

CAUSES OF/SOLUTIONS TO THE ISRAEL-ARAB CONFLICT

I. ISRAEL/PALESTINE IN ANCIENT TIMES

The Israelites, forbearers of today's Jews, emerged in ~1200 BCE in today's West Bank. Twice in ancient times they established independent kingdoms (~1000-586 BCE, ~140-63 BCE). These Israelite kingdoms were eventually conquered and destroyed by others. Many Jews fled to Europe at some point. There they were relentlessly oppressed--driven into ghettos and sometimes murdered *en masse*--by the Christian majority.

The Arabs are a Mideast people racially and linguistically related to the Jews and Canaanites. In ancient times they were desert people.

II. THE BIRTH OF ZIONISM, 1896

Theodor Herzl and other early Zionist leaders sought to create a safe haven for the Jewish people in an anti-semitic world that rejected them.

III. ISRAEL-ARAB CONFLICTS: SIX BIG WARS, THREE SMALL WARS, TWO INTIFADAS

- A. Big wars in 1947-49 (the "1948 War," or the "Nakba" or "Catastrophe"); 1956 (the "Sinai War"), 1967 (the "Six Day War"), 1969-70 (the "Canal War"); 1973 (the "Yom Kippur War" or "October War"); and 1982-2000 (the "Lebanon War").
- B. Small wars in 2006 (the "Second Lebanon War" or "July War"), 2008-9 ("Operation Cast Lead" or "the Battle of al-Furqan"), and 2014 ("Operation Protective Edge" or the "2014 Gaza Massacre").
- C. Intifadas (Palestinian uprisings) in 1987-1991, 2000-2005.
- D. Serious peace talks in 2000 ("Camp David"), 2001 ("Taba"), and 2008 (Olmert-Abu Mazen talks).

IV. CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

- A. Conflict over land. The Jews and Palestinians both claim the same place. Oh dear! No settler-colonial movement has ever avoided war with the indigenous people of the lands that it colonized. If so, the cause of the conflict lies in the cause of Jewish settler-colonialism (Christian antisemitism).
- B. The security dilemma. Geography--close proximity and

indefensible borders--made the Palestinians and Israelis a threat to each other. This drove each to seek to dominate the other. Israel sought wide territories in 1947-48, expelling many Palestinians in the process, to gain secure borders. Israel also sent settlers into the West Bank after 1967 to avert a two-state solution, to ensure Israel retained secure borders.

Some argue that Israel no longer needs large territories to be secure. Does Israel's nuclear deterrent make it unconquerable?

C. Invented chauvinist history. Both Arabs and Israelis wallowed in historical mythmaking about the origins of Zionism, the 1948 war and later wars. Each exculpated itself of wrongdoing while casting all blame on the other. Neither put much blame for the conflict on the most responsible party, the Christian West.

> These chauvinist histories lie mainly by what they omit.

D. Religious extremism.

1. **In Israel.**

a. An Israeli settler movement has emerged since 1967 that claims vast Arab lands beyond Israel's 1967 borders, roughly following the borders of David's kingdom. This settler movement is fueled by scripture-based claims that God gave the West Bank and much more to the Jews. This reflects a literalist reading of scripture, and a selective reading scripture that omits the command to "love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 16:11).

b. Some religious Israelis now demand that Israel must retain control of the Temple Mount. This is a change of position the old days; in 1938 Zionist leaders expressed more interest in Mount Scopus (Hebrew University) than the Temple Mount.

2. **Among Palestinians.** Hamas, an extremist Palestinian organization that rejects a two-state solution with Israel, emerged in 1987 and gained large influence. Hamas is fueled by the view that Islam requires jihad, jihad requires the defense of all Muslim land, and Israel is Muslim land. This view reflects militant sections of the Koran written in Medina, when Muhammad and his followers were at war.

> The Israeli settler and Hamas views of scripture are contestable but rarely contested.

3. **Among Christians.** Christian anti-semitism through the ages has been fueled by barbs against the Jews in the

gospels of Matthew and John. These barbs (e.g., Matthew 27:20-26; John 8:44-47; also 7:1, 10:31) were written during growing conflict between the mainstream Jewish community and the early Christian secessionists.

E. False optimism. Both sides have relentlessly believed that force could make the other fold. Neither has proven right so far.

1. The Palestinians refused the 1947 partition and then refused to accept the 1949 armistice lines, wrongly believing that force could gain them better terms.
2. Israel refused Egypt's peace offer in 1971, and pursued later peace efforts indifferently or not at all, wrongly believing that Israel could instead compel the Arabs to concede the gains Israel made in the 1967 war. These policies set the stage for the 1973 war and later violence.

E. Bad strategies and tactics, arising from illusions and misperceptions.

> Regarding Palestinian strategy:

1. Some argue that the Palestinians' strategy of violence has served them poorly. In this view the methods of Gandhi and Martin Luther King would serve them better at this stage of the conflict. Likewise, more use of public relations instead of violence would serve them better. "Use your words."
2. Some complain that the Palestinians have missed opportunities to settle the conflict--they have "never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity."

> Regarding Israeli strategy:

1. Some argue that Israel cannot be expansionist and Zionist. They note that Israel will soon become an Arab-majority country unless it divests itself of the territories it conquered in 1967.
2. Some argue that Israeli expansion (that is, Israeli colonization of West Bank and vassalization of Gaza) on balance harms Israeli security.
 - a. "Israeli expansion retards Israel's ability to attract Jewish immigrants."
 - b. "Israeli expansion could trigger a resurgent pan-Arabism, or an even wider Muslim mobilization against Israel. Pan-Arabism could lead to an Arab union of some kind--as German, Italian, and Vietnamese movements of union produced nation states. This would gravely threaten Israeli security. A still-wider Muslim mobilization would be even more dangerous to Israel."

- c. "Israeli expansion raises the risk of WMD terror against Israel." Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak both worried that the conflict could produce WMD terror against Israel unless it is resolved.

Would better policy evaluation among Israelis or Palestinians have produced peace?

- F. War ---> War. Specifically, 1948 war ---> 1967 war ---> 1973 war, war today.

- G. Strategy debates.

1. In Israel: Does Israel have a Palestinian partner for peace? Related: Does Arab hostility to Israel stem mainly from Israel's seizure of Arab lands and expulsion of Arab peoples in 1947-48? Or from anti-semitism embedded in Muslim scripture?
2. Among Palestinians: Is Israel a partner for peace? Related: Is Israeli hostility toward Palestinian statehood fueled mainly by Israeli doubts that the Palestinians are willing to accept Israel and make a durable peace with it? Or by Jewish religious extremism (i.e., desire for Biblical fulfillment) and a desire for more land for settlement?

Polls show that both sides greatly underestimate the proportion of the other public that is willing to agree a two-state solution.

V. EVENTS 1949-PRESENT

- A. Religions motivations and religious extremism have risen on both sides since 1949,
 1. In the late 1960s an extremist religious Israeli settler movement appeared. It aimed to colonize the West Bank and perhaps more.
 2. In the 1980s an extremist religious Palestinian movement, Hamas, appeared. Its stated goal is to destroy Israel. It now controls Gaza. (The secular Fatah still controls the West Bank.)
- B. Secular communities on both sides have greatly moderated their views, and now largely accept the need to share Palestine/Israel with one another. Secular Israelis (for example, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Kadima party leader Tzipi Livni) accept the notion of a Palestinian state. Secular Palestinians (for example, Palestinian President Abu Mazen) accept the need to recognize and live with Israel.
- C. Since 1949 Israel has become far more secure from conquest, and control of the West Bank has become far less important to Israeli security.

1. Israel has developed a secure nuclear arsenal that makes Israel unconquerable.
 2. Israel achieved peace with Egypt in 1979, lifting threat of Egyptian attack.
 3. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, removing Syria's source of weapons.
 4. The Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian economies have stagnated, while Israel has prospered.
 5. The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and occupied it during 2003-2011. Iraq is now a failed state, incapable of aggression.
 6. Syria fell into civil war in 2011 and is also incapable of aggression.
 7. The Israeli military has adopted new technologies while Arab militaries have stagnated.
- Overall, threat of Arab/Iranian invasion from the east has become implausible.

VI. SOLUTIONS TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT: LARGE OPTIONS

- A. Partition the land of Palestine--the two-state solution.
 1. Through agreement, and failing that,
 2. By Israeli fiat.
 3. By UN fiat.
- B. Create a binational state with power-sharing between Jews and Arabs. Once proposed by dovish Zionists (Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, Ahad Ha'am); later proposed by Palestinian hard-liners.
- C. Palestinian exhaustion, eventual submission to Israeli domination. A greater Israel solution.
- D. Expel (or "transfer") Palestinians into Jordan if they don't submit to Israel. Eventually the Palestinians would accept life in Jordan. Another greater Israel solution.
- E. The Jews eventually leave the Middle East as the Crusaders did in 1300. This is the rejectionist Palestinian solution--often masked under solution B, "binational state."

Which solutions are feasible? How do we know? What evidence is needed to judge their feasibility?

VII. MEANS TO A 2-STATE SOLUTION

Most experts argue that only solution VI "A", partition, holds promise of durable peace in the near term.

If so, how could partition be achieved?

- A. New historical narratives.
 1. Israelis and Palestinians could take responsibility for their own misdeeds and stop false blaming of the

- other.
2. Israelis and Palestinians could put more blame for the conflict where it belongs--on the Christian west--and less on each other.
 - a. Palestinians could then grant the Zionist enterprise some moral legitimacy.
 - b. Israelis could more easily admit their own cruelties toward the Palestinians, knowing that they could attribute these in a final sense to the Christians instead of taking full responsibility for these cruelties themselves.
 - B. Could the U.S. impose peace? Specifically, could it frame an American final-status peace agreement and then persuade both sides to accept it with carrots and sticks?

VIII. WHERE LIES JUSTICE IN THIS CONFLICT? JUDGING MORAL CLAIMS TO ISRAEL/PALESTINE: CRITERIA

- A. **Religious claims--"God gave it to us."** (A Jewish claim, echoed by the Jews' evangelical Christian allies; and a Palestinian claim.) Jews point to the Covenant passages of Genesis and Exodus. Palestinians claim that Palestine is "Muslim land" and that Palestinians are enjoined to defend it by the religious requirement to defend all Muslim lands under attack.
- B. **Ancient ownership--"We had it first."** A Jewish and Palestinian claim. Jews note their ancient presence in Palestine back to 1200 BCE. Palestinians counter by noting their likely relationship to the Canaanites and other ancients who owned Palestine before the Jews. They also note that in ancient times the Jews lived mainly in the highlands of the West bank. Jewish settlement in the lowlands, including Tel Aviv, was sparse and brief. Under an "ancient ownership" principle the Israeli Jews and Palestinians would trade places.
- C. **Longest tenure--"We had it longest."** (A Palestinian and Jewish claim. In fact it's a close-run thing.)
- D. **Most recent tenure--"We had it last."** (A Palestinian claim.)
- E. **Current tenure--"We have it now."** (A Jewish claim regarding Israel within 1967 lines; and a Palestinian claim regarding the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem.) Related: "It's ours under civil law. Please respect property rights!" (A Palestinian claim.)
- F. **Necessity--"Our straits are more dire than yours--we need Palestine to survive, you don't."** Also, "Palestinians can live in any one of 21 Arab states; Jews have only one

- Jewish state.**" (A Jewish claim.)
- G. **Religious importance of the land--"Israel-Palestine is key to our faith!"** Jews point to the central importance to Judaism of the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem and the Grave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Palestinian Muslims point to the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem. (Christians once made similar claims; interesting they no longer do so.)
- H. **Illegitimacy of the opponent's status as heir--"You are not descendants of those from whom you claim you inherited rights to Palestine."** A Palestinian claim, arguing that today's Jews are descended from Jewish converts from Khazaria, and cannot trace family lineage back to ancient Palestine.
- I. **Human rights--"You can't take Palestine without subjugating and expelling us, because we live there now. That's barbaric!"** (Mainly a Palestinian claim, although Israelis make a parallel claim to denounce Palestinian rejection of Israel's right to exist.)
- J. **Best use--"You wasted the land, we made it bloom."** (A Jewish claim.)
- K. **Forfeit by misconduct:**
- > "You should have shared Palestine with us but refused--so you lose it by moral forfeit." (A Jewish claim.) Related: "You started the wars between us, especially the 1948 and 1967 wars--so you lost Palestine by moral forfeit." (A Jewish claim.) Related: "The Arab states expelled many Jews in 1948 and after; this expulsion negates any wrong that the Jews committed against the Palestinians in 1948." (A Jewish claim.)
- > "You came here to create an ethnically exclusive Jewish state that would dominate us and expel us, not to live together with us in a secular state. You are the ones who wouldn't share Palestine! Hence your Zionist enterprise is morally illegitimate." (A Palestinian claim.) Related: "You started the wars between us. You knew that any indigenous people in our shoes would resist your movement by force but you pushed ahead anyway. Thus you knowingly provoked war by colonizing Palestine." Related: "You lost Palestine fair and square when you foolishly launched the Bar Kokhba rebellion in 134 CE. That folly canceled your claims based on ancient possession, as you threw the possession away." (A Palestinian claim.)

How can these moral claims be assessed?

A formula to consider: **"Both the Jews and the Palestinians**

are right. The Christian west is wrong; it is morally responsible for the conflict."

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