



OPINION and ANALYSIS

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

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Opinion and Analysis: Week ending 27 August 2013

(1) Don't be fooled, Hezbollah hasn't forgotten Israel

Nicholas Blanford, The Daily Star (Lebanon), 26 August 2013

It would be a mistake to assume that Hezbollah's commitment to the Assad regime has led to a weakened stance on its front against Israel ... It is evident that for now neither Hezbollah and its partners nor Israel are in a hurry to rush into a war that would prove devastating for both Lebanon and Israel.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Analysis/2013/Aug-26/228632-dont-be-fooled-hezbollah-hasnt-forgotten-israel.ashx#axzz2d47W8dcU>

(2) Why joint Palestinian-Israeli peace patrols are good for peace

Emily Hauser, TheDailyBeast, 23 August 2013

The enmity, power imbalance, and sheer ignorance between Israelis and Palestinians are staggering and color every aspect of daily life, for people in positions of power as well as the average citizen.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/23/why-joint-palestinian-israeli-police-patrols-are-good-for-peace.html>

(3) Where Muslims can speak freely in the Middle East

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 22 August 2013

Today it has become evident that that leaders and members of the Islamic Movement in Israel enjoy more freedom and rights than the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan, and even -- under the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank -- Hamas.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3945/muslims-freedom-of-speech>

(4) Begin on Saturday, finish on Sunday

Ali Salim, Gatestone Institute, 21 August 2013

Americans need to internalize that Western interests are in danger of being attacked and destroyed by both foreign and domestic enemies. If political Islam is not stopped now in the Middle East, it will explode in the West.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3943/begin-saturday-finish-sunday>

(5) The triumph of illusion

Shoshana Bryen, American Thinker, 20 August 2013

The reality is that Israeli fights every day against people dedicated to its destruction as a sovereign entity. Reality is ugly, so the West pretends we're only a minute or two, an Israeli concession or two, a settlement or two, from Israeli-Palestinian "peace."

<http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/4557/the-triumph-of-illusion>

(6) Another devil we know

Shmuel Rosner, International Herald Tribune, 20 August 2013

If Israelis are rooting for Egypt's military, it's because they want a government next door that will respect the two countries' peace treaty.

http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/20/another-devil-we-know/?_r=0

(7) The Negotiator's Handbook

Uzi Dayan, Israel Hayom, 20 August 2013

So far, we have seen negotiations about negotiations. Negotiations about the very existence of negotiations. Only now do the real peace talks seem poised to begin.

http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=5385

(8) Palestinians accuse peace negotiators of treason

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 18 August 2013

If Palestinian children are condemned for playing football with Israelis, why should it be acceptable for Erekat to be talking with Livni? Palestinian leaders have simply not prepared their people for peace; instead they have delegitimized Israel to a point where it has become a "crime" for any Palestinian to be seen talking to, or negotiating with, any Israeli.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3939/palestinians-peace-negotiators>

(1) Don't be fooled, Hezbollah hasn't forgotten Israel

The rocket attack last Thursday against northern Israel and the retaliatory Israeli airstrike near Naameh briefly turned attention away from Lebanon's northern and eastern border with Syria and back to the southern frontier.

Since the end of the 2006 war, this once volatile border has enjoyed the longest period of relative calm in four decades. Instead, attention on Hezbollah's military activities today tends to focus on the party's armed intervention in Syria.

Hezbollah has deployed thousands of its battle-hardened fighters as well as new recruits to serve in some of the most bitterly contested fronts in the Syrian war, including Damascus, the Deraa province in the south, Homs in the centre and the Aleppo province in the north.

Hezbollah's commitment in Syria is illustrated by the growing duration of each fighter's tour. Initially, fighters served seven days at a time, later extended to 20 days during the battle for Qusair in May.

Today, each fighter is required to spend 30 days on the Syrian front lines, according to sources close to the party. There probably is not one Shiite-populated village or town stretching from Aita Shaab on the southern border with Israel to Al-Qasr on the northern border that has not seen Hezbollah cadres rotating in and out of Syria.

The Syria conflict is also preoccupying Hezbollah domestically. The car bomb attacks in Bir al-Abed and Ruwaiss as well as roadside bombings of suspected Hezbollah vehicles in the Bekaa Valley and continuing cross-border rocket fire into the northern Bekaa has compelled the party to adopt unprecedented security measures, especially in the southern suburbs of Beirut.

This preoccupation with the Syrian conflict and the blowback in Lebanon creates an impression that Hezbollah has suspended its usual focus on Israel and its preparations for a future conflict with the Jewish state. That impression is further hardened by Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's recent pledge to double the number of his fighters in Syria if need be, underscoring the party's determination to help overcome the anti-President Bashar Assad struggle in Syria.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Hezbollah's commitment to the Assad regime has led to a weakened stance on its front against Israel.

The decision to deploy Hezbollah cadres into Syria was not taken unilaterally by the party's leadership but was a strategic choice arising from cold rational logic made in consultation with its partners in Tehran and Damascus.

Iran and Hezbollah clearly believe Assad's regime must survive as its downfall would represent a strategic blow to the "axis of resistance," weakening Tehran's reach into the Arab world and potentially isolating Hezbollah, especially if a Saudi-backed Sunni-dominated regime emerges in Damascus.

It is evident that for now neither Hezbollah and its partners nor Israel are in a hurry to rush into a war that would prove devastating for both Lebanon and Israel.

Even Israel's retaliatory airstrike for the rocket firing Thursday was little more than a routine signal of displeasure. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command base at Naameh traditionally has served as a retaliatory target for the Israeli air force when Israel either cannot find more appropriate targets or does not want an escalation along the border.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah understands that the volatility in the region ensures that there are no guarantees that another conflict with Israel is not imminent. For example, Israel's airstrikes against arms depots in Syria – four have been reported since January – have raised the risk of escalation that could inadvertently trigger a war.

Israel has calculated that Assad will not retaliate to the airstrikes for fear of provoking further Israeli attacks against his military assets which could weaken his ability to fight the rebels. That assessment appears to have paid off for now, but it is a high risk gambit.

Because of these regional uncertainties, Hezbollah cannot afford to disregard its southern front with Israel for the sake of helping the Syrian army crush the rebel forces. After all, wars with Israel tend to occur with little prior warning. If Hezbollah over-extended itself in Syria and a conflict suddenly erupted with Israel, it would risk disaster not only for the party but for its allies in Iran and Syria.

It is impossible to measure the extent of Hezbollah's commitment in terms of manpower to the Syria war because the figures simply are not known.

Reliable sources estimate that between 1,200 and 1,700 Hezbollah men fought in the battle for Qusair in May and June. Extrapolating from that estimate and anecdotal evidence, it is probably safe to assume that there are some 8,000-10,000 Hezbollah fighters serving in Syria at any one time.

That admittedly vague estimate then has to be read against Hezbollah's total force strength.

Before the 2006 war, Hezbollah's fighting strength was generally estimated at a few hundred full-time fighters and a few thousand part-timers. Those figures are wholly redundant today given the massive recruitment and training program Hezbollah oversaw following the 2006 war.

Indeed, there are no reliable statistics for Hezbollah's total man power today. One well-placed source in south Lebanon who is close to Hezbollah estimated Hezbollah's strength at "more than 10,000 but less than 50,000" which is probably a safe, but imprecise, assumption.

With the caveat that the figures above are at the best guestimates, if one takes their averages, it would suggest that Hezbollah perhaps has deployed one third of its manpower in Syria. That might sound like a substantial number if correct, but it should be borne in mind that Hezbollah would not employ its full fighting force at the same time in a war with Israel.

In 2006, the number of Hezbollah fighters confronting Israeli troops in south Lebanon was a relatively small percentage of the party's then strength. It was limited essentially to whomever was deployed in Hezbollah positions in the south when the war broke out and the

part-time fighters who lived in the front-line villages. Relatively few fighters were dispatched from areas further north because they were not needed.

Furthermore, Hezbollah's commitment to the Syria war is restricted mainly to man power. Other than personal arms, Hezbollah fighters in Syria have access to the Syrian army's weapons and ammunition.

That ensures that the flood of advanced weapons that arrived in Lebanon post the 2006 war remains in Hezbollah's secret arsenals in readiness for the next confrontation with Israel.

(2) Why joint Palestinian-Israeli peace patrols are good for peace

It's not that Israelis and Palestinians don't care about things like traffic fatalities and drug smuggling. It's just that when you're consumed with and by a military occupation, it can be hard to find effective methods to combat life's more banal scourges. Where neighbors might be able to help each other on cross border issues, enemies find it a lot harder.

Which is why Wednesday's revelation that Palestinian, Israeli, and Jordanian police chiefs have been quietly meeting for the past 18 months (under the auspices of the U.S.-based Police Executive Research Forum), and that furthermore Israeli and Palestinian police forces may soon begin joint patrols, is good news. Following a three-day summit in Jericho, Palestinian Police Chief Hazem Attallah explained the rationale at a press conference:

As you all know, crime these days has no limits, has no borders, and of course for all police forces in the whole world, their job is to counter this violence, to counter crime. We are gathered here for this reason and for this reason only - how we are going to be able to improve the ways that we are using to counter crime, in different ways and different levels.

There's nothing easy or simple about any of this. The patchwork - and entirely political - division of West Bank territory into Areas A, B and C lies at the very root of the problem. Aside from anything else, it can be all too easy to (say) nab a car in one area and take it along back roads to another, driving right off police radar in the process.

Moreover, Israel has a vested interest in keeping Palestinian society at a low-boil of instability in order to deepen the occupation, and the military's regular raids on Palestinian institutions and general disregard for settler violence make it hard for many Palestinians to trust Israeli law enforcement on anything. Israelis, for their part, often react quite viscerally to the image of Palestinians with guns, sure that years of mutual violence means that we can never be sure those guns won't be turned on us.

But this was, of course, the point of the outreach. Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum:

The bigger picture is that sometimes these lines of communication can act as a prelude to something as large as a peace process by simply getting people to work better together.

If any "peace process," anywhere on earth, is to be successful, it will be made up of a handful of splashy events like those at which the likes of John Kerry or Martin Indyk preside, and a million smaller moments without which the big events will be meaningless and

ultimately fail. The enmity, power imbalance, and sheer ignorance between Israelis and Palestinians are staggering and color every aspect of daily life, for people in positions of power as well as the average citizen. Working together to catch bad guys might very well serve as one of those crucial smaller moments in which some of those issues can begin to be addressed.

Israeli Inspector General Yahanan Danino sounded a positive note:

We have [made] a lot of progress. We feel it not only in the working groups, not only on the issues that we mentioned. We feel it in our relations on a daily base when you need something, we have a lot of examples, that we used these relations for the good of our people in all the area.

Hazem Attallah did as well:

It was the first time when there is a Palestinian chief of police standing in the Israeli police academy and give a lecture. I think this is part of the success and No. 2, [I am] inviting Commissioner Danino to come and give a lecture to our officers. This is the kind of progress that we are talking about.

It's not peace. It's a long way from peace. But joint Palestinian-Israeli police patrols have the potential to improve real people's lives, right now - and without such steps, any hope for peace will crash and burn. Again.

(3) Where Muslims can speak freely in the Middle East

Arab journalists and columnists in Israel have been expressing their views about the Egyptian crisis without fear, while their colleagues in Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are afraid to speak their mind.

Israel, for example, is one of the few countries in the Middle East where Muslims are permitted to demonstrate in favour of ousted Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood organization.

This is not because Israel supports Morsi or the Muslim Brotherhood; it is because the Muslim protesters know that in a democratic country like Israel they can hold peaceful demonstrations and express their views without having to worry about being targeted by the authorities.

Israel has become a safe place not only for Arab Christians, but also for Muslims who wish to express their opinion away from intimidation and violence.

While pro-Morsi demonstrators are being shot, wounded, arrested and harassed in Egypt, the PA-controlled territories and some Arab countries, in Israel they are free to stage protests and express their views even in the heart of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

In Israel, pro-Morsi demonstrators even feel free to chant slogans against Israel and the US, and to hoist Hamas flags.

For the past five weeks, thousands of Muslim worshippers have been using Friday prayers at the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to organize demonstrations in support of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

On August 17, thousands of Muslims demonstrated in Nazareth to voice support for Morsi. They also chanted slogans denouncing the "military coup" in Egypt, dubbing army commander Abdel Fattah al-Sissi a US agent.

On August 15, one day after the violent crackdown on Morsi supporters in Cairo and other Egyptian cities, in which hundreds of Egyptians were killed, some 150 members of the Islamic Movement in Israel staged a protest outside the Egyptian embassy in Tel Aviv.

Not a single Muslim has been hurt or arrested in Israel for demonstrating in favour of Morsi. By comparison, the PA, which has come out in support of the ouster of Morsi, continues to crack down on Muslims who voice solidarity with the deposed Egyptian president.

While mosque preachers in Israel are free to express their views about the Egyptian crisis, their colleagues in the West Bank have been warned by the PA government against speaking out in favour of Morsi. Two preachers from the Jenin area who dared to violate the ban were quickly detained by PA security forces.

Earlier this week, PA security officers arrested two Palestinians for expressing public support for Morsi.

While Muslim Brotherhood leaders have been thrown into prison in Egypt, Raed Salah and Kamal al-Khatib, the leaders of the Islamic Movement in Israel, continue to lead normal lives and organize various political activities around the country.

One of them, Islambuli Badir from Tulkarem, was detained for manufacturing and marketing a perfume named after Morsi. The second, Mahmoud Ayyad, a poet from Bethlehem, was taken into custody for wearing a shirt with a portrait of Morsi.

Last week, PA policemen used force to break up a pro-Morsi rally in Hebron. Two local journalists, Akram al-Natsha and Mahmoud Abu Ghania, complained that the policemen threatened and insulted them during the confrontation.

Today it has become evident that leaders and members of the Islamic Movement in Israel enjoy more freedom and rights than the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan and even -- under the PA in the West Bank -- Hamas.

(4) Begin on Saturday, finish on Sunday

The mood in the Middle East is rapidly changing. The elation of the Arab Spring, which led to prosperity and an economic and social upturn in the lives of millions of Arabs, has now deteriorated into a sense that significant dangers are stalking the Arab-Muslim world.

Arabic TV, especially Al-Jazeera, has been broadcasting programs asking if bloodshed is the only mission of Islam, and if *jihad* [war in the service of Islam] still motivates believers to invade other countries with abandon and indulge in worldwide slaughter.

Given the current situation, the Middle East is obsessed with asking itself: Who is responsible for the Muslims' catastrophe? And what keeps us chained behind, while the rest of the world forges ahead in social, economic and technological progress? Needless to say, the imams do not blame themselves. They claim that to change the situation we need only more and closer study and practice of the Islamic faith.

As always, our Islamic society, constantly at odds with itself, blames everyone for our misfortunes. In the days of the Prophet (S.A.A.S.), we blamed the Jews of Khaybar in the Arabian Peninsula for our ills. Now the imams who head the militant Islamist organizations tell us that the Jews, a tiny people who pose no threat to the might of Islam, are responsible for all our ills and for all our failures.

Islamic radicals, however, hate not only the Jews but also the Christians, who have become, we are told, our sworn enemies. Christianity, like Judaism, is also vilified. The history of our hatred for the Christians began with the Crusades, and over the years the same hated Crusaders became the hated European imperialists and the hated colonialists.

The hatred for the Christian West is founded on a sense of deprivation, of humiliation and inferiority, of being threatened and exploited, all of which cast doubt on the eternal message of Islam as the only up-to-date religion, destined to rule the world and invalidate the other religions. The Islamic sages who interpret the will of Allah say that both Christianity as well as Judaism, while monotheistic, are anachronistic, and while temporarily they can exist -- with the patronage of, and overshadowed by, Islam -- eventually all Christians and Jews will convert to Islam.

Islam's openly-stated desire to control the world is now light-years away from its current wretched plight. The Muslims' low self-image not only makes us self-destructive, but leads to the desire to destroy anyone who succeeds, even if it means destroying ourselves as well. The unique prosperity and power of the Jews in Palestine, compared with the slaughter, poverty and backwardness of their Arab neighbours, create antagonism, jealousy, rage and an increasingly murderous desire for "revenge" among Muslims still under the heady influence of the Arab Spring and incited by the sheikhs of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The imams in the mosques brainwash the masses, claiming that Islam's real enemies are the Christians, "the Crusaders," manipulated by the Jews who control them. Attempting to fool the leaders of the Christian West and weaken Israel, the Islamists sugarcoat the real situation and tell the Christians that all they have to do is solve the Palestinian problem. Once that has happened, the artificial Jewish existence in Palestine will come to an end, the entire Middle East will metamorphose into paradise and blossom, and everyone will live in harmony forever. Unfortunately, many Europeans have swallowed this tale whole. In the meantime, however, when not speaking to the West and telling each other the truth, the Islamists repeat the ancient adage, "We will begin on Saturday and finish on Sunday," that is, first we will get rid of the Jews and then we will get rid of the Christians -- as we are seeing now in Nigeria, Iraq and especially Egypt.

When it comes to theology, Islamist theologians claim the Jews distorted the Torah to conceal the future mission of Muhammad, and those same theologians have nothing but contempt for the Christian belief in the Divine Birth. In the meantime, because of regional Middle East chaos, the radical leaders of political Islam hide their true attitude towards Christianity and do not trumpet their plan to take over the world and rule it as Allah's chosen people; instead, they recruit eager agents among the Christians to make life miserable for the Jews.

The radical sheikhs still mourn the loss of "Andalusia" -- that is, Spain -- as well as Palestine and other parts of the old Islamic empire that were lost, and now plan not only to restore Islamic rule to the lost territories but globally. Thus Islamic terrorists, inspired and goaded on by the preaching of their leaders, blow up planes, embassies, towers, subways and skyscrapers to cause untold casualties. Dispatched by their imams, they go on rampages of slaughter and bloodshed in the name of Allah, and brainwash and recruit Islamic youths as their successors to ensure future terrorism and violence.

Much of the Islamist sheikhs' activity focuses on brainwashing within the Islamic communities in the West, where many have found a haven. There, they have formed enclaves where they nurture terrorism and violence and, when the time comes, from where they will break out of their ghettos to overwhelm their tolerant hosts who generously and freely accepted them into Western Europe and America.

The leaders of the Western world stubbornly claim, as the European Union did of Hezbollah, that there is a difference between religious and political Islamic leaders but these well-meaning Westerners will pay dearly for making the distinction. The West's political correctness and refusal to listen to and believe what the political Islamist leadership openly says -- and its refusal to defend itself -- will lead to catastrophe. For us Arabs it is not just wordplay: when someone tells you he means to kill you, he means to kill you.

Innocence, willful ignorance and complete lack of understanding of both the Arab and Muslim mentality and its operational codes have misled the West into either patronizing Islamism and stupidly trying to dictate to its leaders, or into simply fearing it. Every single American attempt to bring Western-like democracy to the Arab-Muslim world has failed abysmally and led only to radical Islamist regimes as, for example, in Iran and Egypt. The same is true for the European declarations against the "undemocratic" involvement of the army in the government in Turkey. These brought on the Islamist regime of Erdogan, who jailed the Turkish army's senior officers, who had maintained the balance achieved by Ataturk in restraining radical Islam. The flight of the Americans from Yemen following intelligence warnings regarding al-Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda brought Al-Qaeda greater success than any genuine terrorist attack could have done.

While the legacy of Islam and its Prophet are hardwired into the consciousness of every *da'wah* [religious outreach] activist, and dictate that all means -- terrorism, violence, deceit -- are justified to overcome the enemy, the Americans still seem to have incomprehensible trouble believing that radical Islam means exactly what it says. American impotence in the face of Iranian intransigence and renewed Russian power, as well as the lack of support for the Sisi government in Egypt, will lead to a regional disaster.

America must give up its dreams of a democratic happy ending for the Middle East and start looking reality in the face. Once and for all, Americans need to internalize a fact: Western interests are in danger of being attacked and destroyed by both foreign and domestic enemies. The calls for America to ignore and distance itself from the events in the Middle East will eventually pave the way for a violent, full blown, powerful invasion of both Europe and the US. If political Islam is not stopped now in the Middle East, it will, when the tipping point has been reached, explode in the West.

It is no longer possible, when faced with the challenges of radical Islam, to pursue a policy of weakness or to support democratic processes which correspond only to American values.

The Islamists have now started on Sunday: the Christians are in their crosshairs, and when they have finished, the Islamists will return to Saturday and destroy the Jews. The Zionists in Israel understand the threats of radical Islam and its intentions for their country far better

than the US administration will ever be able to. The Jews do not fear to show their determination and willingness to fight a life-and-death battle for their continued existence; it is that determination which has made the Islamists avoid confronting them for the present and target the Christians instead.

What is unreal are the dictates America imposes on Israel, including the demand to release convicted murderers from jail and to reach an agreement with Mahmoud Abbas, who does not have the support of the Palestinian people. This approach will lead to a Hamas takeover of the West Bank and most likely then of Jordan; and it will destroy what is left of the Christian community in Bethlehem and east Jerusalem, whose members after the Oslo Accords and the withdrawal of Israel from the territories, were killed, raped and threatened into fleeing their homes.

The Christians in the Middle East are in danger of annihilation. If the Islamic fanatics collaborating with the so-called "Free Syrian Army" overthrow Assad, the Christians, who are part of the minority coalition in the Syrian regime, will be subjected to an unimaginable slaughter that in all probability will spread to Lebanon. Thus in trying to stabilize the region, the West should reconsider its policies in dealing with Russia when it comes to Syria and nuclear Iran with its proxy Hezbollah.

A tougher line also needs to be taken with Egypt. If the Muslim Brotherhood succeeds in overthrowing the provisional government of President Mansour and General Sisi, there will be a bloodbath not only of Western values but of the Copts -- the original inhabitants of Egypt now being brutalized out of their historic home. Christians, who openly supported the recent events that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, had their churches burned and believers killed by Muslims even years before the most recent events. Now, museums and a tenth of the churches in Egypt have been burned. Morsi's followers do not forget that the Copts aligned themselves with the new government and against Morsi, and have recently begun beheading Coptic businessmen in the Sinai Peninsula, which was a tourist attraction when under the control of Israel. It is now a centre for attacking the Copts, robbing them of their property and forcing them to flee. However, if Friday is dealt with properly, a more optimistic sun will rise over Saturday and Sunday.

(5) The triumph of illusion

The Palestine Liberation Organization was created in 1964. Like most revolutionary movements, it wrote a Charter to define its aims and fundamental policies, including:

Article 17: The partitioning of Palestine, which took place in 1947, and the establishment of Israel are illegal and null and void, regardless of the loss of time...

Article 18: The Balfour Declaration, the Palestine Mandate System, and all that has been based on them are considered null and void. The claims of historic and spiritual ties between Jews and Palestine are not in agreement with the facts of history or with the true basis of sound statehood. Judaism... is not a nationality (and) the Jews are not one people with an independent personality...

Article 19: Zionism is a colonialist movement in its inception, aggressive and expansionist in its goal, racist in its configurations, and fascist in its means and aims...

Article 24: This Organization does not exercise any territorial sovereignty over the West Bank in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, (or) on the Gaza Strip.

Contrary to belief in some quarters, the Charter has never been amended and in fact, fealty to "armed struggle" (i.e., terrorism) was reasserted as late as 2011. In pursuit of its goals, Palestinian terrorism has killed more than 5,000 Israelis since 1949. Airplane hijackings; sniper shootings (including an infant in her father's arms), bombings on buses, in cafes and in restaurants; little boys bludgeoned to death; children murdered in their homes in front of their parents. Raw anti-Semitism pours today from Voice of Palestine Radio. School children learn that Israel is only a temporary impediment to Palestinian aspirations and that killing and dying is the highest good.

This would seem to preclude peaceful coexistence with the State of Israel.

Yet, it has become conventional Western wisdom that the Palestinian leadership -- bifurcated as a result of a brutal civil war, without an electoral mandate, beholden in part to Iran -- wishes nothing more than a split, rump state in the West Bank (and Gaza), areas it previously rejected. And furthermore, in exchange for that, Palestinians will accept a) the Jews as a national people "with an independent personality," b) the legitimacy of the 1947 partition (or 1949 Armistice Line), and c) Zionism -- not as fascist, racist and aggressive -- but as the legitimate expression of Jewish national peoplehood.

This is the triumph of illusion, required because reality doesn't comport with the liberal, democratic Western standard in which every difference can be split. The reality is that Israeli fights every day against people dedicated to its destruction as a sovereign entity. Reality is ugly, so the West pretends we're only a minute or two, an Israeli concession or two, a settlement or two from Israeli-Palestinian "peace."

No, we aren't, nor will we be. But it is through similar illusions that American policy toward Egypt is best understood.

Pretending the Muslim Brotherhood was a political party, pretending it had renounced violence and become a social service agency, pretending it would govern at odds with its Charter and founding principles, pretending Morsi's virulent anti-Semitism and anti-Christianity would give way to multi-religious comity, the United States deliberately bolstered the fortunes of a fascist, jihadist organization bent on the acquisition of state power to institute its radical Charter and punish its enemies.

In 2011, then-DNI James Clapper told Congress, "The term Muslim Brotherhood is an umbrella term for a variety of movements. In the case of Egypt, a very heterogeneous group, largely secular, which has eschewed violence." His correction was no better: "In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood makes efforts to work through a political system that has been, under Mubarak's rule, one that is largely secular in its orientation."

The Brotherhood never "eschewed" violence -- when its leadership was being imprisoned and hung it made the reasonable tactical decision that announcing a determination to take power through violence would be foolhardy. Secular Egyptian governments in succession understood that they needed to stand on the neck of the Brotherhood because it was not going to give up and was not going to disappear. President Obama invited Brotherhood representatives to the now-discredited Cairo Speech in 2009, over the objection of President Mubarak. He treated it as if it was one among many parties entitled to a seat at the table of governance in Egypt.

But the Brotherhood, like the PLO, was unwilling to accept only a seat -- it had designs on the table, the kitchen, and the living room.

The administration made the same mistake in Syria, tapping the Muslim Brotherhood-leaning Turkish Prime Minister and the Emir of Qatar to bolster the armed opposition to Bashar Assad while the U.S. hid. Far from promoting what little secular, democratic opposition was able to emerge, Turkey and Qatar resurrected the Brotherhood that had gone underground in Syria after the massacre in Hama by Hafez Assad in 1983.

The US has the Palestinian model from which to work: when a violent, dictatorial organization tells you its goals and the means by which it plans to achieve them, believe them. When they say they're not democratic, that their ideology precludes a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, believe them. When violence is part of their mandate and they prove over and over that they are prepared to use it in pursuit of their clearly defined aims, believe them. They are not fit partners for the US.

In Egypt, the fighting is not a civil war; it is the determination and requirement of the government to push the Muslim Brotherhood insurrection back into the dungeon from which the Obama Administration freed it. As such, it should be supported.

(6) Another devil we know

Here we go again. Israel is rooting for another butcher.

Officially, of course, Israel is no more than a "bystander," wearily looking on at the upheaval in Egypt. "We have nothing to do with any of what is going on in Egypt," said Avigdor Lieberman, a former foreign minister and chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

But make no mistake: Lieberman isn't telling the whole truth. While Western states are reviewing their relations with Egypt because of the government forces' recent massacres of Egyptian citizens, Israel wants "the whole world to support" Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt's military commander, said former Defense Minister (and Prime Minister) Ehud Barak last week.

He wasn't just stating his personal view. As The New York Times, the Jerusalem Post and other newspapers have reported, the Israeli government has been working the US and Europe to rally support for the government in Egypt.

It wouldn't be the first time Israel has lent its support to a despotic regime. In 2005, when President George W. Bush was frustrated that the Syrian government was assisting the Iraqi insurgency against US troops and suggested to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon it might be the time to get rid of President Bashar al-Assad, Sharon replied that Israel preferred "the devil we know."

Now Israel is conflicted about the civil war in Syria. Assad's staying would be a victory for Iran and Hezbollah, but his going would mean losing a strongman who can keep the border between Israel and Syria quiet. A rational regime can be convinced, by diplomacy or force if necessary, to refrain from harassing Israel. Who knows, though, if Assad's replacements would be rational.

Israel didn't want Hosni Mubarak to be forced out of the Egyptian presidency: Here was the man who had "kept the peace in the Middle East," said President Shimon Peres in January 2011. In 2012 Israelis watched nervously Egyptians go to the polls: They remembered 2006 only too well, when the Palestinians elected Hamas, which then quickly took over the Gaza Strip. Sure enough, the Muslim Brotherhood won.

Israel has been grumbling about the Americans and the Europeans' continued infatuation with the prospect of democracy in the Arab world. Have they not learned the lesson? Do they not know by now that when Arabs vote they elect radicals? Democracy didn't work in Palestine in 2006, and it didn't work in Egypt in 2012. It can't work in Lebanon while Hezbollah is politically active and armed. And it will not work in Syria, where sectarian loyalties trump any sense of national identity.

And so the Israeli government is hoping that the Egyptian military won't surrender now. (It might even be thinking: Good thing the Islamists were pushed aside before they could weaken the secular and nationalistic military, Turkey style.) The same goes for the Israeli public, said pollster Menachem Laza, of Panels Politics. He said it wants "anything but the Muslim Brotherhood."

This view may seem cold-hearted and cynical. It may seem hypocritical: Aren't Israelis for democracy? It may even seem racist: Is it because they are Arabs that we disregard the bloodshed and think they are incapable of having a democracy?

Israelis are not immune to being cold-hearted, cynical, hypocritical and racist. But this position is something else. If Israelis are rooting for Egypt's military, it's because they want a government next door that will respect the two countries' peace treaty. And it's because the military is the only institution in Egypt today that can prevent the Sinai Peninsula from becoming a safe haven for radicalism. Israelis are being pragmatic, and that might look ugly, but that's what experience has taught them.

(7) The Negotiator's Handbook

So far, we have seen negotiations about negotiations. Negotiations about the very existence of negotiations. Only now do the real peace talks seem poised to begin.

After many years of dealing with Israeli issues, and armed with the experience -- not to mention quite a few scars -- as an official who served as the head of the security committee during talks with the Jordanians, the Syrians and the Palestinians, I'm ready to offer my services and recommend seven core principles for this round of new-old negotiations.

1) A speedy, decisive return to negotiations, without any preconditions:

We must stop acquiescing to preconditions such as the release of terrorists. Freeing these prisoners is problematic both from an ethical and tactical perspective. The U.S. set that precondition. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has decisively and wisely pushed peace talks forward, accepted it, to the best of my understanding, to neutralize prospects of either a settlement freeze or an early discussion on the 1967 borders. Negotiators must now return to a position of "no preconditions" in all other matters.

2) Recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, with Jerusalem as its undivided capital:

We do not need the Palestinians to recognize the Jewish nation's historic right to a state in Israel. But failing to recognize the existence of a Jewish state draws a huge question mark over how ready the Palestinians truly are to agree to two states for two peoples.

3) Defensible borders:

Israel's need for defensible borders is written in blood. But how will such borders look? The answer is that they will be drawn in a way that fulfills our three basic security needs:

** The need for strategic depth: The average width of Israel from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea is 64 kilometers (40 miles). The strategic depth here is of little importance. But the need increases in light of growing threats stemming from the age of nuclearization, ballistic missiles, and long-range rockets that mostly threaten population centers.

** The need for defensive depth: The era of "slim chances for war" is over. The Middle East has become a realm of uncertainty. Civil wars and the lethal combination of terrorism and movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood make it necessary for us to remain vigilant over the possibility of an attack from the east.

** The need to be able to combat terror: The only factor that will guarantee the demilitarization of the Palestinian entity is a permanent Israeli presence along the West Bank's eastern border. The disarmament of the Palestinian state is not only a condition that was guaranteed to Israel's when it signed the "two states for two nations" principle. It is also a condition that ensures the security and fulfillment of any agreement. The situation in Sinai is a testament to that. The Jordan Valley "envelopes the state of Israel."

Holding onto the Jordan Valley is the only way to fulfill these three national security needs. Only through full Israeli sovereignty in the Jordan Valley can the Jewish state manage its own arrangements for security -- us, the IDF and Israeli settlements in the Jordan valley. Not foreign armies.

4) Zero compromise on the "right" of return:

Only Israel can be allowed to permit any individual who wants to immigrate to do so, and that is, of course, if the country wants to absorb the immigrant. Plain and simple.

5) Security arrangements:

Israel requires several security arrangements to provide protection to its citizens whose lives, and not the Palestinians', are in constant danger, and whose existence is wrapped up in the dangerous and delicate fabric of the region. Control and prevention, hot pursuit, the authority to arrest, and so on. The fifth principle has one critical aspect, and that is the control over airspace. The territory between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea is, on average, just 40 miles wide. A fighter jet covers that distance in a few minutes. If we factor in our concern over safe civilian air traffic, then we reach one inevitable conclusion: Israel must maintain exclusive control over the territory's airspace.

6) A solution to Hamastan in Gaza:

Whom does Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas represent? He can't enter Gaza, and he couldn't include Gaza in the Palestinian state which he represents. There won't be a "three-state solution."

7) Bilateral negotiations:

How many times have we heard the (true) cliché that "it takes two to tango"? Have you ever tried to tango with a third partner?

The Americans did not participate whatsoever in peace negotiations with the Jordanians. During negotiations with the Palestinians, the Americans did not so much as enter the room. On the other hand, the Americans sat down to negotiations with the Syrians and the results were as expected: The parties stopped speaking altogether, communicating instead with the

Americans alone. A modern variation on the famous non-dialogue skit by legendary actor Shaike Ophir.

The Palestinians need to reach agreements with Israel, not with the US, not with the United Nations, not with the Quartet. The US must understand that its role is limited to bringing the two sides to the table and implementing agreements. Other pretensions won't succeed and will only cause harm.

A few words on the UN's strategy

While both parties chose to pursue peace talks for a permanent solution, they also knew such negotiations had scant chances for success. It was a choice they made based on the assessment that the political cost of various concessions on the road to an interim agreement would be intolerable. The two sides also understood that even if they could not reach a permanent arrangement, an interim agreement would always be a possible alternative.

Israel controls most of the territory in Judea and Samaria, and it does not lay claim to territories under the PA's rule. Therefore, Israel must insist that territorial issues will only be settled at the end of negotiations. And if not, so be it. Deliberations over Jerusalem, the refugees and other core issues will end up depleting Israeli munitions.

These are the seven core principles. There is no need to introduce red lines or road maps to solutions. Experience has taught us that such proclamations only produce one-sided obligations. The Palestinians, with the help of the "useful Israeli idiots," view them as Israeli points of no return and continue to gnaw away at them, bargaining for the next concession.

Can you recall how the "Beilin-Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] agreement," the "Geneva initiative," the "Clinton parameters," or the "Olmert concessions" wound up? We cannot afford to walk into the same trap.

And the most important thing to remember? We have got a Jewish state to build.

(8) Palestinians accuse peace negotiators of treason

At the request of the Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership, the first round of peace talks with Israel, which was launched in Jerusalem on August 14, was held away from the media spotlight.

The PA leadership requested that no journalist or photographer be permitted to cover the meeting between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. And even the location of the peace talks was kept a secret, again at the request of the PA leadership.

The PA's request for secrecy in the peace talks does not stem from its desire to secure the success of the negotiations.

It is not as if the PA is saying: We care so much about the peace talks that we prefer to avoid media coverage in order to make sure that the peace process succeeds.

The main reason the PA does not want the media to cover the peace talks is related to its fear of the reactions of Palestinians and the Arab world.

Mahmoud Abbas is already facing widespread opposition among Palestinians to his controversial decision -- which was taken under heavy pressure from US Secretary of State John Kerry -- to return to the negotiating table with Israel.

When the heads of the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams, Tzipi Livni and Saeb Erekat, met in Washington earlier this month to announce the launching of the peace talks, many Palestinians and Arabs seized the opportunity to ridicule Erekat and accuse the PA leadership of treason.

A photo of Erekat and Livni standing together in Washington has since been exploited by Facebook and Twitter activists to hurl insults and profanity at the chief Palestinian negotiator. Palestinian sources in Ramallah said that Erekat felt so offended by the insults and obscene language directed against him that he decided that there was no need for "photo op" with Livni or any other Israeli.

Both Abbas and Erekat are fully aware of the growing opposition among Palestinians and Arabs to the resumption of the peace talks with Israel under the terms of the US Administration. That is why the two men do not want to be seen sitting in a room with any Israeli representative. They know that any photo of Erekat and Livni shaking hands or sitting together would provide their enemies with additional ammunition.

Those who think that the opposition to the peace talks is coming only from Hamas and other radical groups are either ignorant or turning a blind eye to the reality.

When Abbas agreed to resume the peace talks with Israel, he went against the recommendation of the PLO leadership, whose members rejected Kerry's attempts to force the PA president to abandon two of his pre-conditions -- namely, that Israel accept the pre-1967 lines as the basis for negotiations and freeze all construction in settlements and east Jerusalem neighbourhoods.

Last week, the PLO officials once again reminded Abbas of their opposition to the peace talks.

During an August 15 meeting in Ramallah, several PLO leaders told Abbas that they remained opposed "in principle" to the idea of resuming peace talks with Israel under the current circumstances. The only Palestinian official who has come out in public to voice support for Abbas's move is the powerless Prime Minister, Rami Hamdallah.

Abbas and Erekat know that Hamdallah's public endorsement of the peace talks does not carry any weight. After all, Hamdallah is an unelected public servant with no grassroots support or political base.

To further complicate matters for Abbas and Erekat, several Palestinian factions are now in the process of forming a "national alliance" the main goal of which is to thwart any deal between Israel and the PA. This rejectionist front will consist of various PLO and other factions and organizations and could create many problems for the PA.

But there is another reason why the PA leadership does not want media coverage of the peace talks. For many years, the PA has been supporting boycott campaigns against Israel, as well as organizations combating "normalization" with Israelis.

If Palestinian children are condemned for playing football with Israelis, why should it be acceptable for Erekat to be talking with Livni?

PA leaders can only blame themselves for the growing opposition to the peace talks with Israel. Palestinian leaders have simply not prepared their people for peace. These leaders have, instead, delegitimized Israel to a point where it has become a "crime" for any Palestinian to be photographed talking to, or negotiating with, any Israeli.

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