, eager to move into the tantalizing era of reconciliation fleetingly glimpsed in June 1967, embarrassed and discomfited by the serial indictments of Israel levelled by the international community, many began to internalize the critique of their state's fundamental legitimacy and to accept Arab rejectionism as an unalterable condition of life. Despite the brief euphoria generated by Egyptian President Sadat's visit in 1977 and the subsequent peace treaty negotiated at Camp David, Israelis began perceptibly to surrender any thought of transforming the basic terms of a clearly intractable conflict.

The most striking evidence of this fateful shift in mood and perception would present itself in the early 1990s, when, under the premiership of Yitzhak Rabin, Israel started negotiating with its arch-enemy. Whereas real peace would have to be based on acceptance of the legitimacy of a Jewish state in the Middle East, the Palestinian national movement, represented by the PLO, was based on the opposite doctrine. Had Israel retained its hope for real peace, it should have been steadfast in its refusal of any dialogue with this organization, and waited for it to dissolve (as almost happened). Instead, entering into the most ambitious and futile of peace processes, it picked the PLO as its partner, thereby compromising on the issue of its own legitimacy and helping to create a new political entity based explicitly on *anti-Zionism*. In exchange for tepid and partial recognition, a small Jewish state in the midst of a huge Arab region agreed to shrink itself still further.

This was the new meaning of "peace," and, just as one might expect, it led to nothing but violence. The passing of Gaza and most of the West Bank's populated areas into the hands of Arafat and his murderous kleptocracy did nothing to resolve the problem of the 1948 Arab refugees (on which more below), to prepare the local Arab population for genuine peace, or

to mitigate the larger Arab/Muslim refusal to accept a Jewish state. If anything, it achieved the contrary aim; in advancing that aim, the PLO initiated a sustained campaign of terror whose toll in blood would number in the thousands of Israeli civilians.

Yet even this was not enough to dissuade successive Israeli leaders from trying to woo some form of acceptance from the steadfastly recalcitrant Palestinians. The Oslo accords signed on the White House lawn in 1993 ostensibly obliged the PLO to strike from its covenant the call for Israel's eradication. In the late 1990s, during his brief term of office, Ehud Barak, having reached a reckless final-status agreement with the Palestinian Authority (PA), insisted that Arafat declare a final end to the conflict. Benjamin Netanyahu now demands that Mahmoud Abbas recognize Israel as a Jewish state. So far, all such efforts have failed.

None of this should come as a surprise. In embracing the Palestinian national movement as its partner, Israel pretended not to see that, absent its fundamental objection to the existence of the Jewish state, there was no Palestinian national movement.

3. *Paying the price*

That is today's reality. Before considering what if anything might be done to change it, let's look at a few examples of the price paid by Israel for constricting its Zionist horizons and acquiescing in the conditions imposed on it from without.

Tel Asur, also known as Baal Hazor, is the highest mountain in the Judean hills north of Jerusalem. Of its twin peaks, one is home to a military base and the other is open to visitors - unless they are Jewish. (The area is surrounded by hostile villages.) From the top one can enjoy a fascinating view of the Holy Land: the Mediterranean and the coastal plain to the west; the Gilead mountains in Transjordan to the east; the high mountains of Jerusalem and Hebron to the south; and the great Mount Hermon, facing Damascus, to the north. Mentioned in the biblical story of Absalom and Amnon (2 Samuel 13:23-30), the site, according to an ancient tradition, is where the patriarch Abraham first stood after separating from his nephew Lot and where he was promised by God that all he saw spread out before him would forever be the land of his descendants (Genesis 13:14-15).

To anyone who cherishes the Bible, here is a place of compelling and indeed romantic interest. Under normal circumstances, the Jews in Ofra, the nearby Israeli village to the southwest, and the Christians of Tayibe, the Arab village to the southeast, would cooperate to realize their area's religious, cultural, and economic potential. Yet the Arabs of Tayibe are resolutely opposed to the mere presence of Jews in the area, and this turns everything into a political pitched battle.

Thus, when the residents of Ofra began to construct a sewage-processing plant to protect the area's environment and drinking water, some neighbouring Arabs, pushed by Israeli "peace activists," petitioned to block its completion. The fact that the plant would also serve some of their villages, while being fully financed by Israeli Jews, was no deterrent. Claiming that part of the structure was built on private land and lacked the necessary permissions, they filed a lawsuit that halted the project in its final stage. Now the unfinished plant corrodes in the sun, and the sewage runs freely.

Such stories abound in the West Bank, an area of picturesque landscapes rich in biblical and historical associations, all within a few minutes' drive from Israel's bustling metropolitan centres.. It could and should be turned into a biospheric sanctuary, devoted to preserving the many archaeological treasures and traditional forms of agriculture to be found in the area. If this were to happen, local residents would benefit from a dramatic rise in amenities and

employment opportunities, and the world would enjoy access to an un-mined portion of the biblical heritage. Yet with the exception of a few hiking paths, some freshly excavated ruins, and a number of boutique wineries and olive-oil presses - all in the Jewish sector - very little of this potential is being realized. On the contrary: in most of the Arab-inhabited countryside, delicate ecosystems are maltreated, sewage is uncared for, waste is burned openly, and scarce aquifers are polluted.

Another case of underdevelopment is the Old City of Jerusalem, one of the world's best-known ancient sites. Commonly, such prized urban spaces undergo renewal projects, carefully restoring old buildings and streetscapes, rebuilding infrastructure, modernizing electrical and other delivery systems. This was done in the Jewish Quarter, which had been destroyed and plundered in the 1948-49 war and deserted during the Jordanian occupation. After its liberation in 1967, renewal projects uncovered, among other sites, the Herodian Quarter, the Burnt House, and the Roman Cardo, essential attractions for visitors from around the world.

No similar program has ever been seriously considered for other parts of the Old City, mainly populated since the 1950s by low-income Arab families living in cramped and dilapidated quarters. One might think there would be broad support for an initiative to rejuvenate the Old City as a whole, uncovering the archaeological riches lying underneath and bringing the entire walled area up to 21st-century standards. Yet the Palestinian leadership unfailingly objects to any such proposals. Whatever the area's Arab residents may wish for in terms of an improved quality of life, the ethic of "resistance" - fuelled as ever by foreign money funnelled through PA enforcers - assures that these families stay where they are.

As elsewhere, the real source of tension in Jerusalem's Old City is not Israel's presence there since the June 1967 war but, rather, the longer-standing rejection of Jewish national legitimacy. One sees this clearly in the most seemingly refractory conflict of all: the one over the Temple Mount.

Conventional wisdom has it that any attempt to change the status quo on the Mount - where, ever since 1967, Israel has allowed the Islamic Waqf to retain its authority over the Muslim buildings as well as access to the plaza itself - will enrage the entire Muslim world and ignite a conflagration. But why? The Holy of Holies in the ancient Temple - the spot on the Mount most sacred to Judaism - was located, according to most authorities, in the middle of today's 37-acre plaza. That spot is now occupied by the Dome of the Rock, which dates from the 7th century and is one of the most ancient and beautiful of Muslim monuments.

Unlike Al-Aqsa, the famous mosque located on the southern edge of the terrace, which faces south to allow worshippers to pray toward Mecca, the Dome is not and never was a mosque. According to some sources, it was built to protect the rock known as the foundation stone, and thereby to mark the place of the ancient Jewish temple. Its creators had no intention of denying the site's Jewish importance, or of Islamizing it; indeed, some claim that the site was used as a synagogue in the Middle Ages, and until this day the whole platform is also known as *Bayt al-Muqaddas*, an Arabic version of *Beyt Hamikdash*, the classical Hebrew term for the Temple and its immediate environs.

Sadly, despite this history of former coexistence, today's political struggle over the fate of Jerusalem has corrupted religious understandings. Al-Aqsa, co-opted by the Palestinian resistance movement, has stretched symbolically over the entire Temple Mount, so that Jewish attempts to pray anywhere in the vast open areas of the plaza are portrayed as a threat to the mosque. Yet the truth is that Israel for its part has never repudiated the significance of this holy place to Muslims, and no amount of Jewish prayer, not even the building of a synagogue on the Mount, would harm the mosque in any way.

Still another contentious issue plagued by resistance to Zionism is the status of Arab citizens of Israel. Constituting roughly 20% of the population, they are the beneficiaries of numerous government programs aimed at improving their education, their economic opportunities, and their welfare. Yet while investment in the Arab sector is high, and while the share of taxes paid by Arabs is kept low, progress has been lingering. The reason is that, no matter how much Israel tries to advance the integration of its Arab citizens, there is no ignoring the elephant in the room: the issue of Arab loyalty to and solidarity with the Jewish state.

That issue affects both the way Israeli Jews treat Israeli Arabs and the way Arabs relate to the rest of society. There is no blinking the fact of discrimination against Arabs in Israel. Sheer prejudice may play a part here, but probably only a minor part. In general, it is no simple matter to join hands with people who very likely oppose your nation and wish it to disappear, and who therefore cannot be assumed to share your conception of the common good.

But the greater obstacles to Israeli Arab advancement are internal. The many Arabs who do accept the Jewish state as their permanent home are not represented in positions of leadership, and those who actively promote cooperation and integration are regularly branded as traitors. Recently, for example, an Arab Christian priest began advocating that Christian Arabs enlist in the Israeli army (they are officially exempt from service, though some volunteer); for this brave act, he was promptly silenced and had to be given police protection. In such an atmosphere, genuine integration remains extremely difficult, if not impossible.

There is much more to be said about the price paid within Israel itself for the forced closing of Zionism's horizons. The regional price is, if anything, even higher. Israel is a dense country, inhabiting a small plot of land with scarce resources, and making an extraordinary success of it. But without a way to spread its success outward, the future is problematic. Real estate in Israel is expensive, not only because of market malfunctions but also because there is nowhere beyond the immediate borders where Jews can even consider living.

When a Jew from abroad wants to buy a home close to Jerusalem but can't find what he's looking for at a price he can afford, he will not turn his gaze to Amman, just a 90-minute drive from the Old City, but will stay in New Jersey and, a few times a year, fly twelve hours each way. Similarly, when an Israeli entrepreneur exhausts the opportunities of the home market, he will expand his reach not to neighbouring lands but to Europe and the United States. And then there is the charitable front: Israel spontaneously dispatches aid delegations as far as Haiti and the Philippines, but is largely unable (at least publicly) to bring any real benefit to its own bleeding and war-torn region.

4. The path not taken

Was a different outcome conceivable?

The answer is yes, but a highly qualified yes. In the 1970s and 80s, had Israel not abandoned its single-minded quest for real, final peace, and had it stuck to its refusal to enter into dialogue with the unreconstructed PLO, it is at least possible (as I mentioned earlier) that the latter might have withered away. For this to have happened, of course, it would also have been necessary for other Palestinian leaders to emerge, leaders who, seeking the benefit of all, were prepared for reconciliation with Israel.

Indeed, there were such leaders-in-the-making among West Bank Arabs, though the odds against them were formidable and in the end decisive. Menahem Milson, who served briefly as civil administrator of the West Bank in the early 1980s, recalls how a "group of young

Palestinians who had become politically active during my period [in office] laid the groundwork for a new political organization, the Palestinian Democratic Movement for Peace, calling for negotiations with Israel." A number of West Bank notables - mayors, village chiefs, religious figures, educators, intellectuals, and others - were similarly bent on escaping the predatory grip of the PLO. From such beginnings it might have been possible to grow, in time, a new, moderate political class, ready in the right circumstances to take and exercise power in public interest.

It was not to be. On one side stood the PLO, which since 1974 had been appointed by the Arab countries as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Its coffers overflowing with Arab and, later, European money, it distributed patronage, Mafia-style, in return for submission and unquestioning loyalty; nor did it hesitate to counter dissent and deviation by means of threats, intimidation, and murder. On the other side stood the Israeli administration, fastidiously non-interventionist in the civil affairs of the territories when not positively preferring to deal with the PLO, which it regarded as the only source of authority capable of insuring domestic calm (a mistake soon to be repeated and amplified by the Rabin government in entering into the Oslo negotiations). Between these two forces, as Milson records, the nascent democratic movement of the 1980s was condemned to failure.

Since then, some others have taken up the banner of an anti-PLO strategy. In his *The Case for Democracy* (2004), for example, Natan Sharansky urges Israel and the West to support and work with those Palestinians who, inspired by the idea of a free society, familiar with the workings of Israel's democratic political culture, and eager to build truly representative institutions of their own, are the only potential peace partners worthy of the name. Moshe Yaalon, now Israel's defence minister, records in his 2008 memoir, *The Longer Shorter Way* (Hebrew), his own odyssey as a peacenik mugged by Oslo and thenceforth converted to a more sober but also more activist and more hopeful position; reaching conclusions similar to Sharansky's, his book is a model of clarity and common sense on where Israel went wrong in its dealings with the Palestinians and on how, by ceasing to treat with dictators while patiently helping to plant and nourish the seeds of democracy, it might correct its error.

5. What to do now?

What, then, can be done? Of course, as long as we Israelis continue to deal with a Palestinian leadership that cannot and will not accept the legitimacy of the Jewish state, there is a harsh limit to what can be achieved. That being so, Israel must simply allow the current, American-led "peace process" to self-destruct, as it will naturally tend to do.

But with the Arab world as a whole in flux, there may be a unique opportunity for Israel on its own to take steps in an alternative direction: one not focused solely on survival or on playing for time, that is not resigned to the permanent Arab rejection of the Jewish state, and that can circumvent the inevitable deadlock whenever we seek to appease or compromise with the Palestinian national movement. In short, the most important task is to change the Israeli mindset by recovering a positive Zionist vision.

Let's start with the issue of the West Bank. Proponents of the two-state solution tend to see the West Bank as a separate territory that was seized by Israel from Palestinian rule in 1967. This is totally inaccurate: the West Bank is not a real territorial unit, there was never any Palestinian state there prior to Israeli control, and to this day Israel's claim to the territory under international law is as strong as or stronger than anyone else's. After 1948 and until 1988, when Jordan renounced its own claim to the area (a claim recognized by only three nations, and never by the Arab League) in favour of the PLO, the residents enjoyed Jordanian citizenship.

Were Israelis to return to their original concept of a Jewish state accepted by the surrounding Arab environment, their futile negotiations with the Palestinian national movement could be replaced by a dialogue addressing the very real problems of the Arab population of the West Bank. The biggest such problem is their legal and political status. If, as is possible, the PA is not going to become a state, what will be the identity of those who today live under its jurisdiction? Will they be able to recover their Jordanian citizenship? Will they enjoy full integration into Israel? Will a form of autonomy arise that will replace the PA?

Obviously, none of these options is simple or uncontroversial; by its very nature, the challenge admits of no simple or uncontroversial answers. But difficult does not mean insoluble. At only a fraction of the effort invested in the two-state solution over the last two decades, it would be possible to craft a model of governance that would benefit all parties. Once the idea of implacable Palestinian rejectionism is removed from the equation, even the option of integration into Israel makes sense. And why not? In the huge Arab Middle East, the Jews are a minority; in the small Jewish state, Arabs can be a minority. Fair enough.

Then there is the issue of the Arab refugees, which would similarly benefit from a paradigm shift in Zionist thinking. Their story is well known: the war that attended the founding of Israel in 1948 created hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees who sought shelter amidst their brethren in the surrounding Arab states. At the exact same time, and in almost exactly equal numbers, Jews were forcibly expelled from the Arab states of the Middle East. Put simply, a harsh wartime population exchange occurred.

The natural and most humane solution was to absorb all of these refugees where they were, which is precisely what Israel did with the Jewish refugees.. Yet, by decision of the Arab powers and with the active connivance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the Arab refugees, except for those in Jordan, were kept stateless and apart as an enduring monument to the "catastrophe" (*naqba*) of 1948 and an invaluable diplomatic and propaganda weapon against the Jewish state.

UNRWA, created as a temporary aid agency specifically and solely for the Palestinian refugees, renews its mandate every other year, and the refugees, their numbers swollen into the millions by successive generations who know no other existence, remain imprisoned in the camps. Meanwhile, the campaign against Israel's legitimacy prominently features a demand for the "resettlement" of the refugees and their descendants in their ancestral homes - a demand that holds out the prospect of destroying the state's Jewish character altogether.

An Israel seeking real peace, a peace based on acceptance of its existence as a Jewish state, could also push for the rehabilitation of the Palestinian refugees and an end to their ongoing tragedy. Back in the 1980s, Menachem Begin's government made a small effort to start such a process, but it was never carried through in a serious way. Today, as criticism of UNRWA is gathering steam globally, a self-possessed Israel could both urge and take a leading role in a broader campaign to put an end to this lingering ramification of the 1948 war.

Another initiative worth pursuing much more vigorously than heretofore is the integration of Israel's Arab citizens, including by requiring of them, as it does of Israeli Jews, some form of national service. A third would entail standing confidently behind what Israel regards as the best ideas for local and regional development, ignoring the automatic objections of those who see the Jewish state as an illegitimate power.

An example of the last is the biospheric sanctuary mentioned earlier. This could be brought into being without waiting for a political solution for the West Bank as a whole. The Arab

inhabitants of the area will cooperate if they understand that Israel is not only serious but unwavering in its intentions. The same can be said of urban renewal in the Old City: a clear Israeli vision and a strong stand against pushbacks, both domestic and international, can turn such a plan into a reality for the benefit of all.

Impossible? The case of the light-rail system in Jerusalem, which opened in 2011, proves that it can be done. The system's route crosses the pre-June 1967 border, stitching together Arab and Jewish neighbourhoods as if Jerusalem were never a divided city and as if there were no tension or hostility between Jews and Arabs. The service works quite well, and has become an undisputed fact of city life.

In brief, Israel must adopt a more confident view of itself. Over the last decade, there has been a welcome renewal of interest among Israelis in classic Jewish and Zionist thought. But that is not enough. Traumatized by decades of bitter conflict, we Israelis find it hard to regard the Arabs as partners; demoralized by decades of anti-Zionist discourse, we find it even harder to regard ourselves as potential benefactors of the region.

But it would befit us to dream again. In 1993, Shimon Peres, in *The New Middle East*, composed a rhapsodic paean to the era of unity and prosperity about to be ushered in, as he saw it, by the Oslo Accords. It was a deluded vision, soon to be shattered. But if, at some imaginable point in the future, Israel were to achieve true acceptance from its neighbours, a real new Middle East could indeed emerge. Is it too much to envision the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem megalopolis as the centre of the future Levant? Or the spectacle of Jews being welcomed as residents in Arab countries? Or a massive *aliya* from North America? Or the restoration of Jerusalem as the international hub it previously was, with the old routes connecting Jaffa to Beirut, Damascus, and Cairo, long shut down and neglected, once more facilitating the traffic of goods and ideas around the region?

In 1949, after the ceasefire in the war of independence, David Ben-Gurion was touring the newly conquered Eilat region on the southern tip of the new-born state. Pointing toward the mountains of Edom on the Jordanian side of the border, he asked the army officer leading the tour how one might go about capturing them. The officer, like the professional he was, replied by sketching a quick tactical plan, but then stopped and asked the prime minister, "Why, do you have any plans to conquer the area?" "No," answered Ben-Gurion, "I won't try to capture it. But maybe you will."

Israel needs no more territory or conquests. But the mindset of our current leaders is much too far from Ben-Gurion's. Speaking with a large group of journalists in 2012, Benjamin Netanyahu projected the persona of an uncompromising leader preoccupied with one mission: survival. That is an admirable thing; we need leaders ready to take upon themselves that most onerous of responsibilities. But if Ben-Gurion, leading a much more fragile country and facing perhaps even greater external challenges, could see beyond his own horizon, then we should be able to expect the same of our own leaders. When they don't see as far as we think they safely could, ours is the duty to help them envisage, and debate, the better future that might lie ahead.

4. War across the borders

It has become a commonplace to claim that the unrest in the Arab world is challenging the state borders laid down in the Arab world following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918.

This claim, however, is only very partially valid. It holds true in a specific section of the Middle East, namely the contiguous land area stretching from Iran's western borders to the Mediterranean Sea, and taking in the states currently known as Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

In this area, a single sectarian war is currently taking place. The nominal governments in Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut may claim to rule in the name of the Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese peoples. But the reality of power distribution in each of these areas shows something quite different.

In each of these areas, local, long suppressed differences between communities are combining with the region-wide cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia to produce conflict, discord and latent or open civil war.

In each case, sectarian forces are linking up with their fellow sect members (or co-ethnics, if that's a word, in the case of the Kurds) in the neighbouring "country" against local representatives of the rival sect.

Let's take a look at the rival coalitions. These are not simply theoretical constructs. The cooperation between the relevant sides is largely overt, and has been extensively verified.

On one side, there are the Shia (and Alawi) allies of Iran. These are the Maliki government in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and Hizballah, the Iranian proxy force which dominates Lebanon.

Both Hizballah and the Maliki government, at the behest of Iran, have played a vital role in the survival of Bashar Assad and his current resurgence.

Hizballah's role is well-documented. The movement maintains around 5,000 fighters at any one time in Syria. They have just completed a spearhead role in a nearly year-long campaign to drive the rebels from the area adjoining the Lebanese border. They are also deployed in Damascus.

Assad's Achilles heel throughout has been the lack of committed fighters willing to engage on his behalf. Hizballah, working closely with Iran, has played a vital role in filling that gap.

In addition, Hizballah is working hard to suppress any Sunni thoughts of insurrection in Lebanon itself. Its forces cooperated with the Lebanese Army in crushing Sunni Islamists in Sidon in June, 2013. It also offers support to Alawi elements engaged in a long running mini-war with pro-Syrian rebel Sunnis in the city of Tripoli.

Maliki's role on behalf of Assad is less well-reported but no less striking.

It is first of all worth remembering that the Iraqi prime minister spent from 1982-90 in exile in Iran, and his political roots and allegiances are, unambiguously, to Shia Islamism.

Regular overflights and ground convoys have used Iraqi territory since the start of the Syrian civil war to carry vital Iranian arms and supplies from Iran to Assad's forces in Syria.

A western intelligence report obtained by Reuters in late 2012 confirmed this, noting that "planes are flying from Iran to Syria via Iraq on an almost daily basis, carrying IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps) personnel and tens of tons of weapons to arm the Syrian security forces and militias fighting against the rebels."

It also asserted that Iran was "continuing to assist the regime in Damascus by sending trucks overland via Iraq" to Syria.

In addition, Iraqi Shia volunteers from the Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigades and other formations have helped to fill Bashar's gap in available and committed infantry.

The Maliki government has made no effort to stop the flow of such fighters across the border – even as it engages in a U.S.-supported counter insurgency against Sunni jihadis in western Anbar province in Iraq.

So the Iran-led regional bloc is running a well-coordinated, well-documented single war in three countries.

The Sunni Arab side of the line is predictably more chaotic and disunited. On this side, too, there are discernible links, but no single, clear alliance.

Unlike among the pro-Iran bloc, only the most radical fringe of the Sunnis cross the borders to engage in combat. There is no Sunni equivalent to the Qods Force cadres active in Syria and Lebanon.

Among the Sunni radicals, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group now controls a single contiguous area stretching from eastern Syria to western Anbar province in Iraq, and taking in Fallujah city in Iraq.

Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian franchise of al-Qaeda, is now active also in Lebanon. It has on a number of occasions penetrated Hizballah's security sanctum in the Dahiyeh neighbourhood of south Beirut.

More broadly, Saudi Arabia is the patron of the Sunni interest in both Lebanon and Syria.

It is currently backing rebel forces in the south of Syria, and pro-Saudis dominate the Syrian National Coalition, which purports to be the political leadership of the rebellion.

It also supports and promotes the March 14th movement in Lebanon, and recently pledged \$3 billion for the Lebanese Armed Forces – presumably in a bid to build a force that could balance Hizballah.

But both Qatar and Turkey also play an important role in backing the Syrian rebels, and have their own clients among the fighting groups.

Saudi and Turkish fear and distrust of radical Sunni Islamist fighting groups prevent the emergence of a clear "Sunni Islamist international" to rival the Shia international of Iran.

Still, it is undeniable that cooperation exists among the various Sunni forces in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

It's just that it's a complicated and sometimes chaotic criss-crossing of various rival interests and outlooks on the Sunni side, rather than a coherent single bloc.

And finally, of course, there is a single contiguous area of Kurdish control stretching from the Iraq-Iran border all the way to deep within Syria. This zone of control is divided between the Iraqi Kurds of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Syrian Kurds of the rival, PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Once again, it is a contiguous area of control based on ethnic affiliation.

None of this means that the official borders of these three countries are going to officially disappear in the immediate future. The U.S. administration and others are committed to their survival, so they are likely to survive for now, in the semi-fictional and porous state in which they currently exist.

This, however, should not obscure the more crucial point that the entire area between the Iraq-Iran border and the Mediterranean Sea is currently the site of a single war, following a single dynamic, fought between protagonists defined by ethnic and sectarian loyalty.

5. Saudi Arabia: A kingdom on guard

The reaction was almost instant. On the same day that the Saudi government announced a ban on the Muslim Brotherhood, the four-finger sign of sympathy with Egypt's Brothers disappeared from Twitter picture displays.

No one in the kingdom was willing to take the risk of being accused of supporting the Islamist group, even if the yellow symbol was sometimes just an expression of pity for the victims of the Cairo regime's repression of Islamists.

This month's ban, it was clear, would be enforced under harsh antiterrorism regulations introduced just a few weeks earlier. So sweeping were the new laws that any hint of support for outlawed groups could be deemed a criminal offence.

The actions taken by the Saudi leadership reflect an increasingly hardline attitude in Riyadh that has rattled political activists and puzzled Mid-East and western officials.

The Muslim Brotherhood certainly has followers in Saudi Arabia. And they were emboldened by the sudden, if shortlived, success of their brethren in Egypt and Tunisia after the 2011 uprisings. But in an absolute monarchy, where no right of assembly is recognised, it has been impossible for a group to emerge that could pose a threat to the House of Saud.

Casting a wide net against a group's sympathisers is not the usual Saudi way of doing business. The government's preferred method is to combine subtle co-option and not-so-subtle punishment on a narrow band of leaders and agitators.

"It's strange. Nothing has dramatically changed in Saudi Arabia to justify this," says a Riyadh-based lawyer.

Around the same time as the legal crackdown, Saudi Arabia stepped up a long-running dispute with Qatar, accusing its smaller neighbour of destabilising the Gulf. Along with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, Riyadh withdrew its ambassador from Doha. It also hinted at more stringent measures, including closing its borders and airspace, in what is shaping up to be one of the worst crises within the Gulf Cooperation Council, the regional group that includes both Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

People close to the Riyadh government say Saudi Arabia is assuming regional responsibility and will no longer tolerate those who spread chaos across the region. "We are becoming an initiator of policy and defining our interests," says one.

Others, however, say the moves are a sign of growing insecurity at a time when an ageing leadership is desperate to return the Arab world to a more comfortable pre-Arab awakening status quo, however intolerant that might seem.

This apparent nervousness has been accentuated by the suspicion among Saudi officials that the US is abandoning the Kingdom while seeking better relations with Iran, Riyadh's regional rival. President Barack Obama will seek to assuage these fears when he visits Saudi Arabia this week.

"Saudi Arabia has changed. Before it was more cautious, more diplomatic. Now it's more assertive and more paranoid," says a Saudi political analyst who asked to remain anonymous.

Islamist threat

There is much to trouble a conservative regional leader in a Middle East that is in a state of permanent ferment. Three years after the outbreak of Arab uprisings that sent ripples of panic through the autocratic Gulf, Saudi Arabia is operating in a more threatening environment. The biggest blow in 2011 was the loss of Hosni Mubarak, Riyadh's reliable Egyptian ally. Worse yet, his demise ushered in a Saudi nightmare: the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood.

It might seem ironic for a Wahhabi theocracy to oppose so forcefully a party that mixes religion with politics. But it is precisely because the monarchy bases its legitimacy on Islam that it fears Brotherhood rivalry. If political Islam were to be rooted in power in the largest Arab country, it could become an exportable commodity to the Gulf.

Fortunately for the kingdom, the Brotherhood's rule in Cairo came to an abrupt end last summer in a military coup that had popular support. Saudi Arabia quickly embraced the new military regime and propped it up with billions of dollars of economic aid. The effective restoration of the old Mubarak order was an opportunity the Saudis were now determined to preserve.

"There is a conviction in Saudi that the Muslim Brotherhood is the only power that could have exploited the Arab spring, and so they think that without the Brotherhood there can be no revolutions," says the Saudi political analyst.

The Saudi government's fretting over Islamists in the kingdom, however, did not end with the fall of Mohammad Morsi, Egypt's Islamist president. As Cairo's crackdown on the Brotherhood escalated, many Saudis were at odds with official policy as their sympathies lay closer to the Islamists than to the Egyptian army.

The anxiety over Islamists in the UAE also added to Saudi concerns. Last year the UAE government accused dozens of alleged Islamists of plotting a coup backed by the Brotherhood overseas. In July the supreme court handed down long prison sentences to the alleged plotters in a trial criticised as unfair by western human rights groups.

As pressure on the Brotherhood widened, however, Saudi relations with Qatar grew frostier. Qatar, the only Gulf state traditionally sympathetic to Islamists and to have backed the Morsi government, refused to join the regional crackdown on the Brotherhood. Saudi pressure for a change of policy in Doha, however, has continued to intensify, climaxing in the withdrawal of the three Gulf ambassadors this month.

According to Gulf sources, the main Saudi demand has been for the closure or the drastic curbing of the coverage of Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based network and only remaining popular

channel that gives ample airtime to Brotherhood members. Qatar, however, has insisted it will not be bullied. It has argued that it is neither committed to the Brotherhood nor able to dictate to Al Jazeera how it should cover Egypt's story.

Regional rivalry

Saudi Arabia might have handled Egypt with a softer touch, had it felt more secure in its neighbourhood. But the stand-off between the Sunni kingdom and Shia Iran has intensified over the past three years, as the two regional heavyweights backed opposite sides in the Syrian war.

To Saudi Arabia's chagrin, moreover, Iran's image in the world has improved with the election of Hassan Rouhani. The centrist president favours engagement with the west and has embarked on negotiations with world powers that are designed to curb Iran's nuclear programme and ensure it remains peaceful.

The prospect of a resolution of the nuclear dispute – bolstered by the Rouhani government's signing of an interim nuclear agreement in November – has sparked a profound rift in Saudi-US relations.

The growing production of shale gas in the US, along with its reduced dependence on Gulf oil, has deepened Saudi fear that the era of a special relationship with the US – one based on an exchange of oil for security – was nearing an end. Saudi officials have been uncharacteristically vocal in their criticism of the US, which they also blame for failures in Syria. And they have made no secret of their opposition to a nuclear deal with Iran, which they suspect would lead to western acquiescence of Iranian regional hegemony.

"With the warming of US relations with Iran and the reduction in Saudi Arabia's strategic oil importance, the Saudis are concerned about losing out," says the Riyadh-based lawyer.

What Saudi officials do not express, however, is that the sense of vulnerability and anxiety about the future might be exacerbated by something closer to home: the state of the monarchy. King Abdullah is about 90 years old and is said to have considerably reduced his workload in the past year. Crown Prince Salman, his brother, is also believed to be in fragile health. Analysts and diplomats say that some princes and aides, including Khalid al-Tuwaijri, the king's "gatekeeper", have assumed greater authority and pushed for a more uncompromising policy.

Internal disarray appears to have affected Saudi decision-making, particularly in policy towards Syria. Saudi backing for a nebulous rebel movement has also led to a flood of Saudis joining extremist groups – potentially forming a new wave of jihadis who might return to the kingdom and wage a domestic jihad, much as they had done after fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Last month Riyadh sought to stem the flow of Saudi militants (at least 1,000 have gone to Syria, according to the interior ministry, and many more according to western sources) by imposing 20-year jail terms on those travelling to fight abroad.

Until recently Syria policy was led by Bandar bin Sultan, the hawkish national security chief and former ambassador to Washington. Saudi watchers say that although Prince Bandar might still be involved, the Syria file has now been handed to Mohammed bin Naif, the more restrained interior minister whose focus is on antiterrorism at home.

Security gamble

It is not only in Syria, however, that Saudi Arabia has taken a dangerous gamble.

As the kingdom flexes its muscle, it risks provoking broader turmoil in the region while also breeding resentment at home. With the new antiterrorism laws, even the small political space that had been opened by King Abdullah is at risk of vanishing as freedom of expression is restricted.

Western diplomats say that Riyadh and other Gulf states financing Egypt's economy should be using their leverage to counsel reconciliation and reform instead of replicating Egypt's harsh measures against the Brotherhood.

With the Gulf, too, there are similar concerns. As one senior Gulf official says: "The message that's now being given to political Islam is go underground, and that's after 25 years of telling them to learn about democracy."

The fear for Egypt and beyond is that the repression of the Islamist group that had renounced violence long ago might moderate some of its leaders but also unleash radicalised splinter groups. This could further swell jihadi ranks at a time of resurgence for al-Qaeda franchises in North Africa and Syria.

Saudi Arabia's attempt to force a united Gulf front towards Egypt could also backfire, undermining a GCC alliance on which it hopes increasingly to rely to counter Iran's authority. New fissures are already apparent in the region.

As Tarek Osman, author of *Egypt on the Brink*, says, two camps are emerging: one led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which maintains that political Islam is a perilous force that should be confronted; and the other led by Qatar and Turkey's ruling party, which believes in political Islam's ability to transform the region.

"This confrontation has not reached its peak yet," he says.

Saudi Arabia's policies might be pursued in the name of stability. But they could well achieve the opposite.

Gulf Cooperation Council: Minnows frustrate Riyadh's plans for alliance

In the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia looked to protect itself through the Gulf Cooperation Council, the loose political and economic alliance of six oil-rich Sunni monarchies of which it is the most powerful member.

By working through the GCC, Riyadh managed to advance policies it favoured, including a peaceful transition of power in Yemen and support for the Nato military intervention in Libya.

It was also nominally a GCC force, though one largely made up of Saudis, that was dispatched to Bahrain to shore up the Sunni monarchy threatened by an uprising by the Shia minority.

Saudi Arabia's efforts to bolster the authority of the GCC, however, have been frustrated on other fronts. Smaller Gulf states have been willing to co-operate when their interests converged with those of the Saudis, mindful of the benefits of closing of ranks to counter regional turbulence. But they have also continued to guard their independence carefully.

So when the kingdom suggested that Jordan and Morocco, two other Arab monarchies, should be added to the GCC club, the smaller members of the alliance balked. Another Saudi plan to upgrade the alliance into a full union was also rebuffed, receiving enthusiastic

support only from Bahrain. Oman took the unusual step of making its opposition public in a statement by its foreign minister.

The Saudi vision of a more coherent and united GCC has appeared to unravel in recent months, as Riyadh sparred with Doha and Oman was revealed to have hosted secret US-Iran talks. Only two other states joined Saudi Arabia in withdrawing their ambassadors from Doha this month, with Kuwait and Oman apparently unconvinced by the accusations against Qatar.

Gulf officials insist that rifts will not destabilise the GCC. But so sensitive are Gulf tensions that when Arab leaders met at their yearly summit this week in Kuwait, the Saudi-Qatari dispute was not even put on the agenda.

6. Why 'moderate Islam' is an oxymoron

At a time when terrorism committed in the name of Islam is rampant, we are continuously being assured - especially by three major institutions that play a dominant role in forming the Western mindset, namely, mainstream media, academia, and government - that the sort of Islam embraced by "radicals," "jihadis," and so forth, has nothing to do with "real" Islam.

"True" Islam, so the narrative goes, is intrinsically free of anything "bad." It's the nut-jobs who hijack it for their own agenda that are to blame.

More specifically, we are told that there exists a "moderate" Islam and an "extremist" Islam - the former good and true, embraced by a Muslim majority, the latter a perverse sacrilege practiced by an exploitative minority.

But what do these dual adjectives - "moderate" and "extremist" - ultimately mean in the context of Islam? Are they both equal and viable alternatives insofar as how Islam is understood? Are they both *theologically* legitimate? This last question is particularly important, since Islam is first and foremost a religious way of life centred around the words of a deity (Allah) and his prophet (Muhammad) - the significance of which is admittedly unappreciated by secular societies.

Both terms - "moderate" and "extremist" - have to do with *degree*, or less mathematically, *zeal*: how much, or to what extent, a thing is practised or implemented. As *Webster's* puts it, "moderate" means "observing reasonable limits"; "extremist" means "going to great or exaggerated lengths."

It's a question, then, of doing either too much or too little.

The problem, however, is that mainstream Islam offers a crystal-clear way of life, based on the teachings of the Koran and Hadith - the former, containing what purport to be the sacred words of Allah, the latter, the example (or *sunna*, hence "Sunnis") of his prophet, also known as the most "perfect man" (*al-insan al-kamil*). Indeed, based on these two primary sources and according to normative Islamic teaching, all human actions fall into five categories: forbidden actions, discouraged actions, neutral actions recommended actions, and obligatory actions.

In this context, how does a believer go about "moderating" what the deity and his spokesman have commanded? One can either try to observe Islam's commandments or one

can ignore them: any more or less is not Islam - a word which means "submit" (to the laws, or *sharia*, of Allah).

The real question, then, is what do Allah and his prophet command Muslims ("they who submit") to do? Are radicals "exaggerating" their orders? Or are moderate Muslims simply "observing reasonable limits" - a euphemism for negligence? - when it comes to fulfilling their commandments?

In our highly secularized era, where we are told that religious truths are flexible or simply non-existent, and that any and all interpretations and exegeses are valid, the all-important question of "What does Islam command?" loses all relevance.

Hence why the modern West is incapable of understanding Islam.

Indeed, just the other day, a Kenyan mosque leader said that the Westgate massacre, where Islamic gunmen slaughtered some 67 people, "was justified. As per the Koran, as per the religion of Islam, Westgate was 100 percent justified." Then he said: "Radical Islam is a creation of people who do not believe in Islam. *We don't have radical Islam, we don't have moderates, we don't have extremists. Islam is one religion following the Koran and the Sunna*" [emphasis added].

Note his point that "Radical Islam is a creation of people who do not believe in Islam," a clear reference to the West which coined the phrase "radical Islam." Ironically, the secular West, which relegates religious truths to the realm of "personal experience," feels qualified to decide what is and is not "radical" about Islam.

Consider one example: Allah commands Muslims to "Fight those among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians] who do not believe in Allah nor the Last Day, nor forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor embrace the religion of truth [i.e., Islam], until they pay the *jizya* [tribute] with willing submission and feel themselves subdued" [Koran 9:29].

How can one interpret this verse to mean anything other than what it plainly says? Wherein lies the ambiguity, the room for interpretation? Of course there are other teachings and allusions in the Koran that by necessity lend themselves over to the fine arts of interpretation, or *ijtihad*. But surely the commands of Koran 9:29 are completely straightforward?

In fact, Muhammad's 7th century followers literally acted on this and similar verses (e.g., 9:5), launching the first Muslim conquests, which saw the subjugation of millions of Christians, Jews, and others, and the creation of the "Muslim world." Such jihadi expansion continued until Islam was beaten on the battlefield by a resurgent West some two or three centuries ago.

Western scholarly works, before the age of relativism and political correctness set in, did not equivocate the meaning of jihad. Thus the authoritative *Encyclopaedia of Islam*'s entry for "jihad" states that the "spread of Islam by arms is a religious duty upon Muslims in general ... Jihad must continue to be done until the whole world is under the rule of Islam ... Islam must completely be made over before the doctrine of jihad [warfare to spread Islam] can be eliminated. Islamic law expert and U.S. professor Majid Khadduri (1909-2007), after defining jihad as warfare, wrote that "jihad ... is regarded by all jurists, with almost no exception, as a collective obligation of the whole Muslim community."

(As for the argument that the Bible contains similar war verses, yet Jews and Christians are not out to conquer the world - so why say Muslims are? - see "*Are Judaism and Christianity as violent as Islam?*" for a detailed breakdown of the similarities and differences. Also see "*Islamic Jihad and the Doctrine of Abrogation*" to understand how the Koran's more tolerant verses have been abrogated by its more militant ones, such as 9:29.)

In short, how can a sincere Muslim - by definition, one who has submitted to the teachings of Allah - moderate" verses like 9:29? How can he "observe reasonable limits" vis-à-vis these plain commands to combat and subjugate non-Muslims?

Must Muslims not, at the very least, admit that such teachings are true and *should* be striven for - even if they do not personally engage in the jihad, at least not directly (but they are encouraged to support it indirectly, including monetarily or through propaganda?)

Just recently, reports appeared telling of how Islamic groups in Syria were following Koran 9:29 to a tee - forcing Christian minorities to pay them jizya, i.e., extortion money, in exchange for their lives. In fact, all around the Islamic world, Christians and other minorities are regularly plundered by Muslims who justify their actions by referring to the aforementioned verse.

Are all such Muslims being "extreme" in light of the commands of Koran 9:29 - which specifically calls for the taking of money from Christians and Jews - or are they simply upholding the unambiguous teachings of Islam?

One may argue that, if Muslims are to take Koran 9:29 literally, why are Muslim nations the world over not declaring an all-out jihad on all non-Muslim nations, including America? The ultimate reason, of course, is that they simply *can't*; they do not have the capacity to uphold that verse (and Islamic teaching allows Muslims to postpone their obligations until circumstances are more opportune).

It would obviously be silly, if not suicidal, for, say, Saudi Arabia, birthplace of Islam, to issue a statement to the West saying either accept Islam, pay jizya/tribute, or die by the sword. But just because Muslim nations do not currently have the capacity to actualise Koran 9:29, does not mean that they do not acknowledge its veracity and try to actualize it in other places when they can.

A quick survey of history before the meteoric rise of Western military might put Islam in check makes this especially clear.

Bottom line: If Islam teaches X and a Muslim upholds X - how is he being "extreme"? Seems more logical to say that it is *Islam itself* that is being "extreme." Similarly, if a self-professed Muslim does not uphold Islamic teachings - including prayer, fasting, paying zakat, etc - how is he being a "moderate"? Seems more logical to say that he is not much of a Muslim at all - that is, he is not submitting to Allah, the very definition of "Muslim."

It's time to acknowledge that dichotomized notions like "moderate" and "extreme" are culturally induced and loaded standards of the modern, secular West - hardly applicable to the teachings of Islam - and not universal absolutes recognized by all mankind.

7. What's left for Israel Advocacy?

If Israel is to remain relevant for a new generation of North American college students, its friends and supporters need to urgently change their arguments. Generation Z is no longer accepting the paradigms of the past.

Arguing that Israel exists because of the Holocaust, whilst never historically correct, is today distancing many Jews from a real and meaningful relationship with Israel.

Israel as a safety haven for Jews, "in case there is another holocaust," is finally proving itself as the shallow argument that it is. Life for American Jews is good and assimilation is a bigger threat than anti-Semitism. I have visited Beverley Hills in California and the Jews there are not suffering.

The time has come to change the Israel advocacy record, because this generation of university students has never owned a record and consider the traditional Israel discourse irrelevant to them.

If Israel is to remain relevant its supporters must recapture the liberal left, to continue to ignore them is a recipe for disaster. The Christian right have proven true friends of Israel, but by relying on their unwavering support Israel has distanced itself from the even more influential liberal mainstream.

The large majority of American Jews believe in abortion, gay rights and a pluralistic outlook. "Israel belongs to the Jews because of God's covenant with Abraham" may be persuasive in the bible belt but not for the majority of young, assimilated US Jews.

Israel advocates need to find a voice that speaks to liberal America and not just the religious right. To do otherwise would be to lose a generation to the folly of J Street and their questionable Zionist credentials or even into supporting BDS, which has enveloped itself in the language of supporting the underdog, social justice and political correctness.

Despite Israel's liberal credentials most liberals are falling automatically into the anti- Israel camp. This fact necessitates those involved in Israel education to have a realistic appraisal of their methodology.

A recipe for success, of six basic principles, needs to be urgently applied.

Firstly – stop advocating Israel's case, start educating about Israel. Show dilemmas, show choices, raise questions and show flaws. Israel is not all perfect nor is it all bad.

Secondly – remember empathy. Supporting Israel does not necessitate delegitimizing the rights of the Palestinian people.

Thirdly – speak the language of your audience. We must be able to justify the Jewish claim as an indigenous people's right to their land and not as a God-given gift.

Fourthly – stop giving out free copies of Alan Dershowitz's "The Case for Israel." Nobody under the age of twenty-five has read it. If you can't explain the case for Israel in 90 seconds on YouTube or in ten points in Buzzfeed, don't bother, nobody is listening.

Fifthly. Attack from the left, not the right. Showing that the boycotters of Israel are not interested in peace, but are stopping Israelis and Palestinian cooperation is more effective than talking about the Ishmael and Yitzhak.

Six – Stop sounding like a Jihad Jew. Are you really convincing the person you are talking to or are you convincing yourself? If you want to convince somebody you must show a contradiction between his or her value system and their belief.

If Israel is to remain relevant to this generation of students we must rediscover what is left of liberal Zionist values, because let's admit it – no country is always right.
