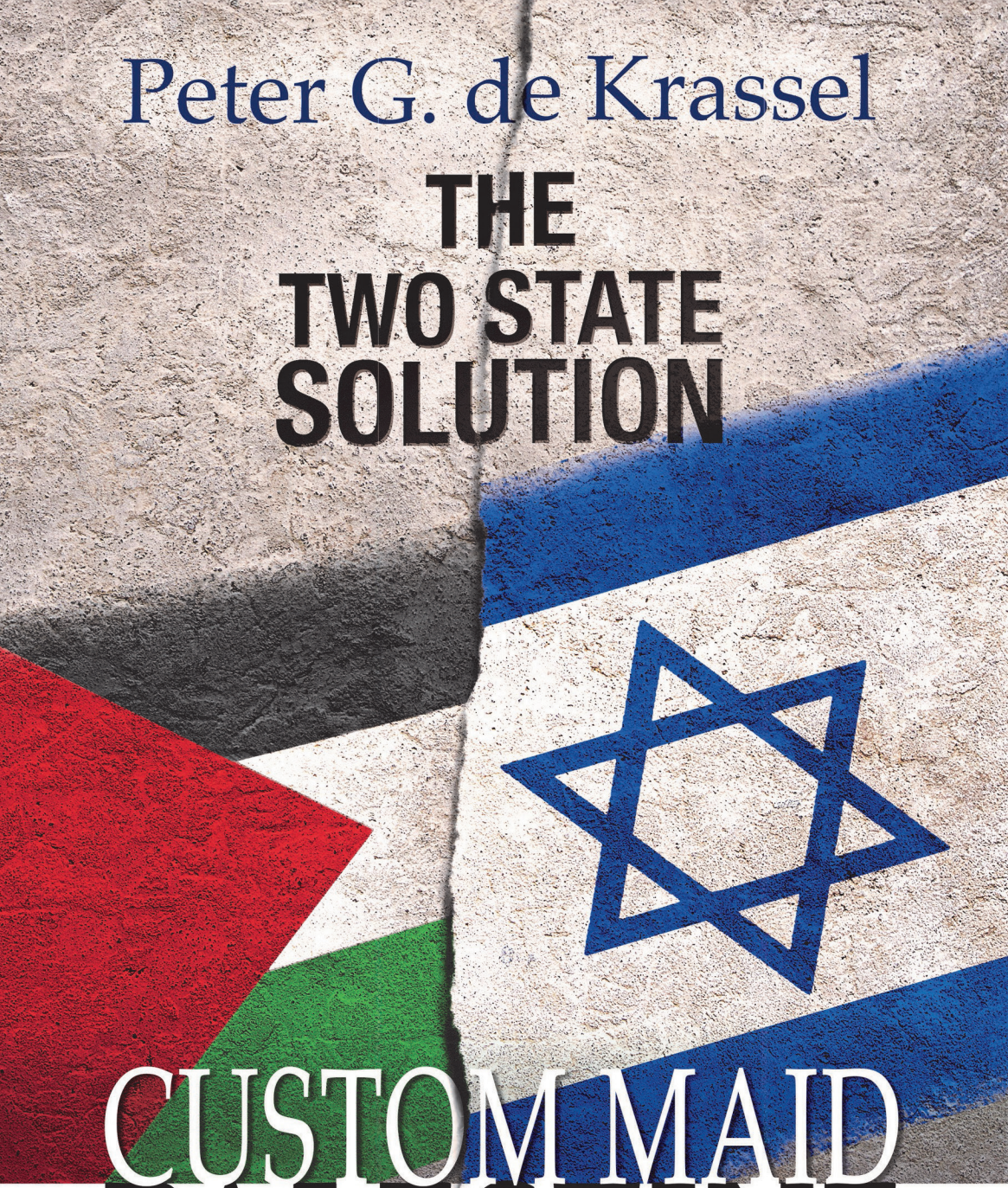
Peter G. de Krassel

THE TWO STATE SOLUTION



CUSTOM MAID PALESTINE

for NEW WORLD DISORDER

Arabian dreams, political sandstorms and broken promises

Who Am I? About the Author

I was made – conceived – in Palestine in 1946 and delivered – born – in London on January 28, 1947.

At the time, Palestine included the territory that Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, southern Türkiye, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, northwest Saudi Arabia, and Egypt occupy today.

My parents, a Zionist mother and a British Forces officer, met in Tel Aviv, married in Jerusalem, and then moved to England, where I was born.

My early education was in British and American Schools in Switzerland and Cyprus.

To complete high school I was sent to an agricultural boarding school in Israel. From there I went to the U.S. for university studies. I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in political science focused on comparative governments, Sino-Soviet communism, and government and politics of the Middle East, and graduated with Honors, and later earned a Juris Doctor Degree, also with Honors, both in California, Los Angeles in 1968, and San Francisco in 1971.

During the 1970s and 80s, I was actively involved in partisan politics at the city and county levels in Los Angeles. I was a member of the Executive Finance Council of the Democratic National Committee and served on the Executive Committee of Democrats for Ronald Reagan.

I was also involved in the Jewish community, serving as the president of the California-Israel Chamber of Commerce, a Board member of Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem, B'nai B'rith, the Zionist Organization of America, and contributed columns to local Jewish publications.

Since the mid-1980s, I have divided my time between my homes in America and China, working as a lawyer, strategic planner, media executive, writer, columnist, and businessman, most recently as co-founder and Managing Director of Pets Central, a veterinary hospital network based in Hong Kong – with intermittent visits to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, where I spent my formative years, and inherited property from my mother that I am now developing, which will include a Peace Foundation and Museum, in her name and honour.

Continued on back flap.

I have lived a Forrest Gump, Bubba, kind-of political lifestyle. I have spent time with heads of states, political movers-and-shakers, decision-makers in the political, business, and corporate worlds, some of those stories I share.

The October 7, 2023, Hamas massacre and kidnapping have confirmed Israelis' fears of extermination. Israel's reaction to the Hamas action has heightened Palestinian fears of extermination.

The political conundrum demands constructive efforts on both sides to find a solution that would enable Israelis and Palestinians to coexist peacefully as neighbours.

The kind of ***Two-State Solution*** I propose presents a viable paradigm shift forward.



Peter attending protest rally against judicial reform in Israel, April 2023

Photo and animal pictures by Dr. Pauline Taylor

Cover and illustrations: Mark Caparosa

Strong in historical perspective and a sincere addition to the search for Peace in the Middle East. De Krassel's two-state solution — with Israelis, Palestinians, and their Arab neighbors walking side by side as equals, each sovereign, each respected — could open that door, but only if all choose to step through it together.

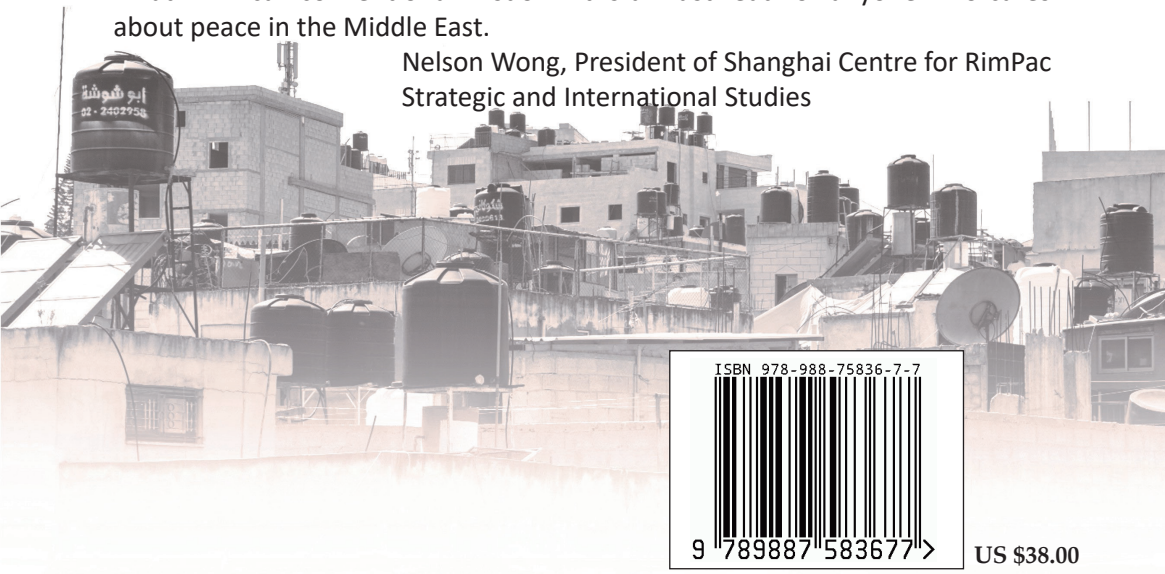
Reba Parker, Speaker, Sociology Professor (College of Charleston), Practical Peace Advocate & Author of The Peaceability Mindset

The book is elegantly and smoothly written. Most of the stories are known but Peter G. de Krassel adds his unique view and flamboyant personality. It is not a book only for scholars. It is a mandatory read for anyone interested in finding a solution to the Palestinian crisis. It was an esthetic pleasure to read, and I have gotten several new important conclusions as well.

Sergey A Karaganov
Honorary Chairman
Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy
Publisher Russian Global Affairs

By revealing ample historical facts with unparalleled depth and breadth, and while duly recognizing the efforts and peace proposals to date, Mr. de Krassel has put forth a “Two-State Solution” which you may never have thought of to solve the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Some critics might label Mr. de Krassel’s ideas to be unconventional, and you may not agree with him on all fronts, but reading this latest book of his has been an educating experience you don’t want to miss because much of his opinions have been formed from his unique life as well as his multicultural and multidisciplinary background reflecting what I will call conventional wisdom. It is a must read for anyone who cares about peace in the Middle East.

Nelson Wong, President of Shanghai Centre for RimPac Strategic and International Studies



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Also By Peter G. de Krassel:

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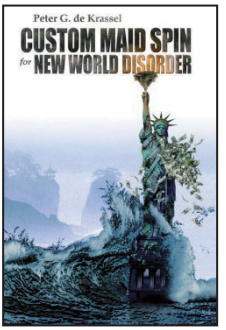
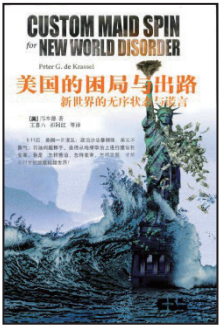
Feasting Dragon, Starving Eagle (2009);

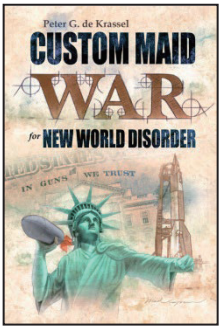
Custom Maid Revolution for New World Disorder (2012);

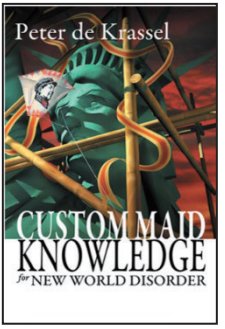
Custom Maid Backspin for New World Disorder (2022); and

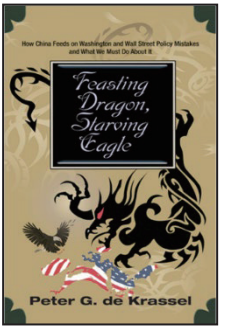
Custom Maid Housing for New World Disorder (2023/24).

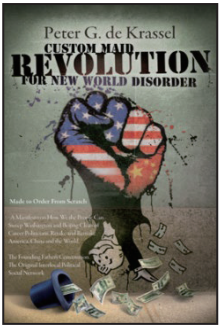


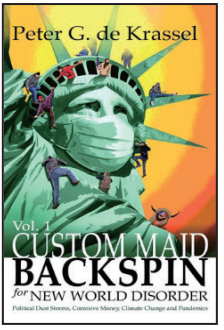
















CUSTOM MAID PALESTINE
for
NEW WORLD DISORDER
The Two-State Solution

Peter G. de Krassel

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Get On Board or Continue
to be Politically Ignored

This Book is Dedicated to Israelis and Palestinians finding a harmonious, peaceful, and long lasting neighbourly Two States solution

June 1, 2026



“Everybody Get Along”
Justine Moore

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Peter de Krassel campaigning with
Jimmy Carter during the
1976 presidential campaign.

Introduction

I'm running for president. I will never lie to you
-- Governor Jimmy Carter --

October 7, 2023
The October 7, 2023, attack in Gaza by Hamas fighters and their allies, who easily breached the security fence, and circumvented existing security and intelligence systems, as well as military personnel that Israel had stationed at the border, resulted in the tragic death of 1,200 Israeli civilians and soldiers, and Hamas taking 253 people hostage. This incident exposed Israel's vulnerability as an independent nation, particularly when it is divided by bitter political partisanship, with a prime minister who prioritizes personal interests over national well-being.

October 7, marked the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, revealing the most appalling facets of humanity's horrific crimes against humanity, including rape, the murder of babies, and the killing of disabled seniors. Most tragically, it was also the brutal slaughter of participants at the *Nova Music Festival* – a celebration representing the peace that both Israelis and Palestinians across the Gaza border long for, reminiscent of an era when they could move freely without fear of violence.

Hamas' actions made a mockery of Israel's esteemed military prowess, largely due to the support from the Iran-aligned *Axis of Resistance*, which, in addition to Hamas in Gaza, includes the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and various Shiite militias in Jordan, Iraq, and Syria.

The October 7 assault was the latest Hamas effort to undermine the state of Israel and obstruct peace between Palestinians and Israelis, as well as Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The first such attempt occurred in 1948, when Palestinians and their Arab allies sought to annihilate the newly established state of Israel, from "River to the Sea." Their failure led to the *Nakba* that rendered 750,000 Palestinians refugees, who were deliberately confined to refugee camps as a political strategy with the intention of relocating them back to Israel.

Subsequent unsuccessful attempts to eradicate Israel in 1956 and 1967, resulted in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, destroying the Jewish communities living within their borders. About 800,000 Jews fled, abandoning their ancestral homes.

Unlike Palestinian refugees, who were relegated to refugee camps for decades, Israel absorbed and resettled the Jewish refugees. More than half of Israeli Jews today are descendants of these refugees.

Jews had lived on the banks of the Nile and Euphrates for at least 1,000 years before the Arab Muslims conquered Egypt and Iraq in the 7th century. No one can argue that the Jewish communities of Cairo, Baghdad or Palestine were a recent colonialist implantation, an argument that Palestinian leaders and their allies from Tehran and New York repeatedly make. The assertion that the Jewish presence between the river and the sea is a

colonial injustice that sooner or later must be “made right,” is utter fake-fact. Nonsense!

The facts are that: *Shabbaticide: Hamas’ Deliberate Campaign to Desecrate the Sabbath*, as rabbinical student Matthew Schultz reminds us in his February 21-27, 2025 column in the *Jewish Journal*. The October 7 massacre took place on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and not just any Sabbath, but *Simchat Torah*, an important holiday celebrating the giving of the Torah. “But Hamas didn’t invent Shabbaticide. It has long been practiced by Israel’s enemies. Let’s not forget that Oct. 7 was the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war – when Israel was invaded on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, with many Jews at their most vulnerable, wrapped in *tallitot* and praying in shul,” Schultz wrote.

“This decades-long effort to desecrate Jewish holidays through invasions and massacres reveals something that people in the West fail to understand – the war against Israel is not an anti-colonialist struggle, but a religious war aimed at rooting the Jews out of Muslim lands,” he correctly concludes.

The reaction to the October 7 Hamas massacre in the Muslim world and elsewhere confirmed Israeli fears of extermination. Likewise, Israel’s reaction and response to the massacre also confirmed Palestinian fears of extermination. A political conundrum that both sides have to constructively work on to find a ***solution*** that allows Israelis and Palestinians to live side-by-side in neighbourly peace.

The ***Two-State Solution*** I propose is an answer.

What qualifies me to arrogantly propose ***The Solution***?

Background

I am a Palestinian product. I was made (conceived) in Jerusalem, Palestine, in 1946, and later born in London on January 28, 1947.

My mother, Rivga Cohen, was born in Ukraine, and migrated to Palestine in 1916 after witnessing her father beheaded by Ukrainian Cossacks during the ongoing anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia and Ukraine.

My father, George David de Krassel, was born in Estonia, when it was part of the Russian Empire. He was smuggled to England in 1916, at the start of the Bolshevik Revolution that brought the Communist Party to power. He went to Palestine with the British forces that were maintaining political and military control of the British Mandate there. Britain had taken over Palestine from the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I – and promised it to the Arabs.

My parents, one Jewish and one Christian, but both Russian speakers, met in Tel-Aviv. They married in Jerusalem, and later moved to London, England, where I was born, having been conceived in Palestine nine months before.

My father began working for the BBC, and our family relocated to

Switzerland, and later Cyprus, so that he could cover the newly founded United Nations; and the war of independence in Cyprus.

In Cyprus, I lived and grew up in Famagusta, in a neighbourhood called *Neapolis*, the Greek word for "new town," a name shared by many towns in Palestine. It was a mixed Greek Orthodox and Turkish Muslim Cypriot neighbourhood. I played with my Greek Turkish Cypriot contemporaries, even during curfews, breaking curfew. We often broke curfew laws, dodging the British police officers and their local constabulary, while listening to stories about detentions and the disappearances of friends' siblings.

My mother chose this neighbourhood because she refused to live in a British camp or compound, despite British families being advised to do so, as British citizens were targets of the Greek Cypriot Liberation movement – EOKA – led by

George Grivas, who was branded a terrorist and deemed a threat to us "English."

After my parents separated and divorced, I faced derogatory remarks from my British classmates. They called me a "WOG lover," a term denoting Wiley Oriental Gentleman," akin to the racial slur "Nigger lover."

I was the only blond English kid in a predominantly dark-haired Greek Turkish neighbourhood. I learned to speak fluent Greek and some Turkish, while being raised by my single mom.
My primary education was in Cyprus, in both British and

American schools, and within the local community. I attended the Army Children's School in Karaolos, a British military camp that formerly served as an internment camp for Jewish Holocaust refugees who were arrested while attempting to migrate to Palestine in violation of British immigration laws. My mother helped bring them ashore in Palestine under the cover of darkness in row boats from ships anchored offshore.

The camp was portrayed in the movie *Exodus,* starring Paul Newman and filmed in the town and at the beach where I spent my formative years and still visit today.

After the camp and the school were vacated by the British and handed over to the Cypriot government in 1957, and with no other British or English school in Famagusta, my mother sent me to the American Academy boarding school in Larnaca. I was the only Jew in a Christian-Muslim boarding school, but when my mother realized that I was being subjected to antisemitism, she moved me to an agricultural boarding school in Israel.

Neapolis, the Army Children School and American Academy prepared me for *Kfar Hayarok*, the green village in Israel. Here I was, a 13-year-old blonde "English Cypriot" with a Christian name who didn't speak a word of Hebrew. Fun times indeed, and a great educational experience filled with wonderful memories, life-long experiences, and friendships.

I completed high school at Kfar, spending my final year on a

kibbutz. From there, I returned to Cyprus and decided to pursue my university studies in the U.S.

Upon graduating from law school in 1971, I began practicing law in Los Angeles, where I later built my firm*, de Krassel, Tierney & Cohen*. I sold my interest to my partners in 1980, and established the Mercantile National Bank, at the time the largest initially capitalized federal bank, along with several thrift and loan organizations. I also founded Counsellors at Large, a strategic consulting firm, with offices in Los Angeles and Hong Kong.

Since the mid-1980s, I have split my time between my homes in America and China, periodically visiting family and friends in Israel and Cyprus.

I am not someone who merely loves to travel and explore different places, and people. I am a political adventurer and explorer, delving into political and religious landscapes, philosophies – their histories, failures and successes.

The October 7 Hamas massacre and Israel's response to it have confirmed the fears of Israelis and Palestinians of their mutual extermination. Both faced existential threats. It's a political conundrum which suggested that both sides consider engaging with the other to find a ***solution*** that will allow Israelis and Palestinians to live side-by-side in neighbourly peace.

The ***Two-State Solution*** I propose is an answer and one that has not been seriously considered to date.

To understand the genesis of this conflict between Hamas – the Islamic Resistance Movement that is backed by Iran, Qatar, and some of their allies – and Israel with U.S. backing, we need to delve into the history of Palestine and the regional players, like Iran, formerly known as Persia, and Saudi Arabia, previously called Arabia. Additionally, the critical role the United States has played, the repercussions of which we see playing out in the Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, and Yemen wars -- along with their direct and indirect regional participants like Britain, France, Russia and China.

Before delving any deeper into how and why October 7 happened, or how and why Israel got into crossing swords with Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, Syrian rebels and Iran, etc., and who is to blame for what and where, it is important we **Cancel** *Cancel Culture*! It's inevitable to honestly review and discuss the fact about Palestine. Real facts, not self-serving fake facts. Something that is easy to do today with any honest fact-checking site.

People should get out of the echo chamber bubbles that social media and Artificial Intelligence algorithms have created and parked in people's minds. People must start talking and listening to each other, shun false AI-induced beliefs and star respecting each other's points of view, be they political, religious, or personal.

We need to engage!

Only then can we foster a free and open discussion and engage in healthy debates that include all perspectives about Palestine. The time is long overdue to engage in dialogue and listen to each other's viewpoints – peacefully and collegially – only then can a Palestinian state be established.

The merits and demerits of recognizing a Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank, and parts of Old Jerusalem, the alternative Palestinian state in the location I am proposing, or other option can only become a reality after we cancel *Cancel Culture*.

Cancel the Cancel Culture

Israel has been quietly crumbling internally over the decades due to cancel culture-- a decline that became loud and public when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chose to fight his criminal indictments by undermining the judicial independence of the Supreme Court. He granted his extreme-right parliamentary religious coalition the power to overrule and override court decisions that did not align with their interests. An additional incentive driving the religious right agenda is the fact that the Supreme Court has ruled the annexation of the West Bank is illegal.

Israelis took to the streets by the hundreds of thousands, protesting the government's decision to strip the Supreme Court of its independence. I joined the protest in Tel Aviv in April 2023 when I went there to spend Passover with my family. Much to my pleasant surprise, many Israelis then carried pro-Palestinian banners and shouted pro-Palestinian slogans.

The political division the protests highlighted was the final straw that led to the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, and the murderous rampage that followed that day. The slaughter was triggered by Yahya Sinwar who aimed to stop a Saudi-Israeli peace agreement and the promise of a Palestinian State, believing that Israel was so divided it could not defend itself; he thought that Iran and its Hezbollah, Houthi, and Shiite Iraqi-Syria terrorist-funded and armed proxies would immediately support Hamas in its battle to destroy and take over Israel from
the river to the sea.

The crumbling state protests continued to widen the schism in Israeli society after October 7 and morphed into the *Bring The Hostages Home* campaign – a futile and ever-frustrating effort. Protestors began calling for Netanyahu to resign, blaming him for the security failures that led to October 7, as well as the ongoing wars in Gaza and Lebanon. Many also demanded a Two-State Solution to prevent future wars.

Palestinians and their supporters on college campuses and elsewhere across the world took to the streets to denounce Israel's military response to the Hamas attack. Israelis, Jews, and their supporters responded by reaffirming their support for Israel and reminding the world that it was Hamas that initiated the conflict – not Israel. Israelis travelling abroad were subjected to hostile encounters and harassment. Just speaking Hebrew was enough to elicit an aggressive reaction.

Israel's national soccer team fans attending a game in Belgium were attacked, the team's coach and his assistant were harassed in Athens, and in Vienna in late July 2025, the cellist Amit Peled, the violinist Hagai Shaham, and the pianist Julia Gurvitch popped into a pizzeria before their concert. They ordered their food in German. The waiter asked what language they were speaking between them and when told it was Hebrew, the waiter said he would not serve them and expelled them.

"The initial shock and humiliation were profound," Peled wrote in an Instagram post a day after the events. "But what struck us even more deeply was what came next – or rather, what didn't. The people around us were clearly startled, some offered sympathetic glances, and then, quickly, they went back to their dinners, conversations, their wine – as though nothing had happened."

Even more galling, Peled said, was that two of them came to the concert after the meal.

Shaham, the violinist said in Berlin Uber drivers would cancel his rides when they saw his name.

"As humans," he said, "I think we have to act humanely."

Presenting himself as a cultural representative who does not take a political stance, Shaham added, "Classical music is the language of Europe."

Cancel culture has kicked in on many university and college campuses in the U.S. Pro-Palestine and pro-Israel events, even unrelated graduation ceremonies, were cancelled! University deans were forced to resign due to their inability to control the protests, and in some cases, the takeover of university buildings.

Brooklyn College cancelled an event planned by the *Jewish Currents* magazine because some of the speakers were pro-Palestinian and the event was also a fundraiser for humanitarian services for Palestinian children and legal support for pro-Palestinian activists in the U.S.

I wholeheartedly agree with Corey Robin, an outspoken professor of political science at Brooklyn College, who stated, “It seems silly to say this,” he told Professor M. Gessen, a board member of *Jewish Currents* magazine, “but this – fostering open discussion – is what a university is for. You can’t talk about a two-state solution or a one-state solution if you can’t even have a conversation about it on a college campus.”

According to Professor Gessen in an op-ed piece he wrote for *The New York Times International Edition* on September 19, 2024, the reasons for the cancellations stem from fear. Why is there fear? “Fear the way these issues are manipulated in public discourse. By choosing the path of excessive caution, however – cancelling the event entirely and being cagey about the reasons – Brooklyn College not only betrayed its own mission,” said Gessen, “It also scored another victory for those who cynically wield accusations

of antisemitism to quash open discussion and turn facts into dangerous secrets."

I share this sentiment wholeheartedly. I have personally experienced and was subjected to the same type of censorship for a show of illustrations from my books and blogs. I was set to give a talk with illustrator Mark Caparosa at Hillel-UCLA on January 23, 2025. The show, titled *State of Statelessness,* aimed to highlight the illustrations from my book, *Custom Maid Housing for New World Disorder*, which proposes solutions to America's housing crisis on how to *Build Affordable Housing Profitably,* with illustrations that advocate for a two-state solution. When the illustrations were displayed in preparation for the show, some students objected to an illustration of Trump with a Pinocchio nose and a Twitter symbol at the end. They demanded the removal of this and other Trump and Israel-related illustrations. Hillel yielded to their pressure and asked us to replace the objectionable illustrations. We disagreed with their decision and after a few long-distance calls between Hillel in LA, New York, where Mark resides, and me, it was resolved to keep the objectionable illustrations up but have them covered until the show opens. But then, the show had to be postponed to February 27, 2025, due to the Pacific Palisades fire that destroyed the community in January and continued to rage at the time.

Whenever I am in LA, where two of my children and three grandchildren were born and raised, I visit family and friends. Several of my family members and friends, before retiring,

worked in the entertainment industry in Hollywood. Some still do. Producers, agents, managers, costume designers, drivers, set designers and actors.

I worked part-time as a miniature prop carpenter, building movie sets in 1967 through 1968 while completing my political science studies, and as a lawyer in the 1970s and 80s, I represented actors, and studios in their distribution of television shows in China.

Hollywood is at war with itself when it comes to discussing the Gaza War, West Bank annexation, or Palestinian rights with members of a so-called progressive community. In the words of Sharon Waxman, founder, chief executive and editor in chief of *The Wrap*, unlike South African apartheid or even the war in Ukraine, issues the industry could unite over, the conflict between Palestine and Israel remains “a third rail, with convictions running deep and across the board. The documentary ‘No Other Land,’ which depicted oppression in the West Bank, won film festival acclaim and ultimately an Oscar, but stirred such controversy that distributors didn’t want to touch it.”

The documentary *The Voice of Hind Rajab* which reduced critics to tears and received a 24-minute ovation at the Venice Film Festival in September 2025 magnified the divide.

Arguing over the merits of allowing or banning pro-Israeli actors

or their films at the Venice Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival, became a personal contentious issue. When it came to the Toronto International Film Festival, the argument revolved around showing *The Road Between Us: The Ultimate Rescue*, a documentary of a retired Israeli general, Noam Tibon, racing from Tel Aviv to the Nahal Oz kibbutz to save his children and grandchildren during the initial October 7 Hamas attack. I felt personally touched because, during my agricultural high school days in Israel, I had spent time at Nahal Oz working in the fields. Many of my classmates moved there after graduation, and some were there during the October 7 attack. The documentary premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2025, though the threat of it not making it was ever-present because Hamas footage of the attack had not been cleared.

Being at UCLA for my book talk where local riot police had used stun grenades to stop pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli students fighting against each other, I couldn't help the horrible flashback of Hisham Awartani, Kinnan Abdalhamid and Tahseen Alliahmad, the three Palestinian students, injured by gunfire while on a stroll before their November 2023 Thanksgiving dinner in Burlington, Vermont, where I was going after my talk.

I spent considerable time in Vermont from 2023 to 2025, promoting my housing charity, *Breaking Housing Matters*. My aim was to get cities in the region to pilot my Housing Subsidy Solution and launch the Housing Subsidy Fund. I chose Vermont, along with Massachusetts, both very progressive states when it

comes to housing.

Palestinians in Vermont? I pondered as I walked through a biting blizzard from my room at the Best Western Motel in Rutland to breakfast. I had just heard news of the Palestinian students attacked while visiting family and friend in Burlington. I witnessed the outrage among Vermonters regarding what had happened to these innocent Palestinians going about doing their own thing and enjoying life to be treated in such a brutal way.

Vermonters are a unique group of American political rebels, a legacy that dates to British colonial days, through the American Revolution, and post, rebels led by Ethan Allan, through today, with figures like Senator Bernie Sanders being a contemporary elected representative example. From extreme political progressives to Green Mountain armed militia. Vermont, known as the Green Mountain state, boasts stunning mountains. It was the first state in the 2024 presidential election that voted for Kamala Harris at a national level – and decimated the Democratic Party locally in cities across the state.

Even Vermont's Ben & Jerry's ice cream got entangled in the Palestine issue when its CEO, David Stever, was fired by the parent company Unilever for the company's stance on Gaza, which called for a cease-fire and support for Palestinian refugees.

In July 2025, Senator Sanders called for a resolution to block the export of automatic assault rifles for use by the Israeli National

Police, which is overseen by Itamar Ben-Gvir, one of the most extreme right-wing members of the government. The measure failed but amounted to an extraordinary rebuke of the Netanyahu government.

All three members of Vermont's congressional delegation – Democrats U.S. Representative Becca Balint and Senator Peter Welch, and independent Senator Bernie Sanders -- were some of the first members of Congress to publicly call Israel's war a genocide.

"America has a moral responsibility to own our complicity in this genocide and to use our power to stop it," Congresswoman Balint whose grandfather died in the Holocaust, wrote in an editorial opinion.

I was heartened to read that a bipartisan group of five Vermont State House members were among 250 state legislators from across the U.S. to participate in a conference organized by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs called "50 States, One Israel" that ran from September 15 to 18, 2025.

Republican James Gregoire, said in an email after the trip that he and other Vermont legislators "spoke to the concerns of food distribution" in Gaza during the trip. He said he observed a divide between what many Israeli citizens want, which is "just to live in peace," and what Netanyahu and some members of the Israeli government want. However, he said it was clear to him that Hamas was standing in the way of a peaceful solution as well.

“The reality is Hamas created this disaster and that cannot be ignored because they will never allow a lasting peace,” he wrote.

Representative Gina Galfetti, one of Gregoire’s GOP colleagues, said that “Hamas has the power to end this conflict and the suffering of the Palestinian people right now by releasing the hostages they took so violently.”

Democratic Representative Will Greer said that he did not travel to Israel to show support for Israel’s government. He described the trip as an opportunity to share concerns that his constituents have raised – including the lack of food aid in Gaza – with Israeli leaders.

“One of the things that I hear a lot from people in Bennington is that, you know, we’re powerless on the world stage. But this was an opportunity to show that we’re not, and to show that we can be changemakers,” Greer said. “I’ve never shied away from trying to add to the conversation – and trying to be there to promote peace.”

Representatives Galfetti, Greer, and Gregoire, were joined on the trip with Democratic Representatives Sarita Austin and Matt Birong.

The soul and spirit of Vermont serve as a modern reminder of what the American revolutionary spirit is all about. President Trump echoes this sentiment, particularly in New England,

America's revolutionary hotbed. The Boston Tea Party was the opening shot of America's revolution, and today's Tea Party faction of the Republican Party acts as a 21st-century reminder, alongside the MAGA movement in New England.

Mohsen Mahdawi, a permanent U.S. resident with a Green Card was arrested when he attended his citizenship interview in Vermont. The reason for his arrest? His outspoken pro-Palestinian views at Columbia University which was at the forefront of anti-Israel and Jewish protests. In 2023, a building at Columbia was taken over by pro-Palestinian students who were abusive towards Jewish students. Mahdawi's arrest brought Vermonters out in the thousands in protest and in support of Mahdawi.

Mahmoud Khalil, another U.S. permanent resident with Palestinian roots, a graduate student at Columbia University, and the co-leader of the pro-Palestinian demonstrations at Columbia, was arrested and held in Louisiana for deportation.

Both Mahdawi and Khalil are entitled to the very foundational rights of the American Constitution and First Amendment, which protects free speech. Including theirs!

Those in the Columbia Palestinian student movement, as in previous historical Palestinian movements, could not agree on a strategy – violent or non-violent approaches -- a reflection of the conflict between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. While some students distributed fliers during a campus demonstration

that glorified violent resistance, Mahdawi was approaching Israeli students, hoping to find common ground in the divisive Israeli Palestinian conflict that had wrought horrors on both sides and affected his life. He told friends that the Palestinian student movement was sidelining him partly because he wished to engage in dialogue with supporters of Israel. Many pro-Palestinian activists rejected the idea. As a result, he stepped back from leadership of the pro-Palestinian movement he had helped establish on campus, which was becoming increasingly hardline in its rhetoric and actions.

Mahdawi, who was expected to graduate in May 2025 from Columbia, attended his citizenship interview in April, fully aware it might be a trap.

Growing up in a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank, Mahdawi, then 34, witnessed violence, including the death of his best friend at the hands of an Israeli soldier. But rather than seeking vengeance, since immigrating to the U.S. in 2014, he has delivered more than 100 lectures at churches, synagogues, and colleges, promoting empathy as the key to a resolving the Middle East conflict. He is a practicing Buddhist.

“The human being is not the enemy,” reads a slide from one of his presentations. “The enemy is fear, segregation and ignorance.”

David Myers, a professor of Jewish history at UCLA, met

Mahdawi at a summer retreat that brought together activists and scholars seeking a new approach to peace between Israelis and Palestinians. They remained in touch.

“This is a person who stands for precisely the values we want to raise up at this moment of such starkness and such blindness and such division and polarization,” said Myers, who formerly led the New Israel Fund, a progressive philanthropic organization. “This person constitutes a bridge, and we’ve torn that bridge down instead of embracing it.”

Mahdawi, met his future American wife in Palestine and moved to the U.S. in 2014. They settled in Vermont’s Upper Valley, near Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, where his wife was a medical student. They married but divorced two years later. He got his green card in 2015 and began studying computer science while organizing events focused on storytelling to inspire peace.

In the fall of 2023, in the aftermath of the October 7 attack on Israel, he aimed to give voice to Palestinians at Columbia where he was a student. He became a leader of a pro-Palestinian student movement on campus and co- founded a Palestinian student union with Mahmoud Khalil.

Aharon Dardik, a 24-year-old Israeli American junior at Columbia double-majoring in philosophy and political science, said that he and Mahdawi collaborated on a proposal exceeding 65 pages, which they felt would promote Israeli Palestinian peace.

“Mohsen spoke of a future where Jews and Palestinians alike were able to live freely and equally,” said Dardik, who considers Mahdawi a close friend, and was part of a group of Jewish students who chained themselves to a Columbia gate to protest Khalil’s detention.

Like Khalil, Mahdawi was always unmasked at protests, making them targets. Vans circulated the campus with Mahdawi’s face plastered on LED screens, branding him an antisemite.

As protests and counterprotests erupted on campus, he collaborated with Professor Jean E. Krasno, a lecturer in political science, and others on a project they called “the Peace Initiative for Israel/Palestine.” Their goal was to determine how their idealistic vision for the region could be realized in practice.

“When he’s on campus, he meets with Jewish students, Israeli students and other international students to build a kind of consensus, to share ideas,” Dr. Krasno said. Mahdawi is working on a peace process. That is what makes it so ironic. “It is just the complete opposite of what the government is painting him as,” said Dr. Krasno.

Mahdawi was determined to attend his citizenship appointment in Vermont, even though he feared it might be a trap. He alerted Vermont’s senators and representatives in case things went wrong. Before the appointment, Mahdawi gathered in a nearby hotel with a few friends, his lawyer, and state lawmaker Becca

White. Don Foster, a retired Foreign Service officer and friend of Mahdawi for a decade said the mood was subdued. “One thing that gave me hope in that meeting Monday morning with him was I heard him tell Becca not to worry.” Since he has been studying meditation, he was going to use his time in prison to meditate and “make heaven for himself there.”

American Justice

Both Mahdawi and Khalil were released from detention by judges enforcing the law. “Despite spending 16 nights in a jail cell, I never lost hope in the inevitability of justice and the principles of democracy. I wanted to become a citizen of America because I believe in the principles that it enshrines. When Judge Geoffrey W. Crawford ruled in my favour he reassured me, along with the American people, that there is still reason to hope in those principles,” Mahdawi said in an Opinion piece published by *The New York Times International Edition* on May 5, 2025.

His only crime Mahdawi said in that article, was “refusing to accept the slaughter of Palestinians, opposing war and promoting peace. I have simply insisted that international law must be respected. I believe the way to a just and long-lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis is through diplomacy and restorative justice.”

Khalil was released after U.S. district judge Michael Farbiarz said it would be “highly, highly unusual” for the government to continue detaining a legal United States resident who was unlikely to flee and had not been accused of any violence.

“Petitioner is not a flight risk, and the evidence presented is that he is not a danger to the community,” said William G. Young, the judge presiding over the trial.

Columbia University agreed to amend its policies to combat antisemitism to restore $400 million in federal funding that had been cut by Trump because of its failure to protect Jewish students from harassment during the protests. The university adopted a series of disciplinary measures, including suspensions, temporary degree revocation, and expulsions, targeting student protestors who occupied a campus building in 2024.

The Trump administration demanded that Columbia codify a definition of antisemitism that specifically addressed anti-Zionism, and insisted that the Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies departments be put under “academic receivership.”

The notion of innocent Palestinians, Israelis, Jews and Muslims being victimized for their identities or expressing their beliefs peacefully is un-American. This represents the worst excesses of Cancel Culture.



“In this world there are only two tragedies.
One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.”
Oscar Wilde



Chapter One

Palestine – Borderless Province

Democracy is the art and science of running
a circus from the monkey cage
– H.L. Menchen –

Borderless Province

Palestine, is, and always has been, a fluctuating and changing borderless concept, sometimes possessing, and other times lacking, official administrative status. The geographical, political and administrative boundaries of Palestine have shifted over the course of three millennia. It is time not only to change again but to establish definitive boundaries – borders – of a modern Palestinian-nation.

There has never been a pure modern- day concept of Palestine as a nation state. The phrase “From the river to the sea” is neither the answer nor a viable suggestion for a state.

Modern-day Palestine has included over the centuries, not only Israel, but also parts of Türkiye, as well as all of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Northwest Saudi Arabia. Palestine, as a historic memory, has been kept alive over the ages through oral histories and traditional Arab storytelling and poetry, especially the Mamluk and Ottoman periods by Palestinian Muslim writers and jurists as well as Arab and Muslim travellers through Palestine, which like the Koran, are memorized and easily recited.

Palestine encompassed the territories of the modern-day countries mentioned earlier not as a country, but as a “Province.” The capital of this province, both political and administrative, shifted among numerous cities over the millennia, but primarily Jerusalem, Caesaria, and Damascus.

Professor Nur Masalha, a Palestinian historian and a member of the Centre for Palestine Studies at SOAS, University of London, in his *book Palestine A Four Thousand Year History* gives Palestine and its people a face and a voice backed by documented historical facts. He argues that “the legend of the ‘Israelites’ conquest of Cana’an’ and other master narratives of the Old Testament, or ‘Hebrew Bible’ – a collection of texts compiled over several centuries – are myth-narratives designed to underpin false consciousness, rather than evidence-based history which promotes truth and understanding”

He also points out why local Arabs have completely forgotten Palestine during the late Mamluk and early Ottoman periods and that it was only brought back to them in the late Ottoman period by local Christians in touch with Europe.

This book is a highly recommended read for anyone interested in the history of Palestine.

The Palestinian identity is a multi-layered personality of all the powerful cultures that have passed through the land of Palestine, including Hellenic, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Aramaic, Arab,

Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Arab-Jewish, Ottoman, and British. I am such a Palestinian mutt. Conceived there by a loving Zionist mother and a Christian father with the British forces.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is home of two Jewish temples where Jews have prayed continuously for millennia, remaining steadfast in their faith through the ages without converting to Christianity, Islam, or any other faith, as other locals did.

Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC and the Romans in 70 AD. It has been home to the Al Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock, two of Islam's holiest sites. This is the city Muhammad, the prophet visited during his *Night Dream Journey*, where he tethered his winged steed, Buraq, during his ascent to heaven, and the city towards which Muhammad and Muslims turned when they prayed before changing direction to face Mecca.

Jerusalem, the ancient capital of various empires and religions over the millennia, is today the capital of Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people – and a place also claimed by Palestinian Arabs. It is once again at the center of political debate concerning whose capital it truly is, either wholly or partially, facing a political crisis involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's extreme religious-right government, as the Israeli Supreme Court and Knesset (parliament), grapple with Netanyahu's criminal trials and legal challenges to the court's authority.

Today's Palestine is defined from the former Ottoman district of Jerusalem, part of the provinces of Beirut and Damascus, and was granted to Britain as a Mandate by the newly created League of Nations after World War I.

Even if we collectively accept the historical arguments supporting the existence of Palestine as a political concept, with Palestinians of all ethnicities and religions --primarily Arab Muslims -- living within shifting boundaries, beyond the River to the Sea; and a Zionist Jewish homeland in biblical Canaan, Judea and Samaria in modern day Israel – let's assert for a moment, that both historical perspectives are valid!

What is a practical territorial solution for the establishment of a Palestinian state that can co-exist peacefully with Israel, with the boundaries of a modern state in today's extreme political and military atmosphere in the Middle East?

All of the solutions proposed since 1948 proved non-starters. Certainly, it is not the most frequently debated plan, which would create a fragmented and unmanageable state tying Gaza and the West Bank politically, economically, and militarily. It will simply lead to more of the same endless, corrupt negotiations that have persisted for years, to the detriment of each successive generation of Palestinian youth who continue to suffer needlessly. Let's not forget that the city of Gaza, is the city of Samson's last stand, the stand that brought the walls crumbling down. A prophecy?

Being Jewish was one of the many regional identities within Palestine; it simply meant an inhabitant of Judea. The latter derives from the name Judah which dates back to the 8th-century BC and refers to the region of the southern highlands, foothills, and adjacent steppe lands at some stage in the course of the 8th to early 6th centuries BC. The inhabitants of Judea became associated with what subsequently became known as the Israelites, who, as a group, appeared in Assyrian inscriptions during the Iron Age II in the 9th-8th centuries BC.

History of Palestine

Palestine has been a defined territory in the Middle East for more than 3,200 years, since the late Bronze Age, from 1300 BC onwards. Over the centuries, it has covered most of what we today refer to as the Middle East. Palestine has been a revolving reconfiguration of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, medieval Islamic, and British Mandate administered boundaries, downsized over time as it was carved up into several distinct countries -- not just Israel, but also Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and northwest Saudi Arabia have all been part of Palestine at one time or another over the past three millennia.

So why is Israel the only country being asked to give-up land for a Palestinian state? Why aren't the other forementioned countries that were part of Palestine asked to do the same?

Palestine has been ruled by Phoenicians, who are identical to Cana'nites, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Israelites, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, British and French, Pagans, Zoroastrian, Christian, Muslim,

Jews, and others. They were all Palestinians.

Today's Palestinians are culturally and linguistically Arab and mostly Muslim. The Palestinian Muslim population was mainly descended from local Palestinian Christians and Jews who had converted to Islam after the Islamic conquest in the 7th-century and inherited many of the social, cultural, religious and linguistic traditions of ancient Palestine, including those of Israelites, Canaanites and Philistines, Samaritans, Hellenic Greeks, Romans Nabatean Arabs, tribal nomadic Arabs, some Europeans from the Crusades, Turks, Brits, French, Russians, and others.

Palestine was always more than just Gaza and the West Bank. To look at these two apocalyptic, detached war zones as a future Palestinian state is not only erroneous and short-sighted -- It is a non-starter!

Time for a disruptive solution, a sea change in thinking to come up with a solution – a modern workable Palestinian State! To realize this, we need to know the history of Palestine and be able to discuss and explore new ideas and thinking – honestly and pragmatically -- that means we have to **cancel** *cancel culture*.

I agree with Masalha who says, "the millennia of Palestine history cannot be an appendage to the 'Israel-Palestine' conflict or subsidiary to the debates on identity politics in Palestine-Israel."

The multi-layered heritage of Palestine is a history of mixed cultural styles and contradictory traditions, marked by twists and turns, of memory and forgetfulness, and of suppression and recovery.

Palestine was the name used most from classical Athenian civilization in 500 BC until the end of the Greek speaking Christian Byzantine period and the occupation of Palestine by the Muslim armies from Arabia in 637-638 AD.

Aramaic was the language of the Jews of Palestine and Jesus of Nazareth. Hebrew was confined to liturgical uses.

The classical, post classical, medieval Arab Islamic, and modern conception of Palestine all went far beyond the original 'land of the Peleset' (*pi-lis-te*, or Pilistu, 'from Gaza to Tantur') of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age.

The official conversion of the Eastern Roman Empire to Christianity in the 4th century and the massive spread of Christianity in the Near East and Roman Provincia Arabia brought about a religious, social, intellectual, and cultural transformation of the country and the creation of greater Palestine (Provincia Palaestina). At its greatest extent in Late Antiquity, greater Palestine under the Byzantines (from the 4th to the early 7th centuries) was divided into three provinces: Palaestina Prima, Palaestina Secunda and Palaestina Salutaris. They were not seen or treated as separate provinces, but politically, militarily, culturally and ecclesiastically they were conceived and continued

to evolve under the Byzantines as 'Three in One' Palestine provinces.

Palestine, throughout its history, has been controlled, dominated, colonized, and managed by foreign powers. Historical powers continue to play a role in Palestine. They include Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China. With 20-20 hindsight, they can collectively play a role today but without repeating past political misjudgements.

With their knowledge and experience of Palestine, honesty about humanity, human suffering, putting religion aside, they can collectively, with the political philosophy and political will of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, come up with the borders of a new Palestinian state, its funding, financial commitments and support.

Arab Palestinians

Arab Palestinians have roots in Arabia, specifically Saudi Arabia. The process began when the Arabs started migrating as individuals and communities in different waves from the Arabian Peninsula to the Levant region which comprised Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine. These waves of migration continued and increased after the triumph of Christianity in the 4th century AD when the new religion was officially embraced by Constantine and the Roman Empire.

From the 3rd to the early 7th centuries AD, large parts of the "Three Palestinas" were settled by the Ghassanid Arab population that emigrated from Saudi Arabia.

The Palestine church integrated the Ghassanid Arabs, and large portions of these provinces were gradually transformed in the 5th-6thcenturies into Ghassanid Arab phylarchates, often referred to as "frontier kingdoms."

The Ghassanid Arabs fought alongside the Byzantines against the Persian Sassanids and the Arab Lakhmid tribes of Southern Iraq. Both the Romans and the Byzantines recognized the Ghassanid Arabs as powerful allies.

The influence of the Ghassanid Arabs on Provencia Palaestina lasted for centuries, with their Christian Arab kings (supreme phylarchs) reigning until the Islamic conquest of Palestine in the 7th-century.

The Ghassanid Arabs, identified as Ishmaelites, interacted with both Christians and Jews in Palestine, learning from them about their common descent from Abraham.

During late Antiquity, Caesarea-Palestina and Gaza replaced Athens and Alexandria as the premier centers of learning in the entire Mediterranean region.

As a Mediterranean country, strategically located between Asia, Africa and Europe, and between the Mediterranean and the Red

Seas, Palestine flourished culturally and economically, achieving a degree of autonomy through its soft power – its holy places, academies, and libraries. Palestine also underwent a gradual process of Arabization, with large parts effectively transforming into Arab vassal states under imperial Byzantine influence.

Following the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 AD, Islam not only conquered the Ghassanid phylarchates of Palestine, but also adopted Christian and Jewish religious terminology and practices.

Arab pagan society was largely illiterate, which led to the cultivation of a rich aural tradition of storytelling, and poetry -- the oldest form of Arabic literature.

In this pre-Islamic Arab culture, the poet served as an oral historian, storyteller, social critic, public intellectual, soothsayer, and political agitator, much like Muhammad did.

I listened to some of these Bedouin oral histories when visiting Bedouin camps during the summers of the early 1960s, serving as an assistant tour guide to my mother, who would bring European tour groups from Cyprus to tour Israel, including Bedouin camps. I heard their stories again when visiting Israel in the 1980s with American elected officials and celebrities. The stories haven't changed much.

They are skilled storytellers.

In the mid-7th century, the population of Palestine was predominantly Christian, consisting mainly of Palestinian Syriac Aramaic-speaking peasants who continued to speak the language of Jesus throughout the early Islamic period.

The Arabization, homogenization, and Islamization of Palestine were gradual processes. From a largely Aramaic-speaking Christian majority to a predominantly Arabic-speaking Muslim majority.

The reading and memorization of the Koran were essential for spreading standard Arabic and establishing it as the lingua franca in the newly founded Islamic empire.

Aylah, present-day Aqaba, was the first major town in Palestine that the Muslim forces under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad captured in 630 AD. By 637-638 Palestine was fully integrated into the Islamic Caliphate. In the Islamic system of governance, a Caliph is viewed as a supreme ruler chosen by the community to succeed the Prophet Muhammad.

There have been several caliphates, including the Umayyads, Mamelukes, and Abbasids with the last being the Ottoman Turks. Palestinian Muslim writers and jurists, as well as by Arab and Muslim travellers to Palestine, have preserved the memory of historical Palestine throughout the recent Mamluk and Ottoman periods. As a travelling lawyer-writer, I can relate to this experience.

The Holy Land, the Land of the Gospel, a sacred territory, has been embraced by Muslims from the Koranic traditions, by Jews through the Old Testament, and celebrated by the indigenous people of Palestine, including Samaritans, based on the religious memory, and by Christians from the traditions of the Old and New Testaments. This multifaith identity of Palestine is universally recognized.

The British who occupied Palestine in 1917-1918, had committed themselves to Zionist goals as spelled out in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917. In 1920, the San Remo Conference of the four Principal Allied Powers of the First World War decided to incorporate the words of the Balfour Declaration in the text of the British Mandate over Palestine. Facing the existential threat posed by the pro-Zionist Balfour Declaration commitments, the Palestinian nationalist movement had to grapple early on with what was to become a perennial dilemma: whether to emphasize the territorial aspects of Palestine or the pan-Arabist dimensions of Palestinian Arab identity. This dilemma has bedevilled Palestinian nationalist politics throughout the first half of the 20th-century and has been carried forward well into the 21st-century. Palestinian nationalism since 1918 has focused primarily on the boundaries of Mandatory Palestine.

The United Nations led by Security Council members Britain and France, who carved up Palestine in the Sykes-Picot Agreement with Russia, and released the Balfour Declaration, decided that

Peter G. de Krassel

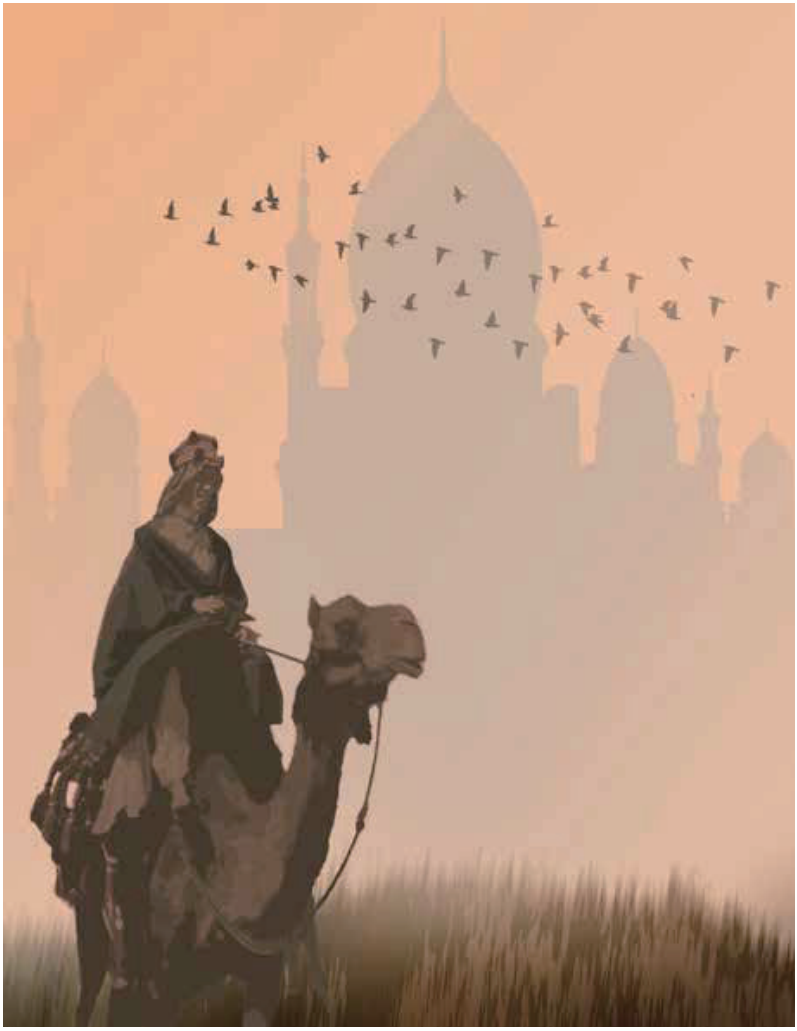
Gaza, the West Bank, and parts of Israel, namely the Galilee and Negev, should be part of the Palestinian state – not the Jewish state.

U.N. Resolution 181 which partitioned Palestine, was unrealistic and unworkable from the start. The U.N. two-state solution failed to see the light of day in 1948; and remains unachievable today.

Time for a paradigm shift – a Sea Change of thinking -- if there is ever going to be a two-state solution that breathes life, and gives birth, to a Palestinian state, living in peace and harmony with Israel.

Like no meaningful talk about Britain, France, Iran, Russia, or China can be held without a clear knowledge of their history, it is also not possible to talk intelligently about Palestine, or a two-state solution without having a concept of the real Palestine, the contemporary Palestine moulded by Arabia, Britain, France, Iran, and Russia in the 19th-20th-centuries.

So, let's get started.



Chapter Two

British Arabian Deals and Broken Promises

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced
–James Baldwin –

Lawrence of Arabia

I was introduced to Thomas Edward Lawrence, popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia, in 1962, in the movie of the same name. I saw the movie in a movie theatre in Tel Aviv, Israel, during a break from my high school studies at Kfar Hayarok, an agricultural boarding high school that was located near Ramat Hasharon, approximately 15 kilometres away from the city. Peter O'Toole, a twenty-five-year-old blue-eyed, blond-haired Brit, much like me, and with the same first name Peter, brilliantly played the lead role. The movie left a lasting impression on me. I have since seen the movie too many times to remember. The movie introduced me to the history of Arabia, the British and Ottoman Empires, and Palestine – the place where I was conceived.

Lawrence had an unconventional background. His father, Thomas Robert Tighe Chapman, heir to an Irish baronetcy, abandoned his wife to live with his daughter's governess. He then changed his name to Lawrence. They didn't get married and had five illegitimate sons, of whom Thomas Edward was the second.

The family lived modestly on Polstead Road, Oxford, where young Ned, as Lawrence was nicknamed, attended high school and college at Jesus College, Oxford University, wanting to be an archaeologist.

He travelled extensively throughout the Ottoman Middle East, learning and mapping the countryside, participating in important digs, and studying the people and their languages and dialects before the war.

Lawrence first visited Arabia in 1909 as a student working on a thesis about the area. He completed his studies of history at Jesus College, Oxford, in 1910. Upon graduation, he supervised a British Museum archaeological dig at the ancient Hittite city of Carchemish, an area split between Türkiye and Syria.

When the war broke out, Lawrence volunteered for military service and got posted to Cairo in 1914 to work in intelligence. Bored with administrative duties such as opening mail, answering the phone, and decoding telegrams, he got transferred to the Arab Bureau to work with his Oxford mentor, David Hogarth, a renowned archaeologist who, during the early stages of the war, shuttled back and forth between London and the Middle East on behalf of naval intelligence. From March 1916, Cairo was Lawrence's permanent home base, where he served as the unofficial leader of the Arab Bureau.

Bored there as well, in October 1916, he eagerly accepted the opportunity to accompany Ronald Storrs, who was serving in Cairo as the British high commissioner's oriental secretary, responsible for drafting the McMahon-Hussein correspondence. Storrs later joined the Arab Bureau, serving as assistant political officer to the Anglo-French mission of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and as military governor of Jerusalem, and travelled to Jeddah for consultations with Sharif Abdullah, the Muslim religious leader.

Lawrence, who, despite the British French partnership in the Great War with common enemies and purpose, felt they had competing interests in the Middle East and wanted "to biff the French out of Syria," made the most of this opportunity.

The "super cerebral Lawrence" impressed Storrs with his knowledge of the language – more importantly – he impressed Abdullah "with his extraordinarily detailed knowledge of the Turkish Army."

When Storrs became aware of the dire situation of Feisal, who was at Hamra, barely maintaining the siege of Medina after the outbreak of the Arab Revolt, as discussed in Chapter Seven, he suggested that Lawrence visit Feisal to assess the situation.

Storrs implied to Abdullah and the Grand Sharif, who was on the phone from Mecca, that Lawrence might then be able to persuade the British government to send troops, arms, and airplanes to support the Arab Revolt. Hussein endorsed the idea.

Lawrence wasted no time. The next day, he caught a ship from Jeddah to Rabegh, the first stage of his journey to Hamra. At Rabegh he met Ali and Zeid, the youngest of Hussein's four sons. Ali did not approve of Lawrence's mission and reminded him that Infidels do not travel in the Hejaz. Moreover, hostile tribes stood in the way. He would only allow Lawrence to travel in secrecy at night, wearing an Arab cloak and headcloth in silence.

A tough trip for Lawrence, who was not used to riding a camel in the desert heat, as he found himself doing on his second day in Rabegh.

That experience is what made him a legend.

When he arrived at Hamra and met the tall, lean figure of Feisal, he felt at first that this was the man he had come to Arabia to seek – the leader who would bring the Arab Revolt to full glory.

The two men began planning the war against Türkiye and its Arabian holdings – "To set the desert on fire," as Lawrence put it – by attacking the railway line.

While Lawrence was cementing his relationship with Feisal, Sykes met with Weizmann on January 17, to discuss Zionism and Palestine.

Background Wars to World War I Alliances

When World War I broke out, Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottomans were aligned on one side, with Britain, France, and

Russia on the opposing side.

Germany was the enemy of Russia, Türkiye's greatest enemy, because Russia coveted free access to the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles, to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Twice, Russia tried to force the issue, and twice it had been thwarted. In 1856, Britain and France, who did not want the Russian navy in the Mediterranean, helped Türkiye defeat Russia in the Crimean War. Then, in 1878, a concert of European powers, meeting at the Congress of Berlin, made Russia back off after it had defeated the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War. The Congress did weaken the Ottoman Empire in other ways by allowing Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro to declare independence, and by granting limited autonomy to Bulgaria.

In August 1914, Russia was ready to try again – and this time Britain and France supported and joined Russia.

The Ottoman government was divided over which alliance to favor, or whether to remain neutral in the war altogether.

When the war began, but before Türkiye chose its side, Winston Churchill, the Secretary of the British Navy, was provocatively and needlessly bold, commandeering two Turkish battleships that had been paid for and were under construction in British shipyards.

Enver Pasha, the Minister of War and leader of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a secret society of army officers linked

to the Young Turk movement that had replaced Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1909, escalated the situation.

To compensate for the two warships that the British had seized, Germany provided Türkiye with two replacements. Enver Pasha ordered Germans disguised as Turkish sailors aboard the German warships to bombard Russian ports on the opposite side of the Black Sea – unbeknownst to most of his cabinet.

With Russia seemingly poised to advance and both Britain and France committed to supporting Russia, Türkiye making a different choice was difficult to imagine. Naturally, Türkiye joined Germany for support. With Türkiye entering the war, all its dominions – including Palestine –were implicated.

Arab Nationalism

Arab nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, known as Arabism, was on the rise before World War I started in 1914, although it was not yet a major movement. The Arabs sought autonomy – home rule, according to the British – but envisioned distinct sovereign Arab states after 1914. The climax of prewar Arab nationalism occurred in Paris in June 1913, at a conference organized by the Young Arab Society. This event marked the world's first Arab congress, attended by elected delegates from various Arab secret societies. On June 21, the congress made public its resolutions advocating for the decentralization and for recognition of Arabic in the Ottoman Parliament as well as the official language in the Arab territories under Ottoman rule.

The British were closely monitoring Ottoman possessions in the Middle East and Southern Syria, a region bordering Egypt through which the Suez Canal, Britain's economic lifeline, flowed. Furthermore, the land route between Egypt and India, the crown jewel of the British Empire, traversed Arabian and Ottoman territory.

The Arabs recognized that if Türkiye lost the war, its grip on Arab lands would be fatally weakened. In that case, it made sense to befriend and work with the British against the Turks.

The British turned the Arab discontent with Turkish rule to their advantage.

Emir, or Grand Sharif Hussein of Mecca

Sharif Hussein was a little older than 60 in 1914 and deeply alienated by Turkish rule. He belonged to the Abadila clan, which claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad. As such, he was the Emir, or Grand Sharif of Mecca, the capital city of Hejaz, which is present-day Saudi Arabia.

The title conferred enormous religious authority because the Hejaz not only included Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad, but also Medina, where the prophet is buried. To Muslims, the Grand Sharif of Mecca probably ranked second only to the caliph as a holy and revered figure. He oversaw arrangements for the annual pilgrimage to the two cities, an extremely lucrative business. In addition, he received other monies, titles to land, and emoluments.

The position dated back to the 10th-century. In the 16th-century, when the Ottomans took control of Hejaz, they chose to retain it as always. They did not significantly reduce the sharif's power because they feared alienating Muslim Arabs. Instead, they increased his powers by exempting Hejazis from taxation and conscription, and they poured money into the holy cities, both of which prospered as a result.

Sharif Hussein was born in Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, in 1853, the son, grandson, and nephew of former emirs. He split his childhood time between Constantinople and Mecca. According to an early biographer, he displayed extraordinary qualities even as a young man: "integrity, energy and truth … unselfishness … gracious manners …love of virtue."

One can imagine Hussein listening intently as his uncles, older cousins, father, and grandfather discussed politics, how to stay and grow their power, and rid the Arabs of the Turks.

Hussein stayed in Constantinople until 1908, when he became the Emir.

Hussein raised four sons: Ali, born in 1879; Abdullah, born in 1882; Feisal, born in 1886; and Zeid, born to a Turkish mother in 1898. Private tutors taught them every subject except the Quran, which he taught them personally. He was known for his piety and knowledge of Islam. His social circle comprised Turkish and Muslim elites, many of whom were descendants of the Prophet.

"He enjoyed the high esteem and respect of Constantinople's statesmen, ministers and viziers, and the Sultan himself," according to his biographer. As a result, he attained the rank of vizier and membership in the Council of State, an advisory body to the Sultan. He would not deviate "even by a hair's breadth from the path of honour and virtue," thus gaining the deepest love and veneration of the whole nation.

As Schneer points out in *The Balfour Declaration*, the fact that Hussein succeeded in becoming Sharif in 1908, when all his male relatives and their Dwahi Zeid rivals also wanted the position, suggests his tact, cunning, and ability to mask his true thoughts.

The Young Turks who seized power in 1909 distrusted the deeply religious and conservative Hussein. He, likewise, despised the CUP. "I pray that God may punish those who have prevented me from benefiting from your talents," Abdul Hamid II told him before he left for Mecca. However, the Sultan could not have done it alone; he had been courting the British.

British Support of Sharif Hussein

The Emir and Grand Sharif Hussein sent a message of thanks to the British ambassador in Constantinople for supporting opponents of the CUP's centralizing policies, and also to the British Dragoman – a Turkish-speaking consular official at the British Embassy -- Gerald Fitzmaurice, who may have recommended Hussein to the Anglophile vizier – a high-ranking religious Muslim leader. Another possibility is that the CUP hoped to score points with the British by appointing their choice.

The Hejaz, of which Hussein became emir in 1908, was a desolate and sparsely populated region, but it included Mecca, with a population of 70,000, as well as Medina and the port of Jeddah, each with 30,000 inhabitants. The Sharif established friendly relations with most of the Arabian tribes, but with one exception. Abdul Azziz ibn Saud, the ambitious and ferocious Wahhabi chief, rejected his overtures and refuted his religious paramountcy.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Türkiye, as the seat of the caliphate, was revered by Muslims around the world, who were called to wage jihad, or holy war, against the enemies of Türkiye. If Britain's Muslim subjects on the Indian subcontinent, in Egypt, and in Sudan heeded this call, Britain had much to lose. To defend itself, the Sharif offered a solution.

Sharif Hussein sent his son Abdullah, in 1914 to establish contact with the British in Egypt and seek weapons and financial support to fight the Turks. Although Egypt was ostensibly part of the Ottoman Empire, it was controlled by the British who held the Suez Canal – Britain's lifeline for trade and communication with India.

Britain took charge of Egyptian finances in 1882 and declared Egypt its protectorate. The pro-Ottoman Egyptian khedive, Abbas Hilmi, was deposed and replaced by his Anglophile uncle, Hussein Kamel, who became the country's sultan. Through him, the British declared martial law and ruled Egypt with an iron fist.

Abdullah met with Sir Ronald Storrs, the Oriental Secretary at the British Agency in Cairo, and Lord Horatio Kitchener, the British High Commissioner, who dangled the possibility of the caliphate to the sharif if he would side with the Allies against the Turks and Germans. Storrs could think of no better figure to undermine the Turkish call for jihad than a descendant of the Prophet who was also the Grand Sharif of Mecca. No one in the British government could think of a better bridge to the Middle Eastern Arab world, either. However, Storrs, being a civilian, lacked the authority to send military support to the Sharif, so he enlisted Sir Gilbert Clayton, a high-ranking military official who, before the war, was the director of intelligence in Sudan and Cairo and became the unofficial father figure of the newly established Arab Bureau, to which T.E. Lawrence was assigned.

Kitchner urged Storrs to send secretly a carefully chosen messenger to Sharif Abdullah to ascertain that if the present armed German influence at Constantinople would coerce the Caliph against his will and Sublime Porte to acts of aggression and war against Great Britain, would he and his father and the Arabs of Hejaz stand with or against Britain.

Hussein told the messenger that he no longer felt obliged to honour his duties to the Ottomans because they had “made war upon our rights.” Throwing back the sleeve of his garment in a dramatic gesture, he declared: “My heart is open to Storrs, even as this. Stretch forth to us a helping hand and we shall never at all help these oppressors. On the contrary we shall help those who do good.”

Since the letter had been addressed to Abdullah, he answered on his father's behalf, stating that the grand sharif looked forward to "closer union" with England but awaited a "written promise that Great Britain will … guarantee the Emir against foreign and Ottoman aggression."

Hussein would not risk putting his neck in a Turkish noose without pledges of protection from Britain. Additionally, he wanted assurances that Britain would not replace Türkiye as their foreign overlord.

Here, in retrospect, arise two ambiguities. First, Hussein appears to have been looking beyond his own kingdom of Hejaz and claiming to speak for Arabs throughout the Middle East. Before he took any action, he warned Kitchener and Storrs that he must receive Britain's promise to "abstain from internal intervention in Arabia." The indeterminate term was crucial: By "Arabia," did he mean not merely the Hejaz but the entire Arabian Peninsula? Did he perhaps mean Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine too?

On the one hand, Hussein's letter was exactly what the British had been hoping for. Only a great leader of "Arabia" could successfully countermand the caliph's call for jihad against Türkiye's enemies. On the other hand, this first wartime exchange between the two parties sowed the seeds of future conflict and misunderstanding.
Sir Milne Cheetham, who served as acting high commissioner between Kitchener's departure in June 1914 and his replacement, Sir Henry McMahon, in January 1915, appears to have discerned

the looming ambiguity and trying to protect against it. He cabled the Foreign Office, saying Abdullah's letter was very promising. "A reply is being prepared subject to your approval, disclaiming all intention of internal intervention and guaranteeing against external aggression only independence of Sherifate." In other words, the British wanted the Grand Sharif to speak for all of Arabia, of undefined boundaries, but they would guarantee to protect his authority only in the territory he already governed.

"Does Kitchener agree?" asked Foreign Secretary Edward Grey. Kitchener did not and directed that the sharif be informed: "If the Arab nation assists England in this war … England will guarantee that no internal intervention takes place in Arabia and will give the Arabs every assistance against external foreign aggression." He had accepted the emir's original broad formulation of "Arabia."

Grey also signed off on Kitchener's broad and vague understanding of "Arabia."

Cheetham, Clayton, and Storrs would have had input on the response to Abdullah and took it upon themselves to limit Kitchener's pledge. They narrowed the original language to read: "If the Amir and Arabs in general assist Great Britain … Great Britain will promise not to intervene in any manner whatsoever whether in things religious or otherwise. Moreover, recognizing and respecting the sacred and unique office of the Amir Hosayn, Great Britain will guarantee the independence, rights, and privileges of the Sherifate against all external foreign aggression,

in particular that of the Ottomans."

This early wartime correspondence sowed the seeds of future difficulties. Once the French, Russians, Italians, and Zionists became involved, the opportunities for obfuscation and double-dealing would multiply.

As for the second ambiguity, Hussein's demand that Britain "abstain from internal intervention," did he mean that Britain must give him a free hand in determining the domestic policies of his kingdom? Did he mean he must also have a free hand in external matters? In the letter Abdullah wrote on his behalf, he appears to say so. Abdullah wrote that Britain must promise to protect "clearly and in writing" the emirate's "independence in all respects, without any exceptions or restrictions."

British diplomats had their own interpretation of what an "independent" emirate, regardless of its boundaries, would entail. Hussein's kingdom would become independent of Türkiye only. On important matters, the grand sharif would refer to the British. Few in Britain's governing circles doubted the necessity for such an arrangement. They could not conceive of Arabs ruling themselves without British assistance.

A third aspect of Kitchener's reply to the grand sharif would prove an additional source of future troubles. He concluded his letter saying:

> *"Till now we have defended and befriended Islam in the person of the Turks; hence forward it shall be in that of the noble Arab. It may be that an Arab of true race will assume the Caliphate at Mecca or Medina, and so good may come by the help of God out of all the evil which is now occurring. It would be well if Your Highness could convey to your followers and devotees, who are found throughout the world in every country, the good tidings of the Freedom of the Arabs and the rising of the sun over Arabia."*

Kitchner planted the seed of religious ambition within the Sharif's heart, hoping thereby to create maximum disruption within the Ottoman Empire. Because, unlike the Catholic Pope, the caliph of Islam was not just a spiritual leader. He held both spiritual and temporal authority as he was also the sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

Kitchner was offering much more than Britain could ever deliver. It would not help the Sharif to be known as Christian Britain's caliph, nor would it benefit Britain to be seen meddling in Muslim affairs. He had taken a false diplomatic step, but then again, his letter was riddled with false steps.

Once again, the emir answered in writing through Abdullah: "We are doing that which is more important than the performance of that which is naturally imposed upon us, regardless of whether or not these negotiations take place and whether or not an agreement is arrived at." This characteristically opaque pronouncement seems to mean, "We are preparing to rebel

against the Turks despite their natural hold over us, and we will proceed with or without British support." This was music to British ears.

The emir had taken the first step toward rebellion. He thereby risked his life and those of his sons, as Kitchener and the other Britons well knew.

Lawrence saw the Grand Sharif as a crucial player in British interests, both during and after the war. "I want to pull them all, (the smaller Arab principalities and tribes) together and roll up Syria by way of the Hejaz in the name of the Sharif … and biff the French out of all hope of Syria. It's a big game, and at last one worth playing." In other words, he wanted Hussein ruling "Arabia" – still undefined, but now including Syria, which encompassed Lebanon and Palestine – under Britain's influence and control. He was destined to become caliph.

"His allegiance to us was inspired, by and his revenues derived from, annual subventions and the proceeds of an annual pilgrimage – guaranteed against foreign and especially Turkish aggression … it is to this ideal that we should shape our course."

Herbert Henry Asquith, a Liberal politician who served as Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916, led Britain into the First World War. In 1915, he formed a coalition government with the Conservatives. Asquith appointed the de Bunsen committee to study and make recommendations concerning British territories

in the Middle East, based on the assumption that the Ottoman Empire would lose the war. It was the first British government committee to consider the future of Palestine, and it assumed that an international condominium would govern the region.

Once the committee completed its report, Kitchener informed Sir Mark Sykes, a Conservative Member of Parliament regarded as an authority on the Ottoman Empire due to his extensive travels in the region and his book *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire*, to travel "right around the Middle East and report back on the various situations.

Sir Henry McMahon, who had replaced Cheetham as the high commissioner, brought Sykes up to date on the promises and inducements made to Hussein as they planned the Arab Revolt. Sykes endorsed the plan.

Upon his return to Britain, Sykes had a meeting with the War Council on December 8, 1915. His report was a masterfully dramatic presentation. "I should just like to conclude," he stated, "by putting before you the dangers that I think confront us if matters are allowed to slide. If we adopt a perfectly passive attitude … the Sharif, I think will be killed."

"Will be what?" asked Arthur Balfour.

"Will be killed," Sykes repeated, "and a Committee of Union and Progress nominee will be put in his place. That gives the Turks and the Germans Mecca. The Christians in Syria will be exterminated

… the anti-Committee (of Union and Progress) elements will be destroyed among the Arabs; the intellectual Arabs will be hanged and shot … The Arab machine will be captured … then we shall be confronted with the danger of a real jihad." But Sykes was preaching to the converted.

While Sykes was reporting to London, the Ottomans were pressing Grand Sharif Hussein to raise an Arab army against the British at the Suez Canal. More importantly, they wanted him to endorse their call to jihad. His endorsement would inspire millions of British Muslim subjects in Egypt, Sudan, and India to rise up against their colonial infidel masters, making Britain's worst nightmare come true.

The emir prevaricated. He supported the jihad personally, he told the Turks, but a public declaration was too risky. It would result in an English blockade of his country and perhaps a bombardment of its ports. His people would starve or, worse, suffer even more. Moreover, the annual *haj* would be endangered. He could not, in this instance, do as they request. However, he would mobilize troops for the attack on the canal.

The Arab Revolt

In the meantime, starting in early 1916, Hussein was secretly dispatching emissaries to the main Arab leaders to determine their interest in joining him if he launched a rebellion against the Turks. Most, including Ibn Saud, supported him and the British against the Turks.

Hussein sent his son Ali with 1,500 troops to Medina, where a substantial Ottoman garrison was stationed. Ali and his men presented that they would join the Turks for the second invasion of Egypt. They would begin the siege of Medina.

Ali's primary mission in Medina was to win over the region's tribal leaders – which he did. Their tribal armies, when added to the 1,500 troops that came with Ali, constituted a significant but unconventional and undisciplined force. They waited for word from Hussein to attack the Ottomans.

Feisal was sent to Damascus, the headquarters of the dangerous Djemal Pasha and the base of the Turkish Fourth Army, of which Djemal was commander in chief, to launch the rebellion after several earlier trips to gauge how the Arabs there felt about joining the British to rid themselves of the Turkish yoke.

Feisal had 40 soldiers with him as bodyguards, and he told Djemal they were there for the invasion of Egypt.

Hussein and his sons Abdullah and Zeid stayed in Mecca to mobilize local sheikhs and coordinate the planned attack planned for Damascus and Medina.

Arab nationalists had been meeting clandestinely to plot Arab independence for years. The two leading secret societies, *al-Fatat* and *al-Ahd*, serving in the Ottoman army with the support of Arab officers, had decided independently to revolt against the Turks.

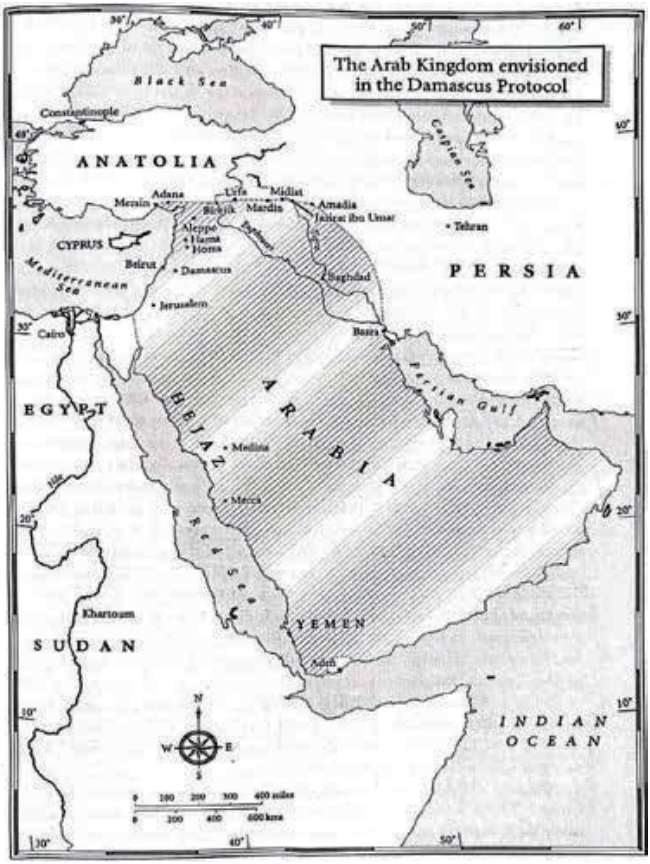
In Damascus, during earlier trips, Feisal had visited the al-Bakri family, a prominent Syrian family that had long been friendly with the family of the Grand Sharif. At the al-Bakri home, he secretly met with the representatives of the secret societies to gauge their plans. During one of his secret nightly visits to the al-Bakris, he swore the blood oaths of both *al-Fatat* and *al-Ahd*. On another later visit, the Arab nationalists told Feisal that they had already set the fuse, and it only remained to be lit. Feisel promised the support of the Hejazi tribes.

“We do not need them,” answered the Arab chief of staff of the Twelfth Corps of the Ottoman Fourth Army. “We have everything.” All they wanted was for the Grand Sharif Hussein to lend his prestigious support to their uprising and for Feisal, the Grand Sharif’s most effective general, to become their visible leader.

They had also settled the question and shared their plan regarding Great Britain’s role in their rebellion and its aftermath. The *Damascus Protocol*, the foundational document and lodestar of the Arab Revolt, implied that Grand Sharif Hussein would preside over the new Arab state. It envisioned a federation of Arab countries organized within a single independent Arab state or empire, which would include Palestine.

The *Damascus Protocol* spelled out the borders of the Arab state The Arab nationalists wanted Great Britain to recognize the borders. The proposed frontiers were:

North: The line Mersin-Adana to parallel 37 N. and thence along the line Birejik-Urfa-Mardin-Midiat-Jazirat (Ibn Umar) Amadia to the Persian frontier;
East: The Persian frontier down to the Persian Gulf;
South: The Indian Ocean (with the exclusion of Aden, whose status was to be maintained)
West: The Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea back to Mersin;



The protocol also requested the abolition of all exceptional privileges granted to foreigners but grant economic preference to the British government and conclude a defensive alliance

between Great Britain and the future independent Arab state. Whether Great Britain would accept the terms of the protocol was something the conspirators could not predict.

Damascus was where Hussein planned to start the revolt. It was the main base of the Arab officers in the Ottoman army who drew up the *Damascus Protocol* and which, Hussein now hoped, would provide the nucleus of a rebel general staff.

However, the situation in Damascus had changed by the time Feisal arrived there in January 1916. Almost all the officers whom Feisal had met the previous year had gone. Djemal had sent the 35th Division, in which most of them served, to fight the British in Gallipoli. Not only the officers but also the Arab soldiers whom the conspirators had counted on to act as the revolution's shock troops were no longer there. It was a major setback that Hussein and his sons had not anticipated.

To make matters worse, the British had blockaded most of the Mediterranean's east coast. It disrupted trade, caused food shortage, leading to hunger and starvation among the residents of Damascus. Historians estimate that during the war, between 150,000 and 300,000 Syrians died from famine and typhus.

Hussein and Feisal had hoped that when the rebel Arab army challenged the Ottomans, the population of Damascus would rise and join them. But with so much of the city ill and famished, there was little chance of that.

Additionally, Djemal had decided “to take ruthless action against the traitors.” Suspected traitors were tried and hanged – regardless of guilt.

With the Arab army rebels gone, and Damascus traumatized, Feisal and the remaining conspirators concluded the revolt could not begin in Syria. Feisal advised his father that the initial strike must occur elsewhere -- in Medina, Mecca, or both.

On June 9, 1916, the telegraph lines connecting Jeddah-Mecca and Mecca-Taif were cut. Two days later, the Arabs attacked the Ottoman headquarters in Mecca and emerged victorious.

In late June 1916, Hussein informed the British of his intention to establish an Arab army of 30,000, with the core composed of Hijazis and bolstered by non-Hijazi Arab officers. However, mobilizing this force was fraught with difficulties, as most regular soldiers and officers were either Iraqis or Syrians who had served in the Ottoman armed forces. Many had either been captured or deserted to Entente lines. It soon became clear that these men were not enthusiastic about serving in a Hashemite army aligned with Christian powers against the legitimate Muslim sovereign of the time – and fearing possible reprisals against family members still living within Ottoman territory. For many, it seemed safer to stay in POW camps.

Thus ended the effort to raise a standing army by recruiting outside the Hijaz.

The Hussein-McMahon Letters

In early 1915, Sir Arthur Henry McMahon replaced Sir Milne Cheetham as the high commissioner overseeing Britain's operations in Cairo.

The Palace in Khartoum was the grandest address in the British Empire. The governor general who resided there when McMahon arrived in Cairo was Sir Francis Reginald Wingate. Once he reviewed the correspondence between London, Cairo, and Hussein, he supported the idea of an Arab revolt backed by Britain believing it would bolster the British war effort against the Turks and Germans.

Wingate urged officials in London and Cairo to make Hussein an offer he could not refuse.

"You should inform Wingate," Foreign Secretary Edward Grey instructed McMahon "that I authorize him to let it be known if he thinks it desirable that His Majesty's Government will make it an essential condition in any terms of peace that the Arabian Peninsula and its Moslem Holy Places should remain in the hands of an independent Sovereign Moslem state." Wingate spread the news "far and wide, and as it is now authoritative it will be believed and credited." But the grand sharif remained silent.

Feisal returned to Mecca on June 20, 1915, and delivered the *Damascus Protocol* to his father. He and his older brother Abdullah urged Hussein to accept leadership of the revolt and

encouraged him to deliver the protocol to the British.

Sometime in mid-July, Hussein agreed with his sons and dispatched two letters to Cairo. The first, a brief note from Abdullah to Storrs dated July 14, 1915, requesting the British to send grain for the annual hajj; the grain had been held back for the past two years and its resumption "would be an important factor in laying the foundation of our mutual advantage. This should suffice for a person of your grasp."

The second letter, undated and unsigned, was undoubtedly composed by Hussein. It quoted the Damascus Protocol and simply asked if the British approved it, and warned that if they did not, "we will consider ourselves free in word and deed from the bonds of our previous declaration which we made through Ali Effendi [X]." Hussein's letter restarted the fatal Hussein-McMahon correspondence, whose conflicting interpretations have divided Britons, Arabs, and Jews for more than 100 years.

The messenger with the letters arrived in Cairo on or about August 22, 1915. He supplemented the letters with an oral statement. "On handing me the letter at Taif, which was in the presence of his four sons, Ali, Abdullah, Faisal and Zeid, the Sherif told me to tell Mr. Storrs – "We are now ready and well prepared." His son Abdullah then said: "Tell Mr. Storrs that our word is a word of honour and we will carry it out even at the cost of our lives: we are not now under the orders of the Turks, but the Turks are under our orders."

The British were delighted – until they read the proposed borders of the new Arab state. Hussein had copied the *Damascus Protocol* verbatim. The British thought they were too expansive. "The Sharif had opened his mouth … a good deal too wide," Storrs wrote.

McMahon cabled London: "His pretensions are in every way exaggerated, no doubt considerably beyond his hope of acceptance, but it seems very difficult to treat with them in detail without seriously discouraging him."

After much consultation with London McMahon tried to square the circle on August 29. He wrote to Hussein: "We confirm to you the terms of Lord Kitchener's message … in which was stated clearly our desire for the independence of Arabia and its inhabitants, together with our approval of the Arab Caliphate when it should be proclaimed." But "with regard to the questions of limits, frontiers and boundaries, it would appear to be premature to consume our time in discussing such details in the heat of war."

Hussein responded angrily and at length on September 29. He emphasized that he now spoke not only for himself, but as leader of an organized revolutionary movement. "The coldness and hesitation which you have displayed in the question of the limits and boundaries … might be taken to infer an estrangement." The borders he had proposed were essential to the well-being of any future Arab state. "I cannot admit that you, as a man of sound opinion will deny being necessary for our existence the borders suggested; nay they are the essential essence of our life, material

and moral." The parties had arrived at an impasse.

On October 24, 1915, McMahon wrote back the most important letter of his career, one that would induce Hussein to finally throw down the gauntlet to Türkiye – and haunt the future of Palestine because of its duplicity.

> *The districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Hama, Homs, and Aleppo cannot be said to be purely Arab and should be excluded from the proposed limits and boundaries. With the above modification, and without prejudice to our existing treaties with Arab chiefs, we accept those limits and boundaries and, in regard to those portions of the territories therein in which Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interests of her Ally, France, I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances and make the following reply to your letter."*

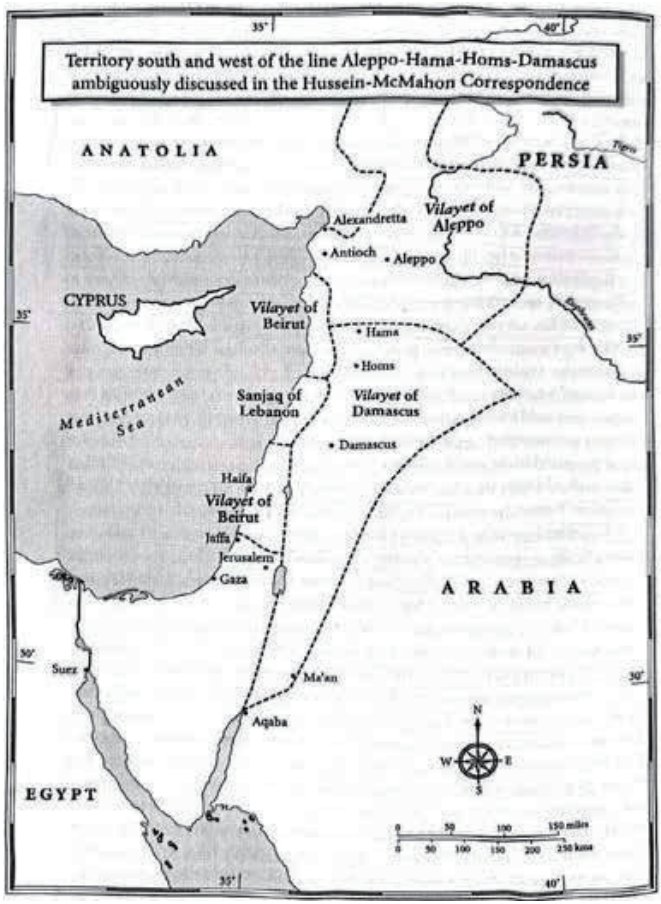
Subject to the modifications referred to above, McMahon wrote that Britain recognizes and supports the independence of the proposed Arab federation with the borders defined in the Damascus Protocol. He also wrote that Britain would guarantee the Muslim holy places against external aggression, advise and assist the Arabs in establishing suitable forms of government in the various states that would comprise the federation. In return, the Arabs must agree to look only to Britain for advice and support and must accept that Britain could assert special

measures of administrative control in the *vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra.

McMahon wrote in English, and the letter was translated to Arabic. The resulting imbroglio of this infamous letter can probably be traced to nothing more than an imprecise translation.

The phrase that caused the Grand Sharif to raise his eyebrows highest, and created untold troubles, was the one about excluding from the Arab kingdom "the districts of Damascus, Hama, Homs and Aleppo." The key word is "districts," simple enough in English, but ambiguous in Arabic *wilayat*. This is the plural form of the Arabic word *wilayah*, which means *vilayet* -- a political jurisdiction in Turkish -- but *vicinity* or *environs*, a geographical expression in English. Arabs claim Hussein understood the word to mean *vicinity* or *environs*, therefore ***not*** to refer to Palestine that is not west but south of the line connecting Damascus, Hama, Homs, and Aleppo as even a glance of a map would show, thus clearly not within the vicinity or environs of those towns.

The British and Zionists argued to the contrary. Since *wilayat* can mean *vilayets*, and as the *vilayet* or *province* of Damascus extended all the way south to Ma'an and beyond down to Aqaba, McMahon did indeed mean to exclude Palestine from the Arab kingdom. Palestine is west of Ma'an.



It is also worth remembering that in 1915 the French were claiming that Palestine fell within their Syrian sphere of influence.

Over the years, Arabs and their proponents asserted that McMahon knowingly misled Sharif Hussein about Palestine. On

the other side, the Zionists defended McMahon. They claimed that McMahon did not mislead the sharif. The sharif, they held, understood and accepted from the start that Britain meant to exclude Palestine from the Arabian kingdom. The British began realizing a longing for Palestine only after 1917. Even if McMahon's strictures about territory were vague, as the Arabs charged, Britain's territorial promises depended on the Arabs carrying out a successful revolt on their own. But the Arabs never did. Instead, they relied on British support to fight and defeat the Turks. The Zionists also asserted that even if McMahon's letter did fail to exclude Palestine from the proposed Arab kingdom, it made no difference because the letter was not legally binding.

Some historians have excoriated McMahon for the sloppiness of his language. Others have praised him for being a subtle guardian of his country's imperial interests.

What McMahon really meant can be found in a letter he wrote to his former chief Lord Charles Hardinge, the Viceroy in India. He said: "What we have to arrive at now is to tempt the Arab people into the right path, detach them from the enemy and bring them onto our side. This on our part is at present largely a matter of words, and to succeed we must use persuasive terms and abstain from academic haggling over conditions."

This remark sounds like an admission of intent to deceive, which is how Hardinge interpreted it. McMahon had "implied that the negotiations over the Arabian boundaries are merely a question

of words and will neither establish our rights nor bind our hands in that country," he wrote to the Secretary of State for India.

In his reply of November 5, 1915, the sheriff accepted some of the terms and rejected others. He immediately renounced his claim to the *vilayets* of Mersina and Adana "in order to facilitate an agreement with the British and to render a service to Islam," but he held firm with regard to the land west of Damascus, Hama, Homs and Aleppo. Only now did he call this territory "the provinces [*vilayets*] of Aleppo and Beyrout and their seacoasts."

Hussein rejected McMahon's territorial proposal and was reserving for the new Arabian kingdom lands stretching down the Mediterranean shoreline from Alexandretta past Haifa nearly to Jaffa. Moreover, in claiming the *vilayet* of Aleppo, he was not only refusing McMahon's demand to exclude it from his future kingdom but was reaffirming his claim to it and to the adjoining territory reaching to the 37th parallel. In Mesopotamia, he would not cede unconditionally Britain's right to administrative control of the *vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra: "We might agree to leave under the British Administration for a short time those districts now occupied by British troops without the rights of either party being prejudiced thereby … and against a suitable sum paid as compensation to the Arab kingdom for the period of occupation."

Hussein also extended an inducement of his own. As soon as a "clear and final reply… to the questions and problems set forth above" had arrived, he and his followers would take "the necessary action … with the least possible delay."

While London, Cairo and Sudan debated how to respond to Hussein, McMahon received a green light from Wingate who thought “a reply to the Sherif should be dispatched at once containing assurances” to minimize any further delays. When McMahon wrote his letter, he again cagily reverted to the style of his first letter, which is why, to this day, we cannot be sure what his intentions were regarding Palestine. Far from clarifying the crucial points, he chose to leave them in abeyance. Whereas his earlier messages to Hussein had been murky about Arabia’s future borders, in his letter of December 17, 1915, he did not discuss them at all. “With regard to the *vilayets* of Aleppo and Beyrout the Government of Great Britain have taken careful note of your observations, but as the interests of our Ally France are involved the question will require careful consideration and a further communication on the subject will be addressed to you in due course.” Regarding Mesopotamia, he wrote that the adequate safeguarding of Britain’s interests “calls for a much fuller and more detailed consideration than the present situation permits.” As an inducement to the Sharif to act and as a signal that Britain would be generous with her potential Arabian ally, he added, “I am sending by your trustworthy messenger a sum of 20,000 pounds.”

It is possible that Hussein interpreted the money as an earnest intent of Britain to pay for what he hoped would be a temporary occupation of Baghdad. The Sharif was also willing to postpone settling the border issue because, while his relations with the Turks continued to deteriorate, his relations with the revolt

plotters had strengthened, and a rebellion seemed the most hopeful course. Hussein wanted Britain on board as much as the British wanted him.

Sharif Hussein replied to McMahon on January 1, 1916. Regarding “the matter of compensation for the period of occupation of Mesopotamia we leave the determination of the amount to the perception of Britain’s wisdom and justice.” With regard to “the Northern Parts and their coasts,” as he confusingly termed them this time, he accepted McMahon’s suggestion that their future be decided at a later date in order “to avoid what may possibly injure the alliance of Great Britain and France and the agreement made between them during the present wars and calamities.”

In his final letter, McMahon assured Hussein that once he launched the rebellion, Britain would be a steadfast and loyal ally; she would not negotiate a peace “in which the freedom of the Arab peoples and their liberation from German and Turkish domination do not form an essential condition.” McMahon added “You will doubtless inform us by the bearer of this letter of any manner in which we can assist you, and your requests will always receive our immediate attention.”

That was sufficient for the sharif to proceed with the Arab Revolt, although the unresolved question of Palestinian borders remained.

On 10 June 1916, at the urging of Lawrence, Hussein heralded the start of the Arab Revolt in Mecca by firing a shot at the Ottoman barracks, quickly overwhelming the 1,500 Ottoman soldiers and forcing them to flee.

Lawrence was delighted. On July 1, he wrote home about the fledgling Revolt stating, “I hate the Turks so much that to see their own people turning on them is very grateful. I hope the movement increases … The Revolt, if it succeeds will be the biggest thing in the Near East since 1550.”

“What befits a person who has been heaped with the goodwill of the Caliph and who has been elevated to the highest honours, when that person betrays the Caliph by joining the latter’s enemy?” asked the leading ulema the Holyman of Damascus. They had been convened by order of the Ottoman authorities shortly after the sharif initiated the revolt. And the ulema answered, “Deposition and death.” Thus, a fatwa was directed against Hussein and his family. It was war to the death.

The sharif and his sons could mobilize no more than 20,000 fighters, mainly from desert and hill tribes, who were “hardy and fit, very active, independent, cheerful snipers.” However, they knew little of military discipline and resisted any attempts to impose it. They agreed to serve as soldiers only under their own sheiks and for limited periods. If they wanted to return home to see their family, no one should stop them, provided they arranged for someone to take their place. At the same time, the

various tribes harboured grievances against each other, which could only be resolved through bloodshed. As a result, “no man quite trusts his neighbour, though each is usually quite wholehearted in his opposition to the Turks.

This would not prevent him working off a family grudge by letting down his private enemy.” Evaluating the situation, Lawrence concluded that Sharif Hussein’s entire army would not be able to defeat even a single properly entrenched company of Turks. In fact, a single company of Turks could easily overpower the Sharif’s entire army. Consequently, “the value of the tribes is defensive only, and their real sphere is guerilla warfare.”

Most British military officials, less imaginative than Lawrence, viewed the tribesmen as picturesque, mounted rabble, “a horde of Arabs.” When confronted by a hostile force, these men on their camels and horses would “spread in a fanlike movement over the whole horizon … eternally sweeping about for no apparent reason, unless it be bravado or the instinct of a kite. Drop a shell in front of them and they will swerve like a flight of teal, make a wide detour at full gallop, and appear on the other flank. Orthodox British officers, unlike Lawrence, did not understand or appreciate how to make good use of the tribesmen.

Lawrence best described the reality on the ground:

> *The Hejaz war is one of dervishes against regular troops – and we are on the side of the dervishes Our text-books do*

> *not apply to its conditions at all. It is the fight of a rocky mountainous, ill-watered country (assisted by a wild horde of mountaineers) against a force which has been improved – so far as civilized warfare is concerned – so immensely by the Germans as almost to have lost its efficiency for rough-and-tumble work.*

Lawrence had proven his reputation through his actions. "Lawrence is quite excellent," Clayton, the director of intelligence in Cairo, informed the director of intelligence in London, "you may take his stuff as being good."

The Sharif and his sons, as described by Lawrence, were just as clueless as the British. Their initial strategy was to attack the cities and towns like Mecca, Taif, Medina, and the critical Red Sea port of Jeddah, where Ottoman forces were concentrated in large numbers. The goal was to push the remaining Ottomans out of Arabia, which they could not achieve. Nonetheless, they managed to capture the acting Ottoman governor and commandant in Mecca after a month of fierce fighting that lasted until July 10, 1916, and soon after taking the key ports of Jedda, Yenbo and Rabegh, with the help of the Royal Navy.

At Jeddah, the Ottomans ultimately surrendered to the emir of the Harb tribe and 4,000 of Sharif Hussein's men. But the surrender was not due to military defeat. As a Turkish newspaper later explained: "Our small force of a few hundred at Jeddah had to cope with brigands by land and the British by sea. But they only surrendered when water and ammunition were exhausted." At

Taif, the Turks surrendered to Abdullah three and a half months into the siege again due to a lack of food and ammunition, rather than any Arab military prowess.

The Arabs, led by Feisal and Ali, who had proclaimed the Arab Revolt on June 5, 1916 outside Medina, failed to capture the city until after the war in January 1919. Unlike Taif, Medina was too well-supplied to be starved out to surrender.

In Mecca, Sharif Hussein appointed a cabinet of nine members dominated by his sons, even though they were occupied at the time in the field of battle. Hussein made Ali his grand vizier, Abdullah his foreign minister and Feisal minister of the interior. Mecca notables were appointed to ministers of justice, public works, *wakf* and holy places, education and finance. Hussein also established a legislative assembly headed by a president and vice president, with 12 members to represent the sharifian clans, the holy places, and a secular population. He also founded a newspaper, *Al Kibla*, for publicity and propaganda.

“The return to chthonic conditions has meant the restoration of tribal or family authority and a great decrease in the exercise of the central government,” reported Lawrence. The grand sharif recognized that his people, whether townsmen or Bedouins loathed the intrusive government officials. He even suspended the collection of taxes.

Hussein intended to rule with an iron fist, enforcing Sharia Law. “We fortify ourselves on our noble religion which is our only

guide," he declared. This entailed undoing the reforms implemented by the modernizing Young Turks. The Sharif suspended the Turkish civil code, which had prohibited slavery. It also involved reinstating the archaic Muslim perspective on women – for did not the good book, as Hussein fondly pointed out, decree that "a man shall have twice a woman's share?" In rebelling against the Young Turks, he sought to throw off the onerous Ottoman yoke and set back the clock in certain critical advancements Lawrence wrote in disbelief. "The Sharif intends, when there is time, to extend the principles and scope of the Sharia to cover modern difficulties of trade and exchange!"

The Sharif was determined to establish his authority. It meant assuming a new and more impressive title than Emir or Grand Sharif. On October 29, 1916, he proclaimed himself *Malik el Bilad el Arabia* -- King of the Arabs or King of the Arab Nation, which included Syria and Iraq, in other words, King of all Arabs.

Foreign Minister Abdullah sent telegrams to the British High Commissioner and the foreign ministers of The Hague, Christiana, Copenhagen, Petrograd, Bucharest, Berne, Washington, Paris, Havre, Corfu, and Kabul requesting that their governments recognize his father's new title.

He told an English official that he did not believe other Arab leaders would object: "The history of the Emir of Mecca goes back to the Abbasids. It is not important whether those people would agree or not."

The British disagreed and restricted his territorial claims. After all, the Sykes-Picot tripartite agreement had already been signed, and the British could not agree to the territory of Syria -- which included Palestine -- without the consent of the French.

McMahon convinced Hussein that *King of the Hejaz* was a suitable compromise. The title stuck. It was a comedown that he had to accept to continue receiving British advice, arms, and funding. This episode highlights the significant gap between what Hussein and the British envisioned for the Sharif and the future of Arabia.

Resolution

Once it became clear that Arab rule over Syria was out of the question, Lawrence proposed another solution. With the British holding the mandate for oil-rich Iraq, Lawrence ensured that Feisal was crowned king. At the same time, he advised on redrawing the borders, which created the new country of Transjordan, with Abdullah Ibn Hussein being made emir, and placed on its throne in 1946 when the British mandate ended. Then in 1949, he became king of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Lawrence and the British believed that their promises to the Arabs had somewhat been upheld: Feisal and Abdullah were kings of their own countries, albeit under a British mandate. Meanwhile, King Hussein continued to rule Hejaz from Mecca. Lawrence left his post in 1922.

Back in the Hejaz, Ibn Saud's forces clashed with King Hussein's over his right to rule the Hejaz. Matters began to look dire. Instead of being king of all Arabs, neither King Hussein, nor his sons would have any land to govern. Indeed, most delegations to the Paris Peace Conference that began on January 18, 1919, were content with Ibn Saud retaining control of the lands in Saudi Arabia while the Hussein family fought for influence over Syria and Iraq.

In 1924, Ibn Saud forced Hussein out of Hejaz altogether, leading to the establishment of modern-day Saudi Arabia. No one yet realized the vast reserves of oil that lay beneath the desert.

On the morning of May 13, 1935, Lawrence set off on his motorcycle to deliver a parcel to the local post office. As he rode over a dip at 50-60mph, he was suddenly confronted by two boys riding their bicycles across the road. Pressing hard on the brakes, he swerved to avoid hitting them and lost control. Thrown over the handlebars, his head struck the road before being slammed into a tree trunk.

On Sunday, May 19, 1935, at 8 a.m. the man known to the world as Lawrence of Arabia died. He was 46 years old.



“Oh I get by with a little help from my friends.”
John Lennon and Paul McCartney



Chapter Three

The Sykes-Picot Agreement

Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidarity

– George Orwell –

The Secret Agreement

While McMahon and Hussein were exchanging their protracted correspondence, British and French representatives were also meeting in London to discuss how they would carve up Arabia in the event of a victory at the end of, what's now called, World War I. McMahon was apprised of these conversations, but Hussein was kept in the dark.

The discussions culminated in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, named after the two individuals, Sir Mark Sykes and Francois George-Picot, who, since 1915, had overseen the negotiations on how to divide the Ottoman Empire.

Thirty-six-year-old Sykes was a Conservative Member of Parliament who was regarded as an authority on the Ottoman Empire. Picot, on the other hand, was a former practicing lawyer and consul in Beirut who fiercely advocated for French colonial interests in the Middle East. Although both strong-willed individuals had different objectives and goals, they managed to reach an agreement. Thus France, which earlier defined its

interests in Syria from Anatolia right down to the Egyptian border – including Palestine -- would control Southern Türkiye, Syria, the Northern Levant, and part of northern Iraq, excluding Palestine, while Britain would administer the provinces of Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, and Russia would acquire Istanbul and Armenia. It was also agreed that the holy land of Palestine would be shared by all three.

“It seems to me we are rather in the position of the hunters who divided up the skin of the bear before they had killed it,” said the director of military intelligence in London. He and others felt the whole agreement was a waste of time, as there was little hope of an Arab victory. Consequently, it was decided to keep the agreement a secret from Sharrif Hussein, making the Arabs fight the Ottomans without any political distractions. “The important thing is to give our assurances that will prevent Arabs from being alienated, and I must leave your discretion in the matter as it is urgent and there is not time to discuss the exact formula,” Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Gray told Henry McMahon.

Sixty-three-year-old Sharrif Hussein not only expected, but demanded that Britain recognize Arab independence – an independence that would allow him to rule an empire encompassing the Hejaz, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia – a territory that Britain, France, and Russia had already carved out for themselves, and which his Arab rivals Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid, also claimed.

As discussed earlier, rather than deny Hussein’s demands,

McMahon carefully worded his response to appeal to Hussein's vanity. Letters from McMahon to Hussein usually began with, "To the excellent and well-born Sayyid, the descendant of the Sharifs, the Crown of the Proud, Scion of Muhammad's Tree and Branch of the Quarayshite Trunk." Buried within McMahon's overblown and vague passages was a statement that any decisions regarding land allocation would have to be decided at a peace conference following the war, and assured him, and led him to believe, Britain would support his demands.

The flag of Hussein's kingdom featured a red chevron with three horizontal stripes: black, white, and green. Black represented the 'Abbasids, white the Umayyads, and green for the Shi'ah of 'Ali, and red was for the *ashraf* of Mecca. According to both Sykes' biographer and Hussein himself, Mark Sykes designed the flag. It symbolized Hashemite rule over the Arabs.

Russia Backs Out & The Declaration to the Seven

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, seized power in Russia. They denounced World War I as an imperial project and pledged to withdraw from and abandon all of the Ottoman territory they had gained. To discredit the policies of the deposed Tsar's government, the Bolsheviks published the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Turks wasted no time in capitalizing on their propaganda windfall. Before we go to the Pasha's speech, let's take a closer look at Russia's presence in Palestine.

The coat of arms of the Russian Empire, with its double-headed

eagle, was formerly associated with the Byzantine Empire. The rulers of Russia had long held themselves to be the main protectors of Christian Orthodoxy, especially after most of the membership of the Greek Orthodox churches from 1460 until the Greek rebellion of 1821 fell under the control of the Ottomans. In the 19th-century imperial Russia continued to view itself as the 'Third Rome' and the successor to the Byzantine Empire. It continued to pose a serious geopolitical threat to the Ottoman state. The latter sought alliances with other European powers, notably the British and the French, to keep the Russian ambitions in check. This led to the Crimean War of 1853-1856, whose immediate cause involved the European competition over Jerusalem and the rights of Orthodox Christian minorities in Palestine. The Orthodox Christians were the largest group among the Christian Palestinians. The Russians not only saw themselves as heirs to Orthodox Christianity and the Byzantine Empire in the East and protectors of the Orthodox community in Palestine, they were also concerned about the sharp decline in the proportion of the Orthodox among Palestinian Christians from 90% in 1840 to about two-thirds in 1880 as a result of the proselytising activities of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

Russian writings on Palestine inspired early Zionist settlers, *Hovevei Zion* – Lovers of Zion – being in the forefront. They started arriving from the territories of the Russian Empire to Palestine in the 1880s.

What is important to remember and keep in mind is today's

Russian last gasp hold in Palestine and Middle East – military bases in Syria – and Türkiye's presence then, as now.

On December 4, 1917, Cemal Pasha delivered an impassioned speech in Beirut disclosing the terms of the agreement to a stunned audience and Arab world. In the process, he claimed Sherif Hussein and his sons were nothing more than British stooges and urged the Arabs to abandon the Revolt and return to the Ottoman fold. He also dispatched a letter to Feisal and Hussein offering them a deal. If they called a halt to the Revolt, the Arabs would receive full autonomy within the Ottoman Empire.

The public revelations of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, detailed in next chapter, left the Revolt hanging by a thread.

Shortly thereafter, on December 11, 1917, British rule in Palestine formally began when General Allenby officially entered the Old City of Jerusalem.

David Hogarth, a renowned archaeologist and Lawrence's old professor, who shuttled back and forth between London and the Middle East for the Department of Naval Intelligence, assured and reconfirmed to Sharrif Hussein, Britain's commitment to helping the Arabs claim their independence.

In March 1918, an influential group of seven Syrians met with the Arab Bureau to gain some reassurance regarding their country's

future and the situation in Palestine. The British government provided a commitment known as *The Declaration to the Seven*, which ensured “the complete and sovereign independence” of territories that had been in Arab hands before the war and had since been liberated. Any territory that the Allies subsequently took would be governed according to the “principle of the consent of the governed.” To avoid this being misconstrued, the document concluded by stating that “the oppressed peoples … should obtain their freedom and independence.”

France was not a party to the agreement, and it did not agree to what the British had proposed.

In early October 1918, the Arabs, led by Feisal Ibn Hussein, the third son of the Sharif Hussein, the leader and architect of the Arab Revolt, entered Damascus victoriously and together with Lawrence, imposed an Arab government in the city. The British led by General Allenby, entered Damascus shortly thereafter. At a meeting at the Victoria Hotel, with Lawrence sitting alongside him, Allenby informed Feisal that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was now being brought into effect. Both Feisal and Lawrence were furious and objected. Feisal and his father, Sharif Hussein, had been told something very different in their correspondence with Henry McMahon, both before and during the war. They had repeatedly been led to believe that the agreement was dead.

Despite Feisal’s victorious entrance into the city, Allenby told him that France “was to be the Protecting Power over Syria.” In return, Feisal was to have “the Administration of Syria” on behalf

of his father, but under French “guidance.” He was also not “to have anything to do” with Lebanon, which was reserved for France. To add insult to injury, Allenby told Feisal that he would have to exchange Lawrence for a French liaison officer.

“The Sykes-Picot treaty was the Arab sheet-anchor,” Lawrence stated years later after the agreement had been annulled. “It was absurd in its boundaries, but it did recognize the claims of Syrians to self-government,” he added. “It was ten thousand times better than the eventual settlement.”

Lawrence, like any skilled diplomat, politician, lawyer, or military leader was prepared to play the devil’s advocate and present an opposing viewpoint. “Self-determination has been a good deal talked about,” he remarked after the war. “I think it is a foolish idea in many ways. We might allow the people who have fought with us to determine themselves. People like the Mesopotamian Arabs who have fought against us deserve nothing from us in any way of self-determination.”

Lord Nathaniel Curzon, who served as Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, joined Asquith’s coalition government as Lord Privy Seal in 1915, joined Prime Minister Lloyd George’s coalition government; and was a member of the select War Cabinet, in which he served as Lord President of the Council – and chairman of the Eastern Committee -- a subcommittee of the War Cabinet, instructed his committee to assume that Türkiye would lose the war and that British troops would take control of Arabia. After the war Curzon replaced Balfour as Foreign Secretary.

Disclosure of The Agreement

The Sykes-Picot Agreement exemplified classic imperialism and the conduct of secret diplomacy. It was drawn-up in secret to benefit Britain, France, and Russia – not the Arabs, Jews, or Palestinians.

With the fall of the Tsarist regime in Russia, and U.S. presidency of Woodrow Wilson, a liberal idealistic internationalist, a new world order centred on anti-imperialistic political philosophy was emerging as America entered the war.

In May 1917, Russia's new provisional Kerensky government based in St. Petersburg declared that "Free Russia does not purpose to dominate other peoples or to take from them their national patrimony or forcibly to occupy foreign territory."

"In this sentiment the British Government heartily concur," Lloyd George's government replied, misleadingly denying the Allies secret annexation agreement.

The growing criticism of imperialism would naturally be horrified by and condemn the Sykes-Picot Agreement. It was now just a question of time before the secret agreement would be made public.

April 12, 1917, was the day the secret was leaked to C.P. Scott by French journalist, Vicomte Robert de Caix, foreign editor and lead writer of *Le Journal des De'bats*. He also advised the Quai d'Orsay on Middle Eastern affairs. Whether de Caix did so accidently or

intentionally is unknown. He told Scott that when the war was over, France would claim Syria down to Acre and Lake Tiberias and across to and including the area of the Hauran. That territory was what the Zionists hoped would be theirs under a British protectorate. The rest of Palestine, de Caix asserted, would be placed under international control. “It is settled.”

Scott shared the information with Harry Sacher, a Zionist journalist at *The Manchester Guardian,* and with Weizmann, who had been introduced to him by Sacher.

Scott received confirmation on April 20 from Sir Alfred Milner of the War Cabinet. He reported to Weizmann that Milner “spoke resignedly about the international solution in Palestine as a whole and said that ‘unfortunate commitments’ had been made a year ago – I gathered to the French.”

Even without details, the outline of the Anglo-French plan for Palestine was beginning to take shape in Weizmann’s mind, along with the dawning realization that the British government had been less than frank with him. In other words, he had been lied to or misled.

On April 24, Weizmann put the question to Herbert Samuel, the former cabinet minister who was both Jewish and Zionist. “His answer was that he could not disclose to me the nature of the arrangement made because he was a member of the Cabinet at the time, but he could say this much, that the arrangement was not satisfactory from the British point of view. He sees no

objection at all why this question should not be reopened, especially now when the British army is occupying Palestine."

Weizmann went to the British Foreign Office and met with Sir Robert Cecil, the acting foreign secretary. Balfour was in America. Sir Robert confirmed the terms of the agreement concerning Palestine, which Weizmann opposed, involved a purely French administration that would be tantamount to "a third destruction of the Temple."

He insisted that only a British protectorate would suffice and vowed to stir "the feelings of Zionist Jews throughout the world in favour of the solution which he desired." Weizmann promised Sir Robert that he would rally Jewish support globally for the British protectorate and warned that the suggested division of Palestine would raise an outcry which will "ring through from one end of the world to the other," as it is contrary to all the principles that have been proclaimed by the Allies since the beginning of the War, and that have lately been so strongly emphasized by America and Russia."

In February 1917, Lawrence disclosed the Sykes-Picot Agreement to the Hashemites during a conversation with Feisal.

Later in December 1917 the Russian Bolsheviks published details of the "secret treaties."

Need For Written Declaration

Weizmann, Sacher, and other Zionists believed the British

intended to alter the terms of their agreement with the French and use Jews and Zionists as leverage. The revelation of British duplicity underscored the necessity, as Sacher put it, of obtaining "a written promise satisfactory to ourselves with regard to Palestine" from the British government.

Weizmann and Sokolow devised a strategic approach to achieve this. They and their colleagues would draft a Zionist statement that Lord Rothschild would send to Arthur Balfour, who would present it to the War Cabinet for approval. Once sanctioned by the Cabinet, Balfour would inform Rothschild by letter. This would constitute a declaration of British support for Zionism – the Balfour Declaration.

Acquiring such a declaration was a challenge, not only due to resistance from the British government, also because of the opposition from Jewish Assimilationists opposition led by Edwin Montagu, a Jewish anti-Zionist, and member of Lloyd George's cabinet. Before the final cabinet vote and decision, Montague was required to leave for India to take up the post of Secretary of State for India.

"I assert that there is not a Jewish nation," Montagu wrote, "I deny that Palestine is today associated with the Jews or properly to be regarded as a fit place for them to live in." He added, "When the Jew has a national home surely it follows that the impetus to deprive him of the right of British citizenship must be enormously increased. Palestine will become the world's Ghetto." And finally, and perhaps inevitably: "The government are asked to be the

instrument . . . of a Zionist organization largely run . . . by men of enemy descent or birth."

After two heated War Cabinet meetings that resulted in a divided line between assimilationists and Zionists, the War Cabinet agreed only to consult Britain's ally, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, before acting. News of the cabinet's indecision reached a furious Weizmann, who threw himself into a last-ditch effort to mobilize American Zionists to extract a pledge of support from Wilson; and British Zionists to push forward one more time. Hundreds of telegrams from Jewish congregations across the British Isles flooded the Foreign Office.

American Support

American support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was necessary for the Balfour Declaration to be approved by the British government.

Colonel Edward House, President Wilson's aide, had sent on the president's behalf, a noncommittal response to the cabinet's inquiry. Wilson had, at the same time, permitted American Zionist and Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis, to send a more positive one. Finally, President Wilson, decisively influenced by Justice Brandeis via Colonel House, telegraphed an unambiguous message of support for Zionism.

A third meeting of the War Cabinet convened on October 31, 1917, and agreed on that day to what is known as the Balfour Declaration. Balfour put it to the War Cabinet this way: "The vast

majority of Jews in Russia and America, as indeed all over the world, now appeared to be favourable to Zionism. If we could make a declaration favourable to such an ideal, we should be able to carry on extremely useful propaganda both in Russia and America." Stereotypical thinking about Jews did play a role in the War Cabinet's decision to issue the Balfour Declaration.

Ironically, British Zionists had done what they could to foster such thinking. Harry Sacher wrote long afterwards: "Many . . . have a residual belief in the power and the unity of Jewry. We suffer for it, but it is not wholly without its compensations.

It is one of the imponderabilia of politics, and it plays consciously or unconsciously, its part in the calculations and the decisions of statesmen. To exploit it delicately and deftly belongs to the art of the Jewish diplomat." During 1917 the Zionists did just that. Starting in June 1917, they began warning that Germany was courting Jews.

The Germans had "recently approached the Zionists with a view to coming to terms with them," Weizmann warned William Ormsby-Gore, a Conservative politician on June 10. In 1916, he had joined the Arab Bureau in Cairo, where Aaron Aaronson converted him to Zionism. Recalled to London in 1917, he held various secretarial posts, including assistant secretary to the cabinet working with Mark Sykes, and befriended Weizmann. "It was really a question whether the Zionists were to realize their aims through Germany and Türkiye or through Great Britain." Weizmann was, of course, loyal to Britain.

The British Jewish press had taken up the issue. Lord Rothschild repeated it to Balfour: “During the last few weeks, the official and semi-official German newspapers have made many statements, all to the effect that, in the peace negotiations, the Central Powers must make a condition for Palestine to be a Jewish settlement under German protection. I therefore think it important that the British declaration should forestall any such move.” It helped that the British government was receiving independent confirmation from Germany, about the Zionist warnings.

The Zionists indirectly played “delicately and deftly” upon the ignorance and prejudice of British officials. In this sense, the Balfour Declaration sprang from fundamental miscalculations about the power of Germany and about the power and unity of Jews.

Balfour sent the message to Rothschild on November 2, 1917, published a week later by the press.

Thus did Weizmann’s long, unlikely success finally achieve its goal while the campaign of T.E. Lawrence, King Hussein, and Sharif Feisal for some form of Arab confederation received a grave setback. Their projected Greater Arabia, if ever realized, would not include Palestine.

Lawrence’s Fury

Lawrence was furious about breaching the promises the British had made to the Arabs, promises which inspired them to fight.

King Hussein had put his trust in the British, their word, and the rule of law. “The sharif first got to respect and like Great Britain about 22 years ago when he was at Stambul,” wrote Colonel Cyril Wilson, Britain’s “pilgrimage officer” in Jeddah on May 4, 1917, after meeting Feisal who wanted to talk about his father.

Hussein’s uncle, who was the grand sharif at the time, had cheated him out of money due him from lands in Egypt. When Hussein complained to Abdul Hamid II, he did nothing about it. Hussein then “took an action in Cairo” and filed a complaint against his uncle, even though this displeased the sultan. His uncle tried to bribe the Egyptian court, “but justice prevailed and Hussein knew then that British methods were honest.”

This initial appreciation grew into something larger; eventually, it helped shape Arab policies toward Britain and thus, perhaps, the modern world. Hussein had compared the British colonial methods with the French and German, Feisal told Wilson. He had arrived at the same conclusion as the Zionists when they performed a similar exercise. The British were better.

Hussein’s wartime letters contain one paean after another to Great Britain’s history of honourable conduct and integrity. “The English, my son, are an honourable kind, in word and in deed, in fortune and in adversity. I say honourable. Only his excellency, the estimable, energetic Luweed Jurj (Lloyd George) is something of an acrobat and a fox,” he said near the end of a long life, repeating his trust in Britain mantra to his dying day.

When Hussein learned about the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the exact source, British or French uncertain to this day, he experienced that same trickle of doubt, just as Weizmann did in London after learning what Robert de Caix told C.P. Scott.

Lawrence strongly and vocally felt the Arabs had been betrayed.

In a letter to his sister around this time, Lawrence outlined what he believed would happen if the British failed to keep their promises:

> *"The results will be as follows – If we keep our part with the French the Arabs will rightly say we have sold them, that we have raised them up only to cast them down … News of this will spread through the Mohammedan World and do us un utterable."*

Since the capture of Damascus, many in the British government felt that the Sykes-Picot Agreement should be discarded in its entirety. Many still hoped that the Arabs and Zionists would cooperate in Palestine under the protection of a British administration. If that were the case, the Arabs should be allowed to govern themselves in Syria.

Upon his return to Britain, Lawrence was invited to a private audience with King George V. Allenby had recommended that Lawrence be awarded a knighthood, but Lawrence informed the king's military secretary that he would not accept the honour. Instead, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to speak

to the king about the issues facing the Arabs in the Middle East. King George later revealed that when he tried to pin the medals on Lawrence's chest, Lawrence immediately removed them. To explain his continued loyalty to the Arabs, he stated that "if a man has to serve two masters it was better to offend the more powerful."

There was enormous respect between the two men, but Lawrence could not hold his tongue. He explained to the king that if the government now reneged on its promises to King Hussein and the Arabs, then they were "crooks," and he again made clear his opposition to the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Today's Treaty Ghost

In 2025, Britain and France finally acknowledged and came to terms with their historical deceit by recognizing Palestine, a non-existing state they created in 1916. Britain's Foreign Secretary David Lammy acknowledged at the U.N. in late July, that Britain will recognize a Palestinian State with the "hand of history on our shoulders."

His French counterpart, Jean-Noel Barrot, also acknowledged history a week earlier. French leaders going back to Charles de Gaulle, he said, had called for an end to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, based on "the recognition by each of the states involved of all the others."

Neither mentioned the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Yet their momentous decisions cast a light on the shadowy roles of both

countries in a region where they once vied for influence.

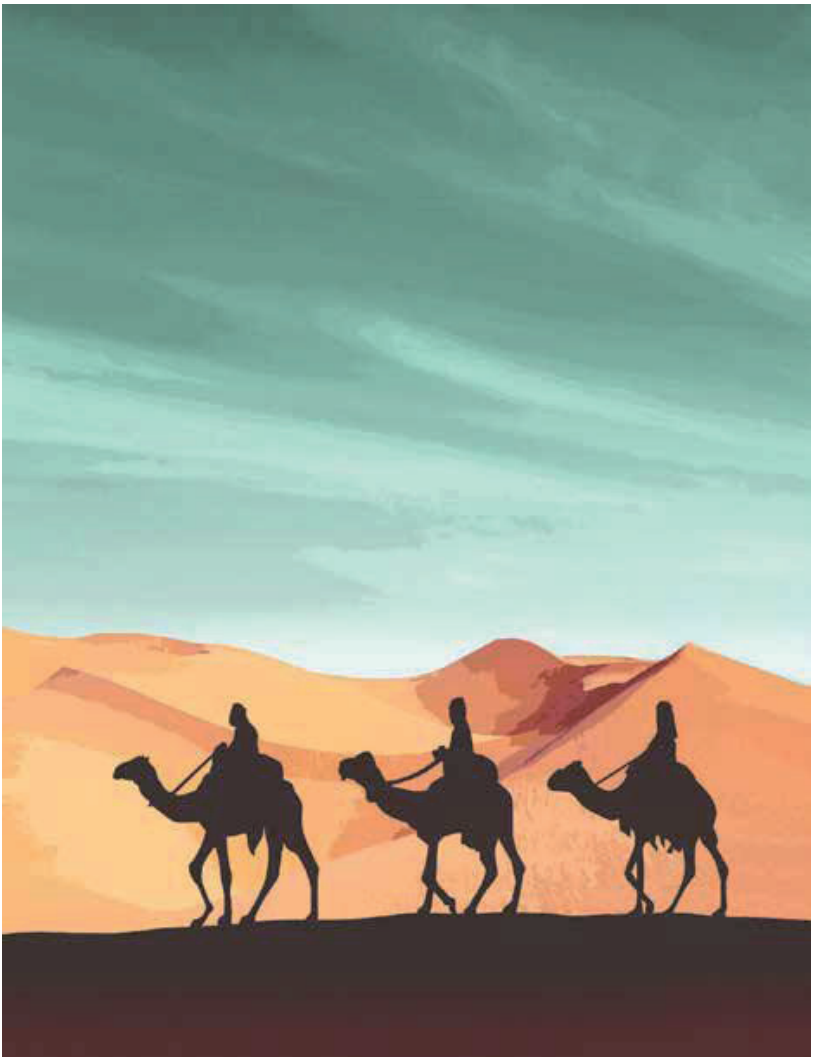
Gerard Araud, who served as France's ambassador to Israel from 2003 to 2006, said, "Neither country understood that the age of colonialism was over. They behaved as if they were still all powerful. It's not the most glorious page of history for either country."

"The history is so relevant," said Eugene L. Rogan, a professor of modern Middle Eastern history at Oxford University. "It shows there's always a chance for historical actors who screwed up in the past to make up for their mistakes."

"Sykes Picot is cited by historians as an enduring example of Western imperial arrogance -- a cynical exercise in drawing borders that cut across religious, ethnic and tribal communities in what are today Israel, Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinian territories. To many Arabs, who view it as a great betrayal, it seeded a legacy of strife and bloodshed in the Middle East," states Mark Landler in his August 5, 2025 article in *The New York Times International Edition* titled, *A 1916 treaty looms over recognition of Palestine.*

A strife that will continue until there is a Palestinian state. Not the illusory state Britain and France recognized at the U.N. in September 2025, but one that is recognized and established in the former province of Palestine that is sustainable and liveable in peace.

The time is long overdue for the leaders of Britain and France to acknowledge and apologize for their role in creating todays Gaza and West Bank conflicts in Israel.



Chapter Four

Hashemites from Mecca to Trans-Jordan, Syria and Iraq

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself
–Leo Tolstoy –

Hashemite Lineage and Rule

The Sharifate of Mecca ruled by a Hashemite sharif, lasted from 968 to 1925. All Sharifs claim descent from Hashim ibn ‘Abd Manaf, the eponymous founder of the Banu Hashim clan within the Quraysh tribe which held Mecca during the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah. Hashim was the great-grandfather of the Prophet. The Prophet’s daughter, Fatima, married his first cousin, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. Their two sons, Husayn and Hasan, founded the two main branches of sharifian descent, known as the Husaynids and the Hasanids. Around the year 968, Ja’far ibn Muhammad ibn Husayn al-Amir, a descendant nine generations after Hasan, asserted control of Mecca. From that point until the Saudi capture of Mecca on October 18, 1924, the Sharifate was held by the Hasanid sharifs. In contrast, Medina was often under the control of the other branch of sharifs, the Husaynids.

Hashemite Roots

The Hashemites migrated north from Yemen, driven like many great migrations throughout history – by disaster -- in this case the collapse of the immense Marib dam, the remnants of which can still be seen in the hills surrounding Sana, the biblical Sheba.

Control of Yemen shifted from Byzantine backed Christian Ethiopia to Zoroastrian Persia, then to independent kings, including a Jewish king in the 5th-century, and then through the entire cycle repeatedly, each transition accomplished through military force.

With the collapse of the Marib dam, the land reverted to high desert, prompting a northbound migration. Quasay, Abd al-Muttalib's legendary great-grandfather, led several clans, uniting them into a single tribe. They adopted the name Quraysh, meaning "those gathered together," and turned away not only from Yemen, but also, from agriculture. Upon settling in Mecca, they understood that controlling the sacred shrine would ensure their survival and prevent starvation.

Kaaba

The Kaaba is a sacred sanctuary of Islam. Often referred to as the *arish*, the word used to describe a palm-covered sheepfold or livestock pen. But this term also had profound mystical significance throughout the Middle East. It was an ancient Semitic name for the tabernacle built in the wilderness by the Israelites under Moses and indicated not just a protected place but a place of protection – a sanctuary and shelter for humans, as well as animals, as expressed in the saying, *The Lord is my shepherd*. The shrine was thus the ultimate enclosure, holding the spirit of God within itself: the godhead al-Lah, literally *the high one* like its Hebrew equivalent *Elohim*, or the still more ancient Mesopotamian *El* the one supreme divinity reigning above all lesser tribal gods and totems.

The Kaaba is the navel of Mecca, the core of its being, around which everything else revolved. Literally. When Meccans returned from a journey, they'd do as pilgrims did and circle the sanctuary seven times, left shoulder inward: a ritual circumambulation that was a kind of seal made with one's own body. "Here I am," it said. "Here is where I belong." This sense of belonging is echoed by the tens of thousands who come from all over the Arabian Peninsula during the *Hajj*; millions today from all over the world.

Accounts of what was inside the Kabba became as exaggerated as what was outside. While some early Islamic historians favoured comparative restraint, saying it contained only the horns from the ram sacrificed by Abraham in place of Ishmael, or just a single solid gold dove. Others insisted it was full of statues representing all the many tribes of Arabia, and Christian paintings of Mary and Jesus, and hordes of treasure, ancient swords, and still more ancient scrolls. Each version was sworn and attested to, seen by someone's own eyes or with the eyes of someone close to them, and each one contradicted by the next. But the most haunting possibility is that, like in the holy of holies of the Jewish temple that had once stood in the far north in Jerusalem, the Kaaba was empty. No physical object could possibly contain the essence of the one God, so that the emptiness constituted a much greater mystery than any number of idols or piles of treasure.

The Kaaba also cemented Muhammad's reputation as "the *Amin,* the Trustworthy."

The worst place to be in Mecca during a flood was at its lowest point, where all the wadis met, and that is exactly where the Kaaba stood. Most flash floods were relatively shallow, but as Muhammad began his retreat on Mount Hira in 605, a violent storm in the south sent a foaming mass of water hurtling toward the sanctuary. Nobody in Mecca at the time could remember a flood of such magnitude.

A semi-circular wall had been built upstream from the sanctuary to protect it. But the wall gave way under the battering of the boulders, debris, and water. The water raced into the Kaaba precinct, crashing into the sanctuary with such force that it washed away the clay mortar and collapsed its stone walls, leaving the Kaaba in a pile of rubble.

There was no question it had to be rebuilt as quickly as possible, before word of its destruction spread through Arabia and taken as a bad omen, undermining the whole raison d'etre of Mecca. The Quraysh council decided to build a raised foundation so that the door would be above the new peak flood level, and opted for a sturdier, more imposing design: a tall, almost cubic shape. Everyone in Mecca was involved. Since labour on the new sanctuary was clearly a privilege, not a chore, it was carefully portioned out between the various clans of the Quraysh, ensuring that no single clan could claim that it had been especially honoured. All went smoothly until the time came to place the famed Black Stone back in the northeast corner. It's still set into the corner of the Kaaba today, almost overshadowed by a huge silver frame.

From a distance, the stone looks like a large chunk of black onyx, though on close inspection, it contains streaks of red, brown, and dark green, and appears to be meteoric in origin. Islamic tradition has it that it was placed in the wall of the original sanctuary by Abraham and Ishmael, and was then lost until it was rediscovered by Muhammad's forefather Qusayy, the founder of the Quraysh tribe. For all its fame, it is surprisingly small, barely larger than a football, so lifting it into place when the Kaaba was rebuilt in 605 was not an issue. One reasonably strong man could do it easily, but now the question was who that strong man could have been.

Everyone claimed the honour of replacing the stone, with none willing to concede. The process that had been a model of cooperation among the clans of the Quraysh broke down into violent verbal disagreements, and actual violence seemed imminent. One clan even produced a bowl filled with animal blood, thrust their hands into it, and held their bloody palms high for all to see, swearing that they were willing to shed their blood for the right of one of their own to lift the stone into the newly built niche. Fists were clenched, and hands reached for daggers when one of the elders, distressed at the prospect of bloodshed in this sacred place, found a way to diffuse the situation.

They were all too exhausted from the effort of intense labour to make such a weighty decision, he said. Instead, they should leave the decision to God by agreeing that the first man to enter the precinct from that point on, regardless of which clan he belonged to, should decide whose hands would lift the stone. As it

happened – or, depending on one's point of view, as it was predestined – that man was Muhammad.

Newly returned from his retreat, he'd headed to the precinct to circle the sanctuary the prescribed seven times, but instead of walking into the peaceful ritual of homecoming, he'd walked into a conflict – and into an almost Solomonic role in resolving it. "This is the *Amin*, the trustworthy one," they agreed when they saw him, "and we will be satisfied with his decision."

He was to be the arbiter: close enough to know what would work yet distant enough to be considered objective. It was a role Muhammad was made for. He was the ideal man for the moment because he was not one of the movers and shakers of Mecca.

"Bring me a cloak," he said, and when they did, he had them lay it on the ground and place the Black Stone in its center. "Let the elders of each clan take hold of the edge of the cloak," he ordered, "and then lift it up together." This they did, and when they had raised it to the right level, Muhammad eased it into position.

The process was acclaimed as the perfect solution. Everyone had a hand in it, and all had been equally honoured.

Muhammad returned to Mecca eight years after his departure. Upon his return, he rededicated the Kaaba to the one God and ordered the destruction of the totems in the precinct surrounding it. He then rode to the nearby mound of Safa, where

he sat for three days as the Meccans emerged from their homes to pledge allegiance to God and His prophet, Muhammad.

The Prophet Muhammad

Much has been written about Muhammad and his teachings in the Koran. Here, I would like to emphasize the Prophet's upbringing, personal tragedies, growth, political evolution, and his historical connection to today's royal family in Jordan.

Muhammed became an orphan at the age six. His father, Abdullah, had a dazzling white light on his forehead the night Muhammed was conceived. But he died before Muhammad was born. His wife, Amina, who exhibited a radiant glow during her pregnancy, also died when Muhammad was just six years old. Abdullah died near Medina while returning from a caravan trip to Damascus. The sixth century was particularly harsh to both widows and orphans.

Psychologists have identified a remarkably long list of "high achievement" figures who were orphaned at a young age. They include Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, William the Conqueror, Cardinal Richelieu, the metaphysical poet John Donne, Lord Byron, Isaac Newton, Friedrich Nietzsche, and possibly even Jesus, as Joseph vanishes from the Gospels shortly after his birth.

Had Muhammad been born female, he might have been abandoned in the desert for the elements or predators to dispose of, or even quietly smothered at birth. The emphasis on male heirs meant that female infanticide was as high in Mecca as it

was in Constantinople, Athens and Rome – a practice the Koran directly addresses and repeatedly condemns.

Muhammad seemed destined to be what his Meccan opponents would later label “a nobody.”

Droughts forced nomads to the outskirts of Mecca in search of water. In the process, many became slaves. The lack of rain during a drought year brought a young woman called Halima from Medina to Mecca in search of an infant to foster. Without her care, he might not have survived infancy. Like many Bedouin women, Halima avoided the fate of slavery thanks to her abundant breast milk, by offering her services as a wet nurse, a common occupation of impoverished women serving the wealthy worldwide at the time. This practice persisted well into the twentieth century as the widespread availability of baby formula and the decline of traditional rural life rendered wet-nursing obsolete in most societies, giving way to nannies and boarding schools.

Abd al-Muttalib, Muhammad’s grandfather, on his father’s side, was a member of the Hashima clan, one of the four primary extended families that banded together to form the leading tribe of Mecca, the Quraysh, of which he became its venerable leader. He was born in Medina, as was Muhammad’s great grandmother, which explains why his mother Amina travelled there from Mecca in the desperate hope of a sick woman to secure a safe home for her child before her death. At the age of six, Muhammad was doubly orphaned, his sole inheritance being a

profound insecurity about his place in the world.

Muhammad was his grandfather's favourite. Legend has it that he discovered his identity at his grandfather's feet, absorbing the tales of clan and tribe from the lips of the man who had played such a central role in those same legends.

When he finally found refuge there, 46 years later after fleeing Mecca, there is no mention of any special welcome from relatives, merely a note acknowledging his partial local ancestry. Any significant blood connection, it seems, had been lost.

As a young man, Muhammad's grandfather had excavated the Zamzam well, a freshwater spring by the Kaaba Sanctuary that attracted pilgrims from all over Arabia. Rumours of the spring's existence had circulated as long as anyone could remember. Some said it had first been discovered by Hagar after she gave birth to Ishmael and that it had then been tapped by Abraham, only to be abandoned for centuries, its location forgotten until Abd al-Muttalib rediscovered it along with its contended miracles. He claimed that the profitable monopoly on providing its water to pilgrims, belonged exclusively to his clan, the Hashims – Hashemites.

The genius of the Quraysh lay in their canny combination of commerce and pilgrimage. Piety and profit were the twin engines of Mecca's prosperity. They refurbished its ancient Kaaba Shrine and appointed themselves its new guardians.

If any doubt lingered in Muhammad's mind regarding how deep the connection between piety and profit had become, it was dispelled by the blatant intertwin of the two at the grand trade fair held just outside Mecca each year at Ukaz. As vital and lively as American state fairs once were it ran parallel to the main pilgrimage serving the profane counterpart to the sacred *hajj*. This was when Mecca transformed from a mere trading hub into a vibrant destination, and the Quraysh capitalized on this fully.

Muhammad heard stories of the many prophets from the Jews who came to Ukaz from the great palm oasis of Medina and Khaybar to the north, as well as from the Christians who journeyed from Yemen and the cathedral city of Najran to the south. They were known as the People of the Book.

The very concept of a book of words possessing physical existence, not in the mouth or ear but before one's eyes, inscribed on parchment scrolls, exerted a magical influence on a boy who could neither read nor write.

Muhammad began working on the month-long caravans from Mecca through an area larger than Europe, reaching north and south in sweeping arcs encompassing Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and Ethiopia. He progressed from a camel boy to an owner's agent. By the time he started working on the caravans, Meccan aristocrats owned estates in Egypt, mansions in Damascus, farms in Palestine, and date orchards in Iraq.

Like all property owners they were aware of everything that might affect the value of their holdings, especially the see-saw dominance of the Byzantines and Persians, which pushed the boundaries of influence in all directions. Suddenly, the geopolitical balance that had held for nearly eight hundred years was in question, and major cities like Damascus, where Byzantine control was becoming increasingly tenuous, buzzed with political rumours and speculation.

For Muhammad there could be no better education than what he gained in Damascus, which was far more expansive than the four walls of a classroom.

It was on a caravan that he met his wife Khadija, a childless widow who proposed marriage to him. They had four daughters and a son. The son tragically died before his second birthday. Khadija shared Muhammad's values and was as disturbed as he was by the inequities of Meccan society. They lived their life together, accordingly, wearing homespun linen instead of ostentatious silks, and donating most of their income in the form of food and alms through a framework for their values among a small group of independent Meccan thinkers known as *hanifs*.

Their search was for a purer form of monotheism, untainted by the sectarian divisiveness that was prevalent in the Middle East at the time. Has much really changed?

The word *hanif* would eventually be used in the Koran to praise all those from Abraham onward who acknowledged the one God

and excluded all others. Although Muhammad did not describe himself as a *hanif*, he must have felt a sense of kinship with this small group of men who had knowingly placed themselves outside the norm, responding to the purity of the idea of a God so great that, if that pronoun can even be applied he was beyond male or female, beyond any form of representation: a single, ineffable, universal concept of the divine.

Muhammad adopted the *hanif's* practice of ascetic meditation in solitary vigil known as *tahannut*, in the mountains outside Mecca. There was a long tradition of such meditation in the Hebrew and Greek bibles, as well as in Indian and Chinese practices. Prophets, hermits, preachers, and gurus all sought the timeless vastness of the high desert for clarity of vision and a sense of eternity uncluttered by everyday human concerns.

Muhammad started speaking openly about Meccan decadence, not only to his kinsmen but in the most public manner possible, within the Kaaba precinct. The new verses he recited there went far beyond mystical praise; they constituted a scathing critique of the greed and cynicism that had transformed Mecca into a kind of 7th-century equivalent of a Wall Street bull market, relegating most of its residents to the status of the underclass.

These new verses served as an impassioned protest against corruption and social inequality. They demanded an end to the worship of the false gods of profit and power, along with those of the totem stones. Above all, they condemned the arrogance of the wealthy – "those who amass and hoard wealth," who "love

wealth with an ardent passion," who "are violent in their love of wealth" and "think their wealth will make them immortal," unaware that "it will not avail them when they perish."

Muhammad appealed to the better nature of the Meccan, warning them of what would happen if they ignored the prophetic call from Moses through the ages to Jesus. "Say: 'We believe in God and in that which has been revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes of Israel; to Moses and to Jesus and the other prophets." This was a call to return to the real tradition of the forefathers. "Before this, the book of Moses was revealed, and this Koran confirms it," said one verse. "All this is written in earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses."

The call for justice was a fierce protest akin to those of the biblical prophets and Jesus; the similarity in their call is no coincidence. Like early Judaism, and early Christianity, early Islam was rooted in opposition to a corrupt status quo.

This was a matter of politics as much as of faith. The scriptures of all three great monotheist faiths as popular movements in protest against the privilege and arrogance of power, whether that of kings as in the Hebrew bible, the Roman Empire in the Gospels, or a tribal elite in the Koran. All three were originally driven by ideals of justice and egalitarianism, rejecting the inequities of human authority in favour of a higher, more just power. The historical record clearly illustrates that the drive for social justice served as idealistic foundation of monotheistic

belief.

The Koran acts as a confirmation of what came before – a renewal of a timeless message – but with a significant distinction. This time, through Muhammad, the message was delivered "in a clear Arabic tongue." It was not in Hebrew as it had been for the Jews, nor in Greek, as for the Christians, but in the Meccans' own language. They no longer needed to feel inferior to the People of the Book, for they were now a people with their own book, newly in the making, one intended not just to confirm but to complete the existing scripture.

Muhammad's message was far more than a personal awakening; it was an Arabian response to the demise of the Nabatean civilization in Petra, in today's Jordan, and the Yemeni one in the remnants of the great Marib dam near Sana.

It is no wonder that Muhammad and his followers faced opposition in Mecca, ultimately fleeing to Medina, where they were invited by pilgrims from the Khazraj tribe to resolve their local disputes with the Aws.

They had heard about Muhammad's preaching and were particularly intrigued by the vehement disdain that the Quraysh held for a man they had once unanimously respected as *amin*, the trustworthy. The story of how Muhammad had resolved the dispute over who would lift the Black Stone into place in the rebuilt Kaaba had spread far and wide and was cited and admired as an example of the wisdom of the compromise. For the

Medinians, enmeshed in bitter conflicts, such a well-crafted solution inspired hope. “Perhaps God will reunite us through you.”

In a time when traditional values were overshadowed by a new drive for profit, the Koranic attack on the accumulation of wealth for wealth’s sake was profoundly subversive. It called into question what the elite wanted to be taken for granted, exposing the injustices of what seemed to them the rightful order of society.

Then, as now, the status quo was a formidable force against change; it felt safer to stay with what you know than to embrace a radically new vision of society. By the end of his first year, Muhammad had attracted no more than a few dozen followers. To many, this new movement seemed hardly worth opposing.

Yet opposition was the crucible in which Islam would be forged. If the Quraysh elite had not so virulently opposed Muhammad – with campaigns of denigration and harassment leading up to a concerted attempt on his life – he might have faded away as just another of the many preachers claiming divine inspiration.

Muhammad’s ties to Medina were tenuous. His father had died there, and six years later, his mother had died on the way back from a visit there. His great-grandfather, the eponymous founder of the Hashim clan, had married a Medinan woman, with whom he had a son.

Before leaving for Medina, Muhammad sought assurances that he and his followers would receive strong protection from the threats looming in Mecca. He demanded guarantees of acceptance and security. Medina had to be a genuine home for him.

He had to be more than an arbitrator. That was an outsider role. The last thing he wanted was to feel like an outsider again. The problem was that there was no existing mechanism for such an arrangement. What Muhammad and the Medinan delegation were negotiating – equal status in Medina, irrespective of tribal affiliation – was a groundbreaking concept.

If Muhammad's judgement was to be respected, his authority as the messenger of God would have to be widely recognized.

Like the Meccans, most Medinans were already halfway inclined towards monotheism. Therefore, instead of simply addressing their disputes, he aspired to achieve a greater goal. In his hands, monotheism would become a means of conflict resolution. Lacking a singular "tradition of the fathers" as seen in Quraysh controlled Mecca, the appeal of the more ancient tradition upon which the Koran was founded was stronger. This was especially true since it was already familiar in Medina, where three of the smaller tribes were Jewish. People today may be surprised to learn that there were Jewish tribes in seventh-century Arabia.

Just as the Quraysh had originally migrated to Mecca after the collapse of Yemen's Marib dam, and the resultant decline of the

agrarian economy, so too had the Aws and Khazraj moved north in the same migration to take over Medina. But where Mecca had been largely abandoned before then, Medina had not been. It was already home to descendants of Palestinian Jews who had spread throughout the Middle East in several waves, most notably following the dramatic but ill-fated rebellion against Roman rule led by Bar Kokhba in the second century. Jews had settled in the chain of valley oases stretching from what is now Jordan into northwest Arabia: Tabuk, Tayma, Khaybar, and the southernmost Medina. Over the years they had integrated into the Arabian tribal system. What made the Jews distinctive was less their concept of God than their assertion that God had spoken specifically to them. After all, they had a book to substantiate the claim.

Now, God was speaking to everyone in Arabia in Arabic. Better yet, the new book encompassed both the Jewish and Christian texts. Eventually, a full third of the Koran would echo many biblical narratives while also extending beyond them, declaring that it had come not only to renew but to perfect the previous revelations.

It made little difference that the ever-growing corpus of the Koran was not yet inscribed on parchment; with each recitation, it was inscribed in the memories of those who heard it. Writing had not yet replaced memory as it would after the invention of printing.

The Koran, as it was eventually documented and arranged, was

not done until two decades after Muhammad's death. Nobody today speaks the 7th-century Hijaz dialect in which the Koran is written, which has led Islamic scholars to engage in lifelong arguments about specific words, let alone verses.

As historian James Carroll points out, the Jewish scribes who wrote most of the Hebrew bible during the 6th-century BC Babylonian exile conceived of "one God" less as a specific identity than as an affirmation of unity. The personified Yahweh, the territorial god of Israel, gave way to the ineffable Elohim, the universal God – the same God known in Mecca as Allah. In this older and wider concept of monotheism, says Carroll, "the God of this people is the God of all people, associated not with a clan or a tribe or a network of tribes, but with all that exists." God thus becomes "the reconciliation of all oppositions."

Each of the 12 Medinans clasped Mohammad's hand closely, forearm against forearm, and pledged himself as a believer to respect Muhammad's judgment. They swore allegiance and obedience to Muhammad himself, as well as to God. For the first time since the initial revelation on Mount Hira 11 years earlier, Muhammad was acting as more than just a messenger. He was now acting as a leader, assuming the political role that his Meccan opponents had feared all along. In his early 50s, he was growing into the politics of his mission.

Muhammad built in Medina what would become the new center of the believers' world. The single feature a modern Muslim

would recognize was a niche in one wall to indicate the *qibla*, the direction to be faced in prayer. But this was not toward Mecca -- not yet. It was toward the city of the Night Journey, Jerusalem – the same direction in which both Jews and Christians turned to pray.

What buoyed and drove Muhammad's supporters was a heady sense of idealism. They were not merely building a new compound, or even a new home. What they were building was a whole new society with a radically different concept of how people would relate to each other.

In unison with man and God, these early Muslims threw themselves into what Kabbalists would later call *tikun olam*, repairing the world. From the broken shards of life, they aimed to create a renewed whole.

Or as Machiavelli famously put it, "All armed prophets have conquered, and unarmed prophets have come to grief."

Power was respected only as long as it continued to be demonstrated. This was the political logic of the time, and Mohammad still had to prove himself within its terms. The Koranic voice had advocated forgiveness and tolerance, but that had been when he had only a small minority of followers. If he was to establish his newly acquired power position, he would need to meet the expectations of his time. A new ruthlessness was called for, and it would be demonstrated nowhere more than in his relations with the Jewish tribes of Medina.

Muhammad assumed that the Jews of Medina would be the most receptive to his message. Their prophets were his prophets, divinely inspired men who had warned their people just as he had been trying to warn his own people in Mecca. The Koran would honour the great figures of the Hebrew bible from Adam through Abraham down to Joseph, Moses, Solomon, and Elijah. Like all Arabians, the Jews spoke of God as Allah, the high one, and often used the honorific that would become familiar in the Koran, *ar-Rahman*, the merciful, just as the newly completed Babylonian Talmud used *Rahmana*.

Muhammad took it for granted that he would have not merely their assent, but also their enthusiastic support. The superiority of the new message he brought seemed self-evident. How could anyone who claimed to worship God possibly reject it.

The problem was that Medina's Jews saw no more reason to accept Muhammad as a prophet than they had Jesus. The Jews stood firm in their traditions. In almost two years, hardly any had accepted Islam, and this appeared to confound Muhammad.

The Koranic voice intervened with an order to institute a major change in religious practice. The *qibla*, the direction of prayer, was to be reversed. Whereas the believers had faced north to Jerusalem, as did the Jews, they were now to face south. "We are turning you in a prayer direction that pleases you," declared the Koran, thus implying that the same direction as the Jews was displeasing. "Turn your face in the direction of the noble sanctuary – the sanctuary of the Kaaba in Mecca."

This change in *qibla* carried doubly symbolic weight. On the one hand it was a message directed at Mecca. It acted as a kind of exclamation mark on the declaration of war against the Quraysh, just as the Jews swore with their bodies never to forget Jerusalem – "If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, let my right hand be cut off" – so now the Muslim believers were to use their bodies as a reminder never to forget Mecca. It was not a place of the past but ever present, the focal point of the new faith. Their praying bodies would proclaim as theirs, and they would reclaim it. But the new direction of prayer also acted as an expression of what some historians would call "the break with the Jews."

Just as Christianity had differentiated itself from its parent Jewish faith six centuries earlier, so the nascent faith of Islam would now begin to do the same. Islam and Judaism shared the same heritage, but the change in *qibla* seemed to indicate that they would no longer share the same future. Perhaps inevitably, as a family split, it was destined to become far more bitter.

The rest, as they say, is history. Muhammad's personal frustration with the Jewish refusal to acknowledge him as a prophet – even though two of his wives were Jewish – led in 627, to the killing of Jewish men and the enslavement of Jewish women and children.

This slaughter and enslavement of the Qureyz in 627 set a terrible precedent. Since faith and politics are so inextricably intertwined in today's Middle East as they were in the 7th-century, the arguments given for the massacre in the early Islamic histories are still invoked, alongside the Koran's anger at Medinian Jewish

rejection of Muhammad's prophethood, to justify the ugly Theo-political extremism of Muslim anti-Semitism to this very day – especially post-October 7, 2023.

Muhammad died of meningitis on Monday June 8, 632, in Medina and was buried on the platform in the house where he died. He had once said that a prophet should be buried where he had died; they would later explain, and since he had died on the sleeping platform in this small room, this was where he had to be laid to rest.

There was no pomp or circumstance, no elaborate ritual or mass procession, no throng of mourners, no eulogies. Mohammad was buried in the dead of night, as quietly and inconspicuously as he had been born, and one has to think that this is exactly how he would have wished it.

Sunni-Shia Schism

The Sunni-Shia schism boils down to Muhammad's failure to leave a clear succession plan, a plan he left to the various family factions to determine. Did he intend it to be by his bloodline, in which case it would be his son-in-law, Ali, or by non-bloodline means determined by the people, in which case it was Abu-Bakr, the companion with whom he fled Mecca and his father-in-law? Most cogently, in the one sentence most often quoted from those days, Muhammad talked about himself in the past tense: "I have left you one thing with which, if you hold fast to it, you will never go astray: the Koran, the book of God."

To many devout Muslims, this sentence says all that needs to be said. However, there are other versions of it, and that is where the collective memory parts way. According to these versions, Muhammad said, “I have left you two things,” not one. The first of these was still the Koran, but the second would remain in dispute. Either he said “the Koran and the example of his prophet” – the *sunna*, literally the “custom” of the prophet. Or he said “the Koran and the people of the prophet’s house” – the *ahl al-bayt*, his blood descendants through his son-in-law Ali and his grandsons Hassan and Hussein.

The first caliph to succeed Muhammad was Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad’s wife Aisha, who held the dying prophet and allegedly heard his final breath.

Tradition of Miracles

However un-Koranic the tradition of miracles calls on elements of historic worldwide hero legends. Greek and Egyptian god legends of the golden bowl and cat face; the Christian idea of Satan lodged like a black clot in the heart; Jewish mysticism both, the *sakina* being the counterpart of the Kabbalistic *shekhina*; and Buddhist tradition, with the mysterious seal of prophesy between the shoulder blades – it becomes almost dream-like.

The visions and terror Muhammed experienced on Mount Hira, and the fits that followed, believed by some to be epilepsy, were transformed into calmness and serene beauty. This transformation was part of the biography created by later believers who, despite the Koran’s insistent abstention from

miracles and omens to be fulfilled, needed faith bolstered by physical evidence. Thus, they insisted that Muhammad conform to popular expectations of a man blessed by the divine. Consequently, no matter how un-Koranic, they called on the tradition of miracles to create a physical representation of Muhammad's purity of heart, a miraculous apparition that people could comprehend and hold onto. In a world where mystery was tangible, this concept was familiar. It aligned with other narratives such as the radiant white light on Abdullah's forehead the night Muhammad was conceived, the glow emanating from Amina's pregnant belly, and the sudden abundance of milk from Halima.

Hashemite Dispersion

By the end of October 1914**,** Türkiye allied with Germany in World War I. Soon, the sultan/caliph declared jihad against his Christian adversaries. Numerous imams backed his call. It raised a major concern for Britain. How would the hundred million Muslims in the British Empire, especially in Arabia, India, and even in Britain, react. Its strategy for retaining the loyalty of the Muslim subjects and blocking the sultan's holy war was to stablish Sharif Hussein as an opposing figure to the Ottoman sultan and suggest that he might assume control over the caliph himself.

Hussein's caliphate and territorial ambitions were influenced by three factors: first, there was a general idea – current in the Muslim world from at least the 15th-century – that the Sharif of Mecca was the legitimate claimant to the caliphate; second, communications from both the British and Arab nationalists

following his assumption of the sharifate in 1908 bolstered his ambitions for the caliphate bringing them into the realm of possibility in his mind; and third, the British and Arab nationalists influenced Hussein to believe that he had the support necessary to achieve Hashemite territorial sovereignty over much of the Arab world. It can, therefore, be assumed that these elements could have fostered in Hussein's mind a potent mix of personal aspirations and a perceived capacity to realize them.

Thus, as you may recall from Chapter Two, the British encouraged Hussein, *Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hashimi* (Hashemite), the Sharif of Mecca – *sharif* meaning a descendant of the Prophet -- to take the lead in the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks. After receiving promises of support from Arab leaders in Syria, the Hashemites met in June in Taif and decided in principle to revolt, beginning with an attack on the railway on June 9, 1916.

The process of forming the necessary tribal alliances before and during the revolt involved extensive bargaining. The tribal chiefs operated with a significant degree of autonomy, and their willingness to join the effort was conditioned entirely on the fulfilment of Sharifian promises for money, plunder, and rifles. Istanbul also offered similar incentives, and the principal, if not the sole, obstacle to keeping the tribes from joining the Turks was that the Hashemites, backed by the British, offered more of them.

In addition to promising weapons, money, and the spoils of war, the Sharifs, particularly Feisal, were constantly engaged in

mediation between and among rival tribes. He adjudicated not only feuds between rival tribal groups, but within them and between individuals. This mediation increased the prestige of the Sharifate which already enjoyed significant reverence because of its Hashemite lineage.

Tribal autonomy, however, was strong and given the right circumstances, tribal groups could easily shift their allegiances. It is critical to emphasize that these alliances were inherently temporary; when the incentives diminished, discontent was inevitable. In other words, the Sharif's hold on the tribes was tenuous.

Golds, Guns and God

The primary incentive for the tribes to join the alliance was gold – British sovereigns. Hussein considered the subsidy his due, for having forfeited the Ottoman remittances, he now needed not only to replace them, but also to exceed them. Another incentive was the Sharif's distribution of rifles to the Bedouin. In the first six months of the Revolt, about 54,000 rifles and 20 million rounds of ammunition were distributed. By June 1917, these numbers had escalated to roughly 71,000 rifles and over 40 million cartridges.

The British also intended to deploy troops to support Hussein, but he believed that adding Christian soldiers into his force would blemish his prestige among Muslims.

While complaining about the vast number of rifles being

distributed, the British did not realize that to the Bedouin the rifles had become personal property, not 'ordinance' issued temporarily by the military to its soldiers. Lawrence noted that Feisal curried favor with the tribes, by, among other promises, paying the large sum of one pound sterling for each captured Turkish rifle, and allowing the taker to keep the rifle. It was reported that Ibn Saud had bought many rifles and over 300,000 rounds of ammunition from the Bedouin, to use them against Hussein. Also, there was little indication that Sharif Hussein was a charismatic leader with direct connection to the tribes, unlike Ibn Saud. Also, unlike Ibn Saud's Wahhabi *da'wah*, there was no ideological attraction for the tribes.

Hussein's nemesis during the revolt was Ibn Saud. Their rivalry for control of the tribes was long running. Hussein feared that his tribes would succumb to the Wahhabi *da'wah*, while Ibn Saud feared Hashemite encroachment on Najd.

What Hussein did not realize at the time was that Ibn Saud intended, at the right moment, to regain his patrimony in the Hejaz – occupied by the first Saud state from 1744 to 1818. The Arabian tribal system, not the British war efforts, determined the behaviour of the two men.

These two protagonists, who despised each other, began diplomatic contacts with the British and with each other because the British wished it. Sharif Hussein and Ibn Saud were pushed to cooperate under British tutelage. Officials in India, in the Gulf and Iraq supported Ibn Saud, while London and Cairo supported

Hussein.

There is evidence that from 1913 to at least until early 1915, when both escalated their actions against the Ottomans, Ibn Saud and Hussein were on good terms.

The Hashemite tribal confederacy, which expanded during the Arab Revolt, differed from other Arabian chieftaincies is many respects. Most importantly, it lacked the ideological cohesion present in the Wahhabi creed of the Saudi chieftaincy. Most importantly, Hussein's leadership was neither charismatic nor based on a personal connection with tribal leaders, as was Ibn Saud's.

Militarily, Hussein, unlike Ibn Saud, failed to develop *esprit de corps* among his troops. The Egyptian and other Arab officers leading the Hashemite armed forces had little, if any, sense of unity of purpose. In fact, the non-Hashemite officers and the forces they were supposed to lead were in constant conflict, resented each other, and undermined one another – especially when the Arab officers were not paid by Hussein as promised. To make matters worse, the Hashemite forces led by Abdullah were more concerned about Ibn Saud than about capturing Medina and defeating the Turks. The British complained that Abdullah did not fight the Turks as he should have because "Abdullah was not interested in doing so." Feisal confirmed their concerns and told them that his brother was 'taking no part in the war against the Turks, because his whole heart, head, and all his resources are engaged in the problems of Nejd.' In other words, Ibn Saud.

As the Saudi threat grew stronger in 1924, Hussein recruited soldiers from abroad. As a result, most of the Hijazi army was made up of mostly poor black men who were often pressed into service by Hussein.

Hussein chose to rely primarily on an outside power – Britain – to support his chieftaincy. He expected and received massive funding and arms, but his expectations that the British would run political interference for him with the French and his Arabian rivals was naïve and foolhardy.

When Hussein began the Arab Revolt, he posed as the defender of Islamic law, *shari'ah*, against the secularizing reforms of the Young Turks, who were perceived all over the empire as anti-*shari'ah*. In 1913 and 1915, the Young Turks weakened the independence of the *shari'ah* courts by placing them under the authority of the secular Ministry of Justice.

Hussein hoped that by basing his Arab Revolt on *Shari'ah,* he would tap into Islamic legitimacy, a strategy that failed because it was not widely supported. His unjust accusations against people and the harshness of his regime bred alienation even among his own Hijazis.

Sharif Hussein failed as a leader on two critical fronts: administration of justice and military leadership. In administering justice, his use of the Islamic *hudud*, which was designed to show his Muslim credentials, served only to alienate his subjects rather than contribute to some kind of unifying ideology based on the

strict implementation of *shari'ah*. He also failed to establish a regular army for the Hashimite Kingdom of the Hijaz.

Financial mismanagement compounded Hussein's problems. Until 1923, all income to the Hijaz came directly to Hussein. Thereafter, it theoretically went through the Ministry of Finance. Yet, even this constructive step in the direction of state-and-institution building was only honoured in the breach. When Hussein wanted money, he would simply ask the Minister of Finance for it. If the money wasn't available to give to him, he would advance the funds out of his own pocket.

With the start of the Revolt in 1916 and the end of Ottoman subsidies, the British stepped in to make up for the loss of funds. This marked the beginning of the Hijaz's financial dependence on Britain. Obtaining approval for funds and managing their distribution became complicated and non-transparent. Unbeknownst to them at the time, the British had fundamentally changed the economy of the Hijaz. Instead of fostering tribal loyalty, they had created a growing demand for money – preferably, British gold sovereigns.

After the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918, which ended the conflict between the Entente and the Ottoman Empire, the Treasury in London, weary of advancing large sums to the Hijaz without proper accounting for their distribution, considered a substantial cut to their monthly subsidy.

At the post-war Paris Peace Conference, Lawrence, who held

little regard for Hussein and Abdullah, played up Feisal's contributions to the war effort. He also told Dudley Ward, the Treasury representative at the conference, that "Abdullah had recently bought 150 thoroughbred Arabian horses at top prices and has a bath every day in eau-de-Cologne."

Ward remarked it was unfair that "British taxpayers should supply funds for such things." As a result of this information, the Treasury authorized a reduction of 120,000 pounds, excluding 80,000 pounds for Feisal.

British officials dealing with Hussein urged that any further reductions be implemented gradually, given Abdullah's efforts against Ibn Saud; they believed that a serious reduction in subsidy would send the wrong signal to Ibn Saud.

Hussein's refusal to reach an agreement with Ibn Saud and issues with the pilgrimage diminished the Foreign Office's willingness to continue providing substantial cash assistance to Hussein. Moreover, Hussein was funding Feisal and others in Syria, who were working against France, Britain's ally.

Treasury officials believed that subsidizing competing rulers was an "unconscionable" drain on public funds.

Taxation Without Representation

Under the Ottomans, Hijazis enjoyed an essentially tax-exempt status. It was a point of Islamic pride for the sultan-caliphs to contribute to the Hijaz rather than tax it. When the Ottomans

tried to impose a cemetery tax in 1909, the result was a riot that killed the idea. After the Young Turk revolution, attempts at taxation were met with protests.

During the Ottoman period, the Sharifate was a state within a state, and Hussein taxed some of the weaker non-fighting tribes. Following the Revolt, Hussein continued this complex policy of tribal taxation.

With the lowering of the British subsidy, the Sharif took the unprecedented step of imposing wider taxes. Starting in 1921, he imposed a tax on every package entering Jeddah, be it personal or business or leaving Jeddah; a post-customs tax on all packages entering Jeddah; and a tax on water brought into Jeddah from wells outside the city – the only source of supply – to be stored in underground reservoirs. The amount depended on the size of the cistern. These taxes were payable only in gold.

“The king appears to have become, as a result of the new charges, more feared and better hated than ever by his people,” the British Agent remarked.

In February 1922, Hussein introduced a new way of mobilizing funds: all shopkeepers, peddlers, and auctioneers were ordered to find someone to attest to and guarantee their financial solvency and professional character. To validate the document of guarantee, Hussein assessed a charge. These taxes, as mentioned earlier, accrued to Hussein directly, for the first time since 1841.

The most widely known and accepted tax in the Hijaz was the tax on camel hire, primarily on the Jeddah-Mecca Road. In 1924, Hussein enforced a policy that forced pilgrims to hire more camels than they needed to increase the tax revenue.

Whenever Hussein was hard-pressed for money, he did not hesitate to assess a customs tax on a pilgrim's personal effects. Thus, during the 1922 *hajj*, he taxed "the very clothes the pilgrims were wearing; if they were adjudged new by customs authorities, they were taxed, and on several occasions, the tax charged was 50 percent of the cost of the article."

To gain additional revenue, Hussein frequently forced wealthy individuals to loan him money that was rarely paid back. This was one of the major contributing factors to the alienation of the merchant class. One example is the leading ammunition merchant of Mecca, Abd al-Khayar, who was forced to make a loan to Hussein. After doing so, Hussein demanded another loan which al-Khayar refused to provide, resulting in Hussein putting him in jail and looting his stores.

Such actions by Hussein led many notables to contact Ibn Saud for relief. They were promised that if they remained indoors and did not support Hussein, they would not be massacred or robbed.

During the Ottoman period, major tribes were accustomed to receiving subsidies to safeguard the pilgrimage. Hussein continued this distributive policy, enlarging it many-fold with the British subsidy. When he determined that certain tribes were no

longer needed, he either ceased subsidizing them or radically reduced their subsidies. The result was an inflation of the price of tribal loyalty, a factor that would have fatal implications for the Hashemite state when the Saudi challenge grew stronger.

Hussein's major failure, due to his incompetence and blind ambition, was his inability to invest in the infrastructure of the one money-making export the Hijaz had – the *hajj*.

Maladministration

As Hussein set out to build his state, which he viewed as the legitimate successor to the Ottoman Empire, he employed mechanisms of coercion and revenue extraction. Coalition building is an important component of state formation, a political ingredient Hussein overlooked. This is accomplished on two levels. The first is the delicate task of giving potential coalition partners – the elites – a stake in the state through some form of power-sharing and/or granting access to the resources of the state. Sound familiar?

The second aspect is on the discursive level, involving the promotion of an ideology, often through education and symbols, that somehow includes the elites and/or legitimizes the ruler. Again, does this sound familiar? It is something Trump mastered on both fronts! Hussein failed on both counts, leading to disastrous consequences.

It became apparent soon after the Revolt broke out in June 1916. Hussein had not succeeded in co-opting or otherwise gaining the

support of the urban elite. Lawrence noted in late January 1917 that at the outbreak of the Revolt, the townspeople supported the Sharrif because he was able to secure British subsidies. However, they now

> *"saw signs of danger and uncertainty in the future and their loyalty was tempered accordingly. They began to doubt how far it was possible that the Sherif could establish any perma -nent independence; many of the leading families, dependent on Turkish pensions, doubted how long the Sherif could go on paying them, now that the Turks had gone . . . To this must be added an emotion common probably to all in varying degrees, namely a half-conscious regret in assisting at what might be a fatal blow to the unity of Moslem power so long represented before the world by Turkey."*

British reports were nearly unanimous in describing the elite's opposition to Hussein, frequently characterizing it as "pro-Turk" or later, "pro-Wahhabi." The Hijazi elite simply wanted to stay out of Hussein's way, and this guided their behaviour until the Wahhabi victory at Turabah in May 1919.

The British Agent reported in early 1920 that the elite of Jeddah, lacking any "organized scheme, form part of a very strong clique against Hussein and the current regime. They would like to see the King replaced with Ali and Abdullah. A similar report later in the year stressed that the leading notables and merchants of Jeddah "reflect general opinion in praying for Hussein's speedy death. They would infinitely prefer to return to the rule of the

Turks . . . The situation, therefore, is that the Sherif sits on the throne of Hedjaz, hated and dreaded by his subjects, with whom it is literally impossible to work with or even regard as a sane man."

He even alienated his sons. By the end of 1918, Feisal became disillusioned with his father. Although he appeared in Paris in early 1919 for the Peace Conference as the representative of the Hijaz, this was because the Hijaz was already more or less accepted as an independent state, which he wished to use as a *fait accompli* to attach to Syria. He put forth claims to Syria, Iraq, Najd and Yemen. With respect to Syria, he was willing to accept only technical advice; as for Iraq, he stated that the Arab government there "would have to be buttressed by the men and material resources of a great foreign power. Concerning Palestine, he accepted an "effective super-position of a great trustee." In a meeting with British officials in London on December 27, 1918, following a meeting with Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann two weeks earlier, and cognizant of the need for Jewish support for his claims on Syria, Feisal admitted the "moral claims of the Zionists," and stated that it would ill become the Arabs "to make difficulties over a question of which they regard the British Government as the best judges." He concluded that "the interests of the Arab inhabitants may safely be left in the hands of the British Government."

With the fall of Feisal's kingdom in Syria in the summer of 1920, "the flight of the Emir and the termination of the Sherifian rule was hailed with great satisfaction, which the leading notables

and merchants have difficulty concealing."

Captain Nasiruddin Ahmed reported from Mecca in early 1921 that while no Muslim wished to see the Wahhabis in charge of the *Haramayn*, the "present feeling is even a Jew, let alone Ibn Saud, would be a relief."

The House of Saud

Ibn Saud engineered a constellation whereby the interests of his state, society, and army were closely identified in the minds of the populace. When the Wahhabis came calling, their fighting men were driven by the ideology of radical *tawhid*, which, to Hussein's great misfortune, proved a more compelling motivating factor than any call to Arab unity or loyalty to the House of Hashim.

The British, hedging their tribal bets, had signed in 1915, a secret treaty to support Ibn Saud for his territorial claims; and later also promised Hussein and his sons, in return for supporting the British in their war effort with the Revolt, to be installed as rulers of the various Arab constituencies of the Turkish Empire.

As Ibn Saud bore down on the Hijaz, the urban and tribal elites abandoned Hussein. The British feigned neutrality, but such a stance amounted to backing Ibn Saud, as Hussein had built his entire strategy on British support. The Sharif was left hanging, and the *Haramayn* fell to the Wahhabi chieftaincy.

The "death rattle of the Hashemite Kingdom," as British Agent

Reader Bullard put it, was sounded in June 1924 when about 40 Palestinian troops marched into the British Agency garden in Mecca, handed over their rifles, and asked for repatriation.

Ibn Saud and his Wahhabi followers first captured Ta'if, a town that supported Hussein in September 1924, and massacred its citizens before marching off to capture Mecca.

The notables of Jeddah waited to see how the Wahhabis in Mecca would behave. Once they saw that there would be no repeat of the Ta'if massacre, which took place before the town fell to the Wahhabis on September 5, they were convinced that the best policy would be to surrender to Ibn Saud. Extremely conciliatory communications from the Saudis reinforced this feeling. Ibn Saud addressed a letter to the people of Jeddah and Mecca, which arrived in Jeddah on October 16, two days before the fall of Mecca. He promised them that their lives and property would be safe, and that he would not treat them in a displeasing manner or do anything contrary to the law. He also promised he would make the country safe for pilgrims. Most importantly, the Wahhabi leader promised the notables of Hijaz that he would not "treat them as vassals, but with advice, security and comfort." Nothing would be done, concluded Ibn Saud, which would injure them or their honour. The contrast to Hussein's behaviour was apparent to all.

On October 3, Ali arrived in Jeddah and summoned a meeting of the notables. He told them he came on behalf of Hussein, who was already in Jeddah after leaving Mecca, and was ready to

abdicate if they wished. After discussion, they sent the king a telegram asking him to abdicate in favour of Ali. The King refused and left Jeddah for Aqaba on October 14.

A delegation from Jeddah went to Mecca in late October and met with Khalid ibn Mansur ibn al-Lu'ayy, Ibn Saud's general. Khalid offered handsome surrender terms, promising to leave the notables of Jeddah alone, not to send troops, and to let the town govern itself, stipulating only that they arrest Ali or force him to leave the country. If they failed to do so, Khalid warned, Jeddah would meet the same fate as Ta'if.

Ali refused to leave and arrested four of the leaders of the delegation, beginning to extort money from the Jeddah merchants to pay his troops. On November 17, tribal troops broke into open revolt in Jeddah, as did Syrian troops and the palace guard on November 19. All were temporarily pacified with promises of more pay, but on December 6, a mutiny broke out among Ali's Syrian and Palestinian soldiers, who barricaded themselves in a mosque. A few days later, members of the Hijaz elite and Harb Bedouin, representing three-quarters of Ali's total forces, sent a message to Ibn Saud offering their submission and asking for instructions.

Ali finally approached the Acting British Consul to ask him to mediate his submission to Ibn Saud. He officially abdicated on December 19 and was allowed by Ibn Saud to leave the Hijaz aboard the HMS *Clementis* the next day. Ibn Saud entered Jeddah on December 23.

Ibn Saud had rightly assessed that one of the main reasons preventing the surrender of Ali was the constant influx of money from Hussein in Aqaba, where the ex-king had been holed up since he left Jeddah.

Back in mid-May 1925, Ibn Saud stated that the prolongation of the war between himself and Ali was the result of the presence of Hussein in Aqaba and that he had forces that would soon move on the town to eject Hussein. This threat caused London to include Aqaba within the borders of Transjordan, which was under British control, to force Hussein to leave. Thus, was the ex-King and Caliph unceremoniously removed from Aqaba to an ignominious non-Arab exile to Cyprus – ending his fight with the victorious Ibn Saud.

After spending most of his exile in Cyprus, Hussein died in Amman, Transjordan, in 1931. Ideologically speaking. Hussein failed to generalize his specific brand of Arab nationalism -- the primacy of the Arabs in Islam and the primacy of the Hashemites among the Arabs – into a supra-'*asabiyyah* and make it the central ideology of Hijazi society, a justification for breaking away from what was until then the Turkish Ottoman Empire, the legitimate political framework.

Eric Davis, in the chapter *Theorizing Statecraft and Social Change in Arab Oil-Producing Countries*, from his book co-authored with Nicholas Gavrielides, *Statecraft in The Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory and Popular Culture*, argues that, for a state to be strong, coalitions must be established with important elites. A

crucial tool in achieving these coalitions is the fabrication of an ideology and symbols that allow the state to forge “emotive links with the populace over which it rules.”

This forging is often accomplished through a reinterpretation of the past to align with the goals of the state; as Davis terms it, “the construction of a particular form of historical memory.”

Hussein failed to deliver on all these fronts. He had poor leadership qualities and did not know when to co-opt, when to ally, and when to confront various social groups competing with the state.

British mentions of an Arab Caliphate and Arab unity fell on fertile ground in Hussein’s mind as a British guarantee, rather than consolidating his rule in the Hijaz. This activity is termed “statecraft,” which Davis defines as the “skills whereby political elites or ruling classes promote state formation.”

Ibn Saud, on the other hand, engaged in successful coalition building after he took control of the Hijaz. He developed a bureaucracy with the strategic purpose of bolstering the state. He allowed the alienated notables of the Hijaz, who facilitated his takeover of the main Hijazi cities, to maintain their social position, did not oppress them, and even institutionalized their leadership. However, Ibn Saud was smart enough not to rely entirely on the local aristocracy. He brought in foreign officials to fill senior bureaucratic positions. His relationship with the notables of the Hijaz was not always smooth, as they resented

the foreigners and the financial burden the Hijaz had to bear in supporting the poorer region of Najd – Ibn Saud's home province.

To the Foreign Office in London, Ibn Saud had "behaved well and had shown loyalty to His Majesty's Government. Moreover, of all chieftains in Arabia, he alone has shown signs of statesmanship." Hussein, on the other hand, was viewed by some officials as being "practically demented."

Hashemite Kingdom

Although the term "Hashemite" can technically be applied to all descendants of Hashim via the Prophet, including the Kings of Morocco, the Abbasid Caliphs, and the Fatimid Caliphs, the only family currently claiming the eponymous title of Hashemite is the ruling family of Jordan, the descendants of Sharif Husayn ibn Ali of Mecca.

The Hashemite Kingdom of the Hijaz was the first independent state to emerge from the Ottoman Empire, and thus represents a significant example of the process of state formation in the post-World War I period in the Middle East, particularly, in the Arabian Peninsula – and for the Two-State Solution in the future – with a caveat. Like the two-state solutions proposed to date by contemporary global power brokers, the Hashemite Kingdom of the Hijaz, serves as an example of failed state formation, notwithstanding the fact that the amirate of Mecca existed from about 968 to 1925.

From February 1917 onwards, the Hashemites left no doubt in their discussions with the British officials that they expected to rule Syria and Iraq. Although this had not been agreed upon by the British, Hussein insisted that it was the case but could not produce any documentation to back up his claims.

The British and French agreed in early 1917 that the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement had to be made known to Hussein. Sykes went to the Hijaz to reassure Hussein regarding French aims in 'the interior of Syria,' and to confirm that his rule could not be imposed on Arabs in Syria or Baghdad, where Britain would 'retain the position of military and political predominance which our strategical and commercial interests require.'

Sykes met Feisal on May 2, 1917. One can only imagine how Feisal must have felt at this meeting, given that he already knew from Lawrence that the British would not support him against France in Syria.

On May 5, 1917, Sykes met Hussein, who shared his concerns about his rebellion against the Turks, the established Islamic authority. The idea of not achieving something at least approximating what he had rebelled against was inconceivable to him and would leave him vulnerable to charges of *fitnah*. He therefore told Sykes, "That unless Arab Independence is assured, he feared that history would charge him with assisting in the overthrow of the last Islamic power without setting up another in its place."

Faisal, the third son of Hussein, who was regarded as the most capable warrior, was put on the throne of the newly formed nation of Syria, one of the Arab territories carved out of the Ottoman Empire. However, a few months later, when control of Syria transferred to France under the postwar agreements, Faisal was abruptly deposed and ousted from Damascus. He was later seen at a railway station in Palestine, where, after receiving a ceremonial welcome from the British, he was left sitting on his luggage while waiting for his connection and title in Baghdad, Iraq.

Iraq, another new state carved out of three provinces of the Turkish Empire by the British and consisting of Sunni and Shia Arabs, Jews, Kurds and Yazidis, required an Arab government with a constitutional monarch that Britain could support. To complicate matters further, the Jews represented the largest single group of inhabitants in Baghdad, followed by Arabs and Turks. Faisal was the ideal candidate and was crowned King of Iraq in Baghdad in August 1921 – with an imported constitution and parliament. Is it any wonder that it failed?

Faisal's brother Abdullah, who was originally destined to be king of Iraq, was instead, on Lawrence's advice, installed on Palestinian land, which the British christened the "Amirate of Transjordan."

Abdullah's parting shot when he left Jeddah to set himself up as Amir of Transjor-dan in 1923 was a raid on the 70,000 pounds sterling held by customs officials along with a forced loan of 20,000 pounds from local merchants. He was helpful to Hussein's

Caliphal ambitions and even attempted to recruit men and send arms for the Hijazi army to fight against Ibn Saud in 1924 but was prevented from doing so by the British.

As was the case with Feisal, this intervention was probably more out of fear of Wahhabi threats to Transjordan and Iraq than out of filial loyalty.

From the extensive correspondence and exchanges between Hussein and British officials, one can understand why Hussein, with his sons in Syria, Iraq, and later Transjordan, likely reasoned, albeit erroneously, that he would be able to contain
Ibn Saud – and eventually eliminate him.

When Faisal was proclaimed King of Syria and Abdullah of Iraq, Hussein reminded the British that they had, in his view, committed to Arab independence, and to recognizing a caliph "of noble stock" once approved by the Arabs. Hussein held on tenaciously to these perceived British promises. Hussein expected British help not only because he believed that he was to rule over Ibn Saud after the war, but also because the British had a treaty with the Wahhabi leader. He expected the British to control him. Hussein never visited Britain. To his chagrin, Ibn Saud's son Feisal was invited to London in November 1919.

Palestine and White Paper

Ronald Storrs, who at the outset of the war was the British High Commissioner in Cairo, became Britain's first governor of Jerusalem. He favoured Arabs over Jews, as did the new Colonial

Secretary Winston Churchill, who hitherto had supported Zionism. However, at a conference in Cairo in 1922, he carved Transjordan out of Palestine and established Abdullah as its ruler.

To make matters worse, Herbert Samuel, the first British High Commissioner for Palestine, stopped Jewish immigration after the anti-Zionist riots of May 1921 and pardoned the rioters.

In 1930, a British Labour government, wishing to assuage Arab resentment regarding the Jewish presence in Palestine, accepted a White Paper issued by Colonial Secretary Lord Passfield, the Fabian socialist formerly known as Sidney Webb. Webb questioned the very basis of the Zionist program in Palestine: Jewish immigration, exclusive labour practices, and the wholesale purchase of Arab land. The Zionists protested so vehemently, that the government backed down.

In 1937, a Conservative British government, hoping to settle the Palestine problem once and for all, accepted the recommendations of the Peel Commission which recommended that Palestine should be divided into a Jewish state and an Arab state, and a territory still under British mandate -- a plan that Weizmann and the Zionists accepted.

The Arabs denounced Peel and rejected his proposal. A general strike of Arab Palestinians demanded immediate cessation of Jewish immigration, prohibition of the sale of Arab land to Jews, and the establishment of a national government. To make their point, volunteers from throughout the Arab world poured into

Palestine to fight both Zionists and Britons.

As a result, in 1939, Neville Chamberlin's government repudiated the Peel Report and rejected the idea of partitioning Palestine, instead recommending that it become a binational Arab-Jewish state.

Zionist mistrust grew as World War II unfolded, despite Chamberlain's plan remaining on the drawing board.

The reality was that although Britain had the mandate to govern Palestine, it lacked the means to do so. The British Empire reached its zenith at the end of World War I, but this conflict also weakened it irreparably.

In the Middle East during the spring of 1919, General Allenby was demobilizing soldiers at the rate of 20,000 per month. By 1920, the chief of general staff complained, "In no single theatre are we strong enough. Not in Ireland, nor England, not on the Rhine, not in Constantinople, nor Batoum, nor Egypt, nor Palestine, nor Mesopotamia, nor Persia, nor India."

In the following decades, Britain experienced what the Ottomans endured – a gradual diminution of an empire whose peoples demanded control of their own destinies and were ready to take up arms to achieve them. In Palestine, Jews and Arabs armed themselves, and Britain could not stop them from fighting each other.

Arab Acceptance of Jews

Historians who have written about the broken promises made by the British to the Arabs, while negotiating side deals with the Zionists, French and Turks, have spilled oceans of ink tracing the initial reaction of King Hussein and his sons to the Balfour Declaration. Did they promise to welcome and work with the Jewish Zionists and develop reservations later, or did they object at the outset?

The evidence for this subject and period, as always, is mixed and ambiguous.

When David Hogarth, a renowned archaeologist, based in Cairo as the unofficial leader of the Arab Bureau, who shuttled back and forth between London and the Middle East for the department of naval intelligence, travelled to Jeddah to explain the Declaration to Hussein, the "King seemed quite prepared for the formula and agreed enthusiastically, saying he welcomed Jews to all Arab lands." It is important to note that Hussein considered Palestine to be Arab land.

Sykes coached Feisal on the subject in an extraordinary letter that reveals his own fantastic understanding of Jews:

> *I know that the Arabs despise, condemn and hate the Jews, but passion is the ruin of princes and peoples . . . Those who have persecuted or condemned the Jews could tell you a tale. The Em-pire of Spain in the old days and the Empire of Russia in our time show the road of*

> *ruin that Jewish persecution leads to. You say to yourself what is this race despised, rejected abhorred, that cannot fight, that has no home and is no nation? O Feisal, I can read your heart and your thought, and there are counselors about you who will whisper similar things in your ear. Believe I speak the truth when I say that the race, despised and weak, is universal, is all pow-erful and cannot be put down.*

Feisal replied: "I do not, and never did, despise anyone on account of his religion. . . Therefore, on general grounds I would welcome any good understanding with the Jews." Was the Balfour Declaration a "good understanding?" Feisal was not sure. He continued in his answer to Sykes: "But I do not know what is going on, nor what is the basis of the arrangement intended to be concluded about Palestine for Jews and Arabs."

To Hakki Bey, a prominent Muslim from Damascus, he expressed doubts in December 1917. He did not look favourably upon the Balfour Declaration, he told him, but he was not yet ready to protest it.

Whatever King Hussein and his family thought of the Declaration, it produced grave reservations among Arabs and Muslims in general.

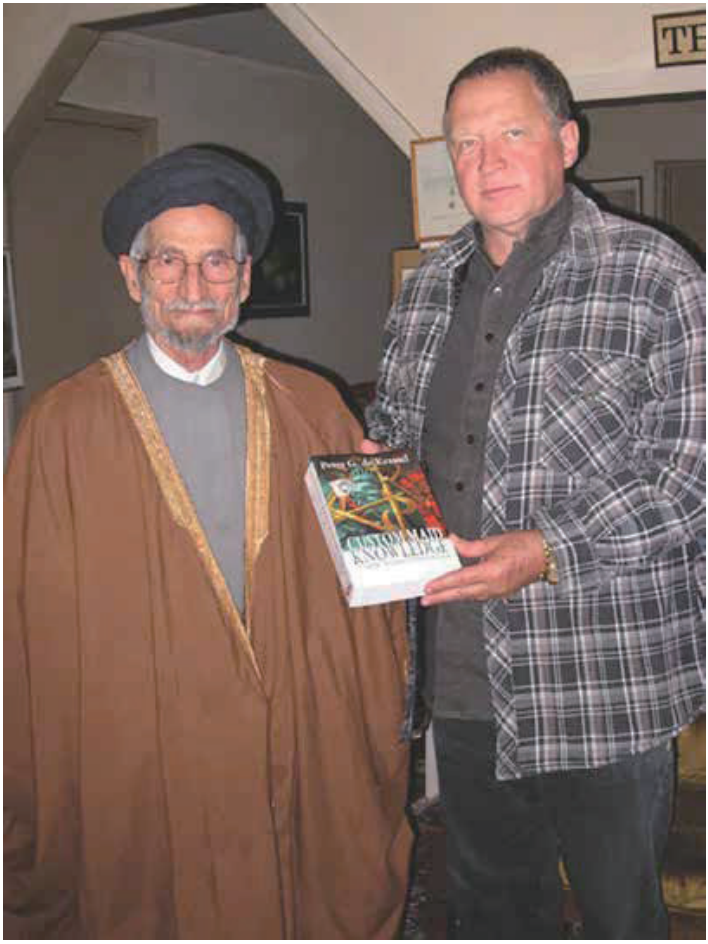
Two days after the publication of the Declaration, William Yale, of the U.S. State Department reported that "the Syrians have held meetings to protest against Zionism to all the Allies, and the younger and more hot-headed among the Moslems are laying

plans for the future that bode no good for the peace of Palestine."

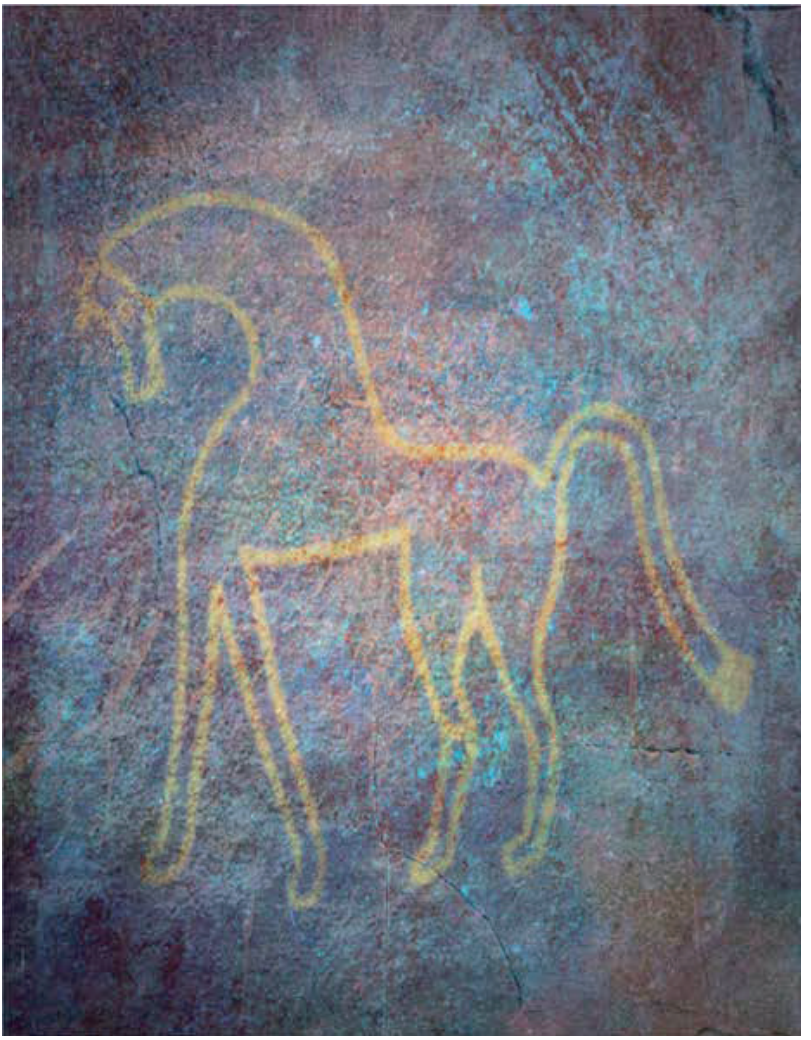
Peace in Palestine was never on the British agenda. Their goal in promoting the Arab and Zionist movements was to win World War I, maintain and expand the British Empire there.

Syrian leaders sent a telegram to Balfour objecting to his declaration to Lord Rothschild claiming Palestine forms a vital part of Syria, "especially as Palestine is looked upon both by Islam and Christendom as the polar star and birthplace of their religious ideals as much as by Jewry."

At the end of the war Britain ruled Palestine by virtue of military occupation. The Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and San Remo Conference in 1920, ratified British rule and the League of Nations gave Britain a mandate to govern Palestine.



Peter de Krassel meets Imam Khrorasani On May 24, 2008 in California.



Chapter Five

Saudi Arabia

Hope is like a path in the countryside.
Originally, there is nothing—but as people walk
this way again and again, a path appears
– Lu Xun –

Founding Family

Saudi Arabia, a country that became independent in 1925, with the sword of Mohammed on its flag, was founded by Mohammed Ibn Saud, of the Saud family and clan, in the mid-1770s. With farmers who hailed from the humble date-growing and caravan trading village of Diriyah, he created the first proto-state in an oasis of mud huts baked in the sun. Definitely not one of the major tribes or families like Sheikh …. of the Hashimites in Mecca, or … in Medina, that were the political and religious rulers, and made up the social, economic, and religious fabric of Arabian desert society.

The Great Powers, led by Britain, gave political support to and funded Ibn Saud while simultaneously funding the Sharif of Mecca to lead the Arab Revolt. This alarmed Ibn Saud and other tribal leaders because the local balance of power was shifting in Hussein's favour. As a result, Ibn Saud began to move toward a more tightly organized quasi-modern state, 'replacing the provisional arrangements of the chieftaincy' with a stronger and more centralized government. Many of the tribes in his

chieftaincy were infused with Wahhabi religious ideology and the *ikhwan*, tribal groups that became Ibn Saud's vanguard in this effort, developed a religious zeal and an '*asabiyyah* based on the Wahhabi *da'wah*. Ibn Saud's state had therefore developed a social cohesion and legitimacy that other chieftaincies lacked. Wahhabi propaganda was continuous throughout the area, reaching all social levels as preachers spread the word far and wide, thereby strengthening Ibn Saud's leadership as the Imam of the *Wahhabiyyah*. This marked a move towards a more modern state, an 'ascent' on the stateness continuum, that distinguished the development of the Saudi state from its main rival – the Hashemite state of Husayn ibn 'Ali.

Ibn Saud outmanoeuvred Sheikh Abdullah, the religious ruler of Mecca, and had him ousted in 1925 from Mecca to Transjordan, by not only outsmarting the Sheikh militarily, but also religiously, forming a political and familial alliance with the extreme Muslim zealot fundamentalist Mohammed Ibn Abdul-Wahhab, who had called for the purification of the religion and its return to Prophet Muhammad's practices. He had been run out of town because of his beliefs and found his way to Diriyah, where he found acceptance, shelter, and support with Ibn Saud.

A mutually beneficial political and religious alliance that propelled the previously unknown Saud clan as the true followers and crusaders of the Prophet Muhammad – Wahhabism – while disbeliever infidels met their fate at the edge of the sword. Within half a century, united, both families' conquests allowed them to control and dominate most of the Arabian Peninsula,

until 1818, when they were defeated by the Ottoman Turks.

The first restoration of the Saudi Kingdom was reestablished in Riyadh, but it eventually fell apart due to rivalries among ibn Saud's great- grandchildren, forcing the family into exile in 1891. They wandered for two years deep in the desert with a nomadic tribe until they were invited by the Sabah family, which ruled Kuwait, to take up residence. Abdul Aziz – the future Ibn Saud – made part of the journey in a bag hung from a camel saddle.

The Turks incited the Rashids, the traditional enemies of the Saudis, to attack Kuwait, which was then a British protectorate. As a diversionary tactic, the Amir of Kuwait dispatched Ibn Saud, then just twenty years old, to retake Riyadh from the Rashids. His first assault was repulsed, but on the second attempt, Ibn Saud entered the city at night and, at dawn, slew the Rashids governor. In January 1902, his father proclaimed him, at age twenty-one, Governor of Nejd and Imam of the Wahabis, making the beginning of the second al-Saud restoration.

The last territories critical to the Saudi empire were added in the years after World War I. Ibn Saud captured northwest Arabia, and in 1922, the British High Commissioner, exasperated by the disputes involving Ibn Saud and the Amir of Kuwait, drew the boundaries himself with a red pencil. By December 1925, Ibn Saud captured the Hejaz, the holy land of Islam, on the western side of the peninsula, bordering the Red Sea. Here lay the port of Jedda and the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. In January 1926, in the Great Mosque of Mecca, after congregational prayers, Ibn

Saud was proclaimed King of the Hejaz, making the Saudi dynasty the keeper of the holy places of the world's Muslims. Thus, at the age of 45, Ibn Saud became the master of Arabia.

However, the warriors of his expansion, the Ikhwan, began to criticize Ibn Saud for backsliding from Wahabism by allowing instruments of modernity, such as the telephone, telegraph, radio, and automobiles – deemed the tools of the devil – to enter the kingdom. In 1927, they rose up in rebellion against him. He defeated them, and by 1930 had destroyed the Ikhwan movement. To commemorate this consolidation, the name of the realm was changed in 1932 from the "Kingdom of the Hejaz and Nejd and its dependencies" to Saudi Arabia.

Tribal and Religious Warfare

In 1802, Saudi forces sacked the Shiite holy city of Karbala in Iraq and massacred thousands of people, including women and children, while destroying ancient tombs that they considered blasphemous. They also carried out a second massacre in the Saudi city of Taif that year.

Mecca was also subjected to a similar religious cleansing in 1803. Tombs were destroyed, and Wahhabi religious leaders were installed, barring Muslims who did not accept their doctrine from performing the pilgrimage.

Diriyah wa reduced to rubble by the Ottoman Turks after the Al Saud-Wahhabi territory expanded to include Mecca and Medina, becoming a regional threat to the Turks. The Al Sauds scattered

across the desert, and efforts by their descendants to revive their power in Riyadh over the years failed due to infighting over leadership.

In the early 20th century, Abdulaziz, a descendant of Al Saud, revived the Saud-Wahhabi campaign and, over several decades, conquered Arabia, bringing it under his control from his capital in Riyadh. He declared the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, which would have remained a backwater but for the discovery of oil – referred to as black gold -- in 1938.

Every Western government sought access to the kingdom's oil. In a secret meeting with King Abdulaziz in 1945 aboard an American aircraft carrier in the Suez Canal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt outmanoeuvred them all. Roosevelt secured the oil for America, and the two leaders laid the cornerstones of the lasting American-Saudi relationship to this day: Saudi oil for American protection.

King Abdulaziz had at least 18 wives and was the father of 36 sons and 27 daughters, who, in turn, were just as productive in procreation, creating a national clan that enjoyed the wealth and privilege bestowed upon them by oil and a country that bore their name.

After King Abdulaziz died in 1953, succession passed to his sons, Faisal, Abdullah, and Salman, who served as the governor of Riyadh Province for nearly 50 years. Under Salman's leadership, the desert town transformed into a sky-scraping metropolis.

Salman was also the father of Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), who was by his father's side, observing this remarkable transformation.

Salman, one of King Abdulaziz's last surviving sons, ascended to the throne in 2015 at the age of 79.

MBS

To understand Mohammed Bin Salman, and his Bedouin attitudes and behaviours, one must explore the works by and about Lawrence of Arabia and Ben Hubbard's *MBS, The Rise to Power of Mohammed Bin Salman.*

In the early 20th century, King Abdulaziz, MBS's grandfather, revived the alliance with the Wahhabi clerics, harnessing their ideological zeal to forge the state that would become Saudi Arabia.

Slavery remained legal until 1962, when King Faisal outlawed it as part of the reforms he promised President John F. Kennedy. The introduction of television in the 1960s incited outrage and may have contributed to the assassination of King Faisal. Moreover, the push for girls' education sparked riots, although it eventually led to women being allowed to enter the workforce in the education and healthcare sectors.

By the second quarter of 2024 women were permitted, at last, to participate fully in the workforce, making a significant shift. According to the Saudi General Authority for Statistics,

participation of women in the workforce reached 35.8 percent in that quarter, up from 16.4 percent in 2015.

Most of the guardianship laws that governed nearly every aspect of Saudi women's lives have been dismantled; Saudi women can now work in every industry and government agency. Women can now, not only attend football games something they couldn't do before MBS took control, they also now have their own professional Saudi women's soccer league.

MBS has also quietly expanded access to alcohol at a discreet unmarked store that opened in the Diplomatic Quarter of Riyadh in January 2024. Wealthy foreign residents, in addition to non-Muslim diplomats, can now buy alcohol. It remains banned for the public. Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, has banned the sale of alcohol since the early 1950s.

The religious police who used to be an annoying and sometimes terrifying fixture of life in the kingdom are nowhere to be seen.

Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Sheikh served as the kingdom's Grand Mufti, for 16 years until his death in 1969, issuing volumes of fatwas that forbade, among other things, toy dolls, photographs, gender mixing, shaking hands with non-Muslims, the adornment of camels, and the celebration of Saudi National Day. Although the mufti was appointed by the king, who could have removed him if dissatisfied, King Faisal chose not to do so.

MBS, unlike his siblings and other Saudi princes and princesses

who studied overseas and learned foreign languages, chose to remain in Saudi Arabia. He pursued his education in a local university, spent time with Bedouins in the desert, and by the side of his father, the governor and king, to learn how to master the art of ruling Saudi Arabia. He has distanced himself from Wahhabism to the extent that, for him, it did not exist.

“A government that is not part of society and not representing them, it is impossible that it will remain,” MBS told *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman in 2015.

“People misunderstand our monarchy. It is not like Europe. It is a tribal form of monarchy, with many tribes and subtribes and regions connecting to the top.” In fact he represents his people by allowing women to drive, promoting

entertainment, introducing movie theatres, supporting sports, and enabling mingling between the sexes -- something the religious Wahhabi police previously prohibited as they vigorously enforced Sharia law and arrested people, much to the disgust and dismay of the Saudi public.

In April 2016, MBS introduced a royal decree that stripped the feared religious police of their extensive powers, advising them to be “gentle and kind” in their interactions with citizens.

In his push for change, MBS benefited from a key aspect of Wahhabism itself. Along with its quest for religious purity was an injunction to obey the ruler, even if he was unjust, as long as he

did not hinder the practice of Islam. MBS was well aware of this tenet and leveraged it against the clerics, who generally kept their criticisms to themselves.

Sykes-Picot Agreement

The Sykes-Picot Agreement discussed in Chapter Three, on how it carved up Arabia into British, French and Russian political spheres of influence, misleading Arab leaders and Allied World War I Arab supporters into believing they would be granted independence after the defeat of Germany and its Turkish Ottoman Empire ally. This agreement played a significant role in granting France and Britain control over the Mesopotamia oil fields.

The wartime petroleum shortage of 1917 and 1918 underscored the necessity of oil to British interests, bringing Mesopotamia back into the spotlight. Prospects for oil development within the empire appeared bleak, which made supplies from the Middle East of paramount importance. Sir Maurice Hankey, the extremely powerful secretary of the War Cabinet, wrote to Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, the same Balfour after whom the Balfour Declaration is named -- stating that “oil in the next war will occupy the place of coal in the present war, or at least a parallel place to coal. The only big potential supply that we can get under British control is the Persian and Mesopotamian supply.” Therefore, Hankey asserted, “control over these oil supplies becomes a first-class British war aim.”

However, there was a political obstacle that America posed. In 1918, to counter the powerful and popular appeal of Bolshevism,

and the Bolsheviks renunciation of Tsarist Russia's claim to Constantinople and other parts of Turkey under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson introduced his idealistic Fourteen Points and issued a resounding call for the self-determination of nations and peoples after the war. His Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, was appalled by the president's broadside. Lansing feared that the call for self-determination, would result in many deaths globally. "A man, who is a leader of public thought, should beware of intemperate or undigested declarations," he said. "He is responsible for the consequences."

Nevertheless, the British government, though equally unsettled by what it considered Wilson's high-minded vagueness, had to take the President's popular appeal into account in formulating its post-war objectives. Foreign Secretary Balfour was concerned that explicitly declaring Mesopotamia a war aim would appear outdated and imperialistic. Instead, in August 1918, he told the Prime Ministers of the Dominions that Britain must be the "guiding spirit" in Mesopotamia, as it would provide the one natural resource the British Empire lacked. "I do not care under what system we keep the oil," he said, "but I am quite clear it is all-important for us that this oil should be available." To ensure this outcome, British forces, already deployed elsewhere in Mesopotamia, captured Mosul after the armistice with Turkey was signed.

America's Oil Fear and Panic

Meanwhile, back in America, after World War I and well into the

early 1920s, Daniel Yergin describes in *The Prize* the fear and panic regarding the imminent depletion of American oil resources that gripped the oil industry and the U.S. government. The wartime experience of “Gasoline less Sundays” and the lobbying by the oil industry gave a tangible form to the fear.

When President Wilson was advised in 1919 that the lack of foreign oil supplies constituted the most serious international problem facing the U.S., the president agreed: “There seemed to be no method by which we could assure ourselves of the necessary supply at home and abroad.” The anticipated rapid depletion of American oil resources was gauged against the rise in demand: American consumption had increased by 90 percent between 1911 and 1918 and was expected to grow even faster after the war. America’s love affair with the automobile was becoming ever more intense. The increase in the number of registered cars between 1914 and 1920 was mind-boggling – a jump from 1.8 to 9.2 million. The fear of shortage was such that one Senator called on the U.S. Navy to transition from oil back to coal.

Leaders in scientific geology shared the concern. The director of the United States Bureau of Mines predicted in 1919 that “within the next two to five years the oil fields of this country will reach their maximum production, and from that time on we will face an ever-increasing decline.”

George Otis Smith, the director of the United States Geological Survey, warned of a possible “gasoline famine.” What to do? The

answer, he suggested, was to go overseas; the government should “give moral support to every effort of American business to expand the circle of activity in oil production throughout the world.”

He warned that the known American oil reserves would be exhausted in exactly nine years and three months.

Significant price increases lent credibility and support to the expectation of a shortage. Between 1918 and 1920, the price of crude oil in the U.S. surged 50 percent, from two to three dollars a barrel. To further fuel the fear, the winter of 1919-20 experienced an actual shortage in fuel oil supplies. It was generally believed that the U.S. would soon become a significant importer of oil, raising concerns about international competition and potential clashes with Britain. Both the U.S. government and the oil industry firmly believed that Britain was pursuing its own aggressive policy to pre-empt the rest of the world’s oil resources before the Americans could act. Thus, the U.S. government quickly rallied to support America’s oil companies in their quest for foreign supplies. The principle invoked was that of the “Open Door” – equal access for American capital and business.

American attention became fixated on the Middle East particularly, Mesopotamia under British Mandate. However, the door was closed.

The British reacted with a mix of scepticism, injury, outrage, and implacability. When two geologists from Standard Oil of New

York slipped into the territory, the British civil commissioner handed them over to the chief of police of Baghdad.

The San Remo Agreement of 1920, between the British and French, divided the oil spoils of victory in Mesopotamia. This stunned American political leadership and

the oil industry and was denounced as a form of old-fashioned imperialism because it appeared to violate the principles of equal rights among the victorious Allies and the Open-Door policy.

The British understood that American involvement would rapidly develop the region's petroleum reserves, providing the revenue needed for the new British-backed government emerging in Mesopotamia. This would subsequently alleviate pressure on the British Treasury.

Lend Lease

In 1940, after winning his third election, President Franklin Roosevelt revealed to the world the political spin behind the fear of an oil shortage in America after World War I. He proclaimed America the "arsenal of democracy." After Japan bombed

Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, America entered the war and instituted the*Lend Lease* program with Britain in March 1941.

The issues confronting Britain at the outbreak of World War II were immense. It had to assume that Germany, as signatory of a new pact with the Soviet Union, would likely secure an abundant

supply of Russian oil, while British supplies from the Far East would be curtailed if Japan invaded Southeast Asia. Closer to home, the rich and accessible Romanian oil resources were also available to Germany. A few months after the war began, before France was overrun by the Germans, the British and French governments, aiming to replicate their actions in World War I, jointly offered Romania $60 million to destroy the oil fields to prevent German access. But the two sides could not agree on price, and Romanian oil fuelled the German war machine. The destruction was left to the Allied bombers much later in the war.

In Britain itself, practical supply issues had to be addressed. Rationing was imposed, and driving private cars was prohibited. As a result, there was a significant increase in bicycling.

However, that alone did not resolve Britain's oil supply concerns in the event of an invasion – all too real a possibility in the early days of the war in 1940 when the German Nazi armies swept across Western Europe and poised themselves on the French side of the English Channel, ready to invade Britain. The Germans had also captured France's oil stockpiles, thus providing momentum for their advance. A similar acquisition of British oil supplies could prove critical to the success or failure of a Nazi cross-Channel attack.

For the British government and oil industry leaders, two questions were paramount: Would the oil be available? And could Britain, already strapped for dollars, afford to pay for it? The answers to both questions would have to come from

Washington. They came in the form of the *Lend Lease* that removed the problem of paying for oil in dollars. American oil was "lent," to be repaid sometime in the future. Consequently, in the spring of 1941, when oil supplies in Britain began to plummet, 50 American oil tankers were redirected from supplying East Coast ports to transporting oil to Britain.

This helped link the American and British supply systems and positioned the U.S. to fuel Britain's war effort.

At the time, the U.S. had a surplus of unused oil production capacity of about one million barrels per day – a far cry from fears of America running out of oil at the end of World War I.

Without America's *Lend-Lease* program and oil supply to Britain, the course of World War II might have been significantly different. "It was only by the narrowest of margins," according to the official history of British intelligence, that "the U-boat campaign failed to be decisive during 1941."

Saudi Lend Lease

Compared to the oil reserves of Saudi Arabia, America was a backwater. "The center of gravity of world oil production is shifting from the Gulf-Caribbean area to the Middle East" said Everette Lee DeGolyer, the most eminent geologist of his era, after visiting Saudi Arabia in 1943. Three years earlier, in 1940, DeGolyer had delivered a speech on Middle East oil to an audience in Texas. "No such galaxy of fields of the first magnitude over such a wide area has been developed previously

in the history of the oil industry," he stated. "I will be rash enough to prophesy that the area we have been considering will be the most important oil producing region in the world within the next score of years."

However, at that time, the Axis powers were still on the offensive in Russia, North Africa, and the Middle East. The "hundred American oil men" in Saudi Arabia devoted themselves not to developing oil fields, but rather on, planning how to protect the wells by filling them with cement in case of bombing, and how to destroy them if "denial" to advancing German armies became necessary. This was carried out in coordination with British and American military and political authorities.

The halt of oil production, the interruption of pilgrimages to Mecca because of the war, and drought that resulted in crop failures, plunged the Saudi economy into a financial crisis in 1941. Ibn Saud had to face a harsh reality. "The Arabs have the religion, but the Allies have the money," he said in 1942 as he sought financial assistance from the British, who were within his political sphere, as well as from American oil companies. However, these oil companies were reluctant to make further loans against future production, especially at a time when production itself was constrained; yet they did not want to risk losing their concessions. Perhaps Washington could provide help under the *Lend-Lease* program as the oil executives suggested.

Unfortunately, Congress had authorized *Lend-Lease* to be

provided to “democratic allies.” Saudi Arabia was a kingdom and not a democracy, and unlike the King of England, Ibn Saud was not a constitutional monarch.

Roosevelt ultimately decided against offering any American assistance. “Will you tell the British, he instructed one of his aides in July 1941, “I hope they can take care of the King of Saudi Arabia. This is a little far afield for us.”

The British did come through, and the American oil executives worked diligently to convince King Ibn Saud that the British aid was effectively American – since Britain was a recipient of American assistance, this meant the aid actually came from the U.S., albeit indirectly. Finally, on February 18, 1943, President Roosevelt authorized *Lend-Lease* assistance to King Ibn Saud. It was only the beginning. Shortly thereafter, the Army Navy Petroleum Board presented its projections for 1944: a significant oil shortage loomed threatening military operations. Sound familiar?

The concerns of the Military- Industrial Complex provided a compelling incentive for the U.S. government to pivot toward Saudi Arabia. This culminated in President Franklin Roosevelt arriving at the Suez Canal in 1945 to meet King Ibn Saud aboard the U.S. aircraft carrier USS Quincy where they signed an agreement guaranteeing American security for Saudi Arabia in exchange for access to its oil.

The most compelling reason to collaborate today -- in 2025 -- on

a solution and a state for Palestinians lies in the same spirit and determination that defined U.S.-Saudi relations in 1945.

New Face of Saudis

Michael Ratney, who served for over three decades as a U.S. diplomat, including as U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, discusses in his May 14, 2025, Opinion piece in *The New York Times International Edition*, titled: *Embracing a new view of the Saudis,* tells us why Saudis appreciated Trump for focusing on interests rather than values.

Ratney reminds us that Trump's decision to make Saudi Arabia the first country to visit after he took office, both in his first term in 2017, and his second term in 2025, was a genuine gesture of respect.

He also reminds us that MBS became crown prince just one month after Trump's first visit -- and his transformation of the country "has been astonishing."

Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of the largest global investors in renewable energy, part of a strategy to ensure a prosperous future when it can no longer depend solely on its vast oil reserves.

For generations, Saudi Arabia exported oil. Now it wants to also export one of the digital era's most coveted resources: computing power.

MBS is seizing a chance to turn Saudi Arabia's oil wealth into tech

influence. Few nations can match the kingdom's cheap energy, deep pockets and open land – the ingredients that tech firms need to operate the vast, power-hungry data centers that run A.I.

Saudi Arabia has been negotiating with American tech giants about using its future data centers and deepening their ties. Executives from Open-AI, Google, Qualcomm, Intel and Oracle attended the country's annual Future Investment Initiative conference in October 2025 to learn more about Humain, the kingdom's equivalent to Aramco, backed by its roughly one trillion-dollar sovereign wealth fund. MBS created Humain to handle about six percent of the world's A.I.
workload in the coming years.

The kingdom is building three major data center complexes aimed at foreign companies, which would be at least 30 percent cheaper for A.I. work than the U.S.

To overcome security concerns, Saudi Arabia is also considering "data embassy" zones, where foreign firms could operate under their own national laws rather than Saudi law.

Amazon said it was working with Humain to "accelerate Saudi Arabia's vision to become a global A.I. leader."

Ratney argues that Saudi Arabia is rapidly transforming its traditional ways, and its success is profoundly aligned with America's interests. It is a prosperous country whose global

ambitions complement those of the U.S. in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and security. Saudi Arabia is a leader in the Arab and Muslim world that today espouses moderate Islam and rejects anti-Semitism. The kingdom shares America's interest in fostering a stable Middle East where Iranian proxies and jihadi terrorists don't wreak havoc.

He echoes the exact sentiments of Israeli leadership. Now, the question arises, how can a peace treaty be signed, that necessitates the establishment of a Palestinian state when Israel is taking over Gaza and the West Bank?

Saudi Arabia desires nothing more than to transform itself with minimal media, economic, or political disturbances.

The kingdom is determined to ensure that nothing disrupts its transformation – be it regional conflicts, economic disturbances, Houthi missiles, or domestic unrest. Keenly aware that Iranian ideology is unlikely to change and that the Middle East will probably remain volatile for the foreseeable future, MBS much like his uncle in 1945 with Roosevelt, is following a family tradition of doing what is best for the Saudi people.

MBS, while respectfully reciprocating to President Trumps gestures to Saudi Arabia, sees America as integral to ensuring its security against Iran. America serves as Saudi's ultimate defence guarantor – essentially its only insurance policy against Iran.

Ratney rightly points out that MBS is observing America's

deteriorating relationships with its closest allies and wondering: “If this is how America treats its friends, how will it treat us down the road?”

A treaty that binds Americans to Saudis would also tie Saudis to America -- and to its unpredictability, to the ongoing conflicts between Yankees and Confederates, amidst America’s growing antagonism toward alliances, and its willingness to upend global economic structures that have on balance, long served both the Saudis and U.S.

Saudi Arabia seems eager to anchor its ambitions in the U.S., seeking to partner with its military, technology and educational institutions.

America, as Ratney points out, must remember that the Saudis have options, with China -- and its ally Pakistan.

On September 17, 2025, the Kingdom signed a defence pact with Pakistan. It was the first firm defence decision made by an Arab country since Israel’s attack on Hamas leaders in Qatar on September 9, 2025.

The pact, signed by MBS and Pakistani Prime Minister Shebbaz Sharif in Riyadh, “aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression,” read a statement published by the Saudi Press Agency.

“Any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both,” it added.

The agreement poses a dilemma for China which has strong relations with both countries, including a long-standing collaboration with Riyadh on its civilian nuclear program.

When asked whether the pact would place Saudi Arabia under Pakistan’s nuclear umbrella, a senior Saudi official replied that it would “encompass all military means.”

The deal comes amid growing Saudi unease over American security guarantees, particularly following Israel’s missile strikes targeting the Hamas leadership in Qatar, a key U.S. ally in the Middle East.

Sun Degang, director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Fudan University, said the widespread belief that Israel had a “nuclear monopoly” in the region was fuelling concern. Sun added that “as America shows reluctance to protect its ally [Qatar], it directly triggered Riyadh’s unease.”

“Whether Saudi Arabia develops nuclear weapons will largely depend on Iran, which has long sought to become a nuclear-capable state.”

John Calabrese, a non-resident senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, said that given this Saudi unease, China could give it an opening to advance its nuclear development.

“China’s historical collaboration with Saudi Arabia on civilian nuclear projects and uranium exploration provides a potential avenue for deeper engagement.

“Beijing could expand support for civilian nuclear infrastructure, with possible dual-use implications,” he said.

In April 2025, the two countries signed another memorandum of understanding on nuclear energy security. But Sun said he doubted that Beijing would want to move beyond civilian projects, citing its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and concern about provoking the U.S.

“Beijing is also not seeking a sphere of influence in the Middle East and remains restrained in defence cooperation, since moving too far would touch on America’s core interests,” he said.

Sun’s assessment was echoed by Rabia Akhtar, a visiting fellow at the Project Managing the Atom at Harvard Kennedy School, who described Beijing as a “hedge partner” for Saudi Arabia – “present enough to diversify Saudi options, cautious enough to avoid a public breach with the U.S. on nuclear issues.”

“China has little incentive to be tagged as a proliferator; it has more to gain by being the reliable civil partner that grows influence without triggering sanctions.”

“This agreement is a culmination of years of discussions. This is

not a response to specific countries or specific events but an institutionalization of long-standing and deep cooperation between our two countries," a senior Saudi official told *Reuters* when asked about its timing – which appeared to be a signal to Israel and America in the wake of Israel's attack in Doha.

Türkiye and Pakistan revealed in early January 2026 that they are planning a separate tripartite defence partnership with Saudi Arabia. Strategically, it signalled a "more self-reliant security geometry linking the Gulf, Anatolia, and South Asia," said Andreas Krieg, an associate professor of defence at King's College London.

On February 8 to 12, 2026, China showcased a range of military equipment at the World Defence Show in Saudi Arabia, the Middle East's largest defence exhibition. It exhibited model J-10CE and J-35A fighter jets, a full-scale model of the Wing Loong-X unmanned aerial vehicle, the world's first unscrewed aircraft designed for anti-submarine warfare, the CH-9, a medium-to-high altitude, long-endurance drone that has a wingspan of around 25 metres, a maximum range over 11,000km, top take-off weight of about 5 tons, and endurance of up to 40 hours, the Golden Eagle MR150B unmanned aerial vehicle, and the FL-300C suicide drone, also known as loitering munitions, or exploding drones, that are reshaping modern warfare.

In early 2026, China established a $5-billion assembly line for the Chinese Wing Loong-3 combat and reconnaissance drone, while Beijing is reportedly helping Saudi Arabia produce solid-fuel

ballistic missiles.

The 4.5 generation J-10CE fighter drew particular attention in the wake of the India-Pakistan conflict in 2025, when Pakistan was credited with shooting down at least one French-made Rafale fighter.

The UAE

The UAE was a leading trading partner of Iran. “Keeping the Iranian economy afloat has been a strategic priority for the UAE since 2021,” said Esfandyar Batmanghelidj, CEO, of the Bourse and Bazaar Foundation, a London Think Tank.

The UAE had been a center for Iranian businesses operating offshore.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps Aerospace Force used a UAE based procurement network in late 2025 to buy advanced Chinese satellite equipment linked to its drone program, according to records seen by the *Financial Times*.

Analysis by the *Financial Times* of documents, satellite imagery and shipping routes reveal how the IRGC continued to draw on commercial networks in the UAE to acquire strategically sensitive technology even after western sanctions targeted its military procurement apparatus.

Embarrassing to say the least. Hosting a company supplying communications equipment to Iran for missiles later launched at

the UAE and U.S. military bases around the Middle East, killed 13 U.S. service personnel and left hundreds injured.

A relationship the UAE has reconsidered after being repeatedly attacked by Iranian missiles and drones in March through May 2026 – even during the ceasefire. On May 4, 2026, the UAE confirmed it was targeted by 12 ballistic missiles, three cruise missiles and four drones launched by Iran.

The UAE's Foreign Ministry said: "These attacks constitute a dangerous escalation and unacceptable violation, posing direct threats to the UAE's security, territorial stability and civilian safety."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei responded by accusing the UAE of backing and cooperating with the "aggressors" against Iran, saying Tehran hopes "all regional countries have learned the necessary lessons from the developments that occurred during these 50 days."

With the unfolding rift between former close allies —Saudi Arabia and the UAE fighting for regional leadership in Yemen, Sudan and Somalia, where the UAE was supporting Iran in its war with Riyadh. That was before February 28, 2026, when the U.S. and Israel, attacked Tehran, killing the Iranian political and military leadership – and Iran responding by attacking both UAE and Saudi Arabia refineries, infrastructure, financial centre, and hotels.

The regional competition, and resulting schism between the two former Gulf allies, widened further when the UAE exited from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries on April 28, 2026.

The Iran War has already driven a deeper wedge between Iran and its Arab Gulf neighbours. The UAE's exit from the cartel, joining Qatar, Angola and Ecuador, represents further disintegration. The UAE has opted to pump all it can now rather than leave reserves to become stranded assets. Some other OPEC members may yet decide to do the same, especially Venezuela.

I agree with Asad Ullah, a post-doctoral researcher in international politics at Shandong University specializing in Middle East conflict, diplomacy and geopolitical strategy, who in a May 11, 2026, opinion in the *South China Morning Post*, titled*: UAE's Opec exit spells the beginning of the end of Gulf unity*, in which he says security architecture, not quota arithmetic, is what holds the cartel together.

"After Iran struck UAE infrastructure Abu Dhabi leaned on the U.S.-Israel axis built on the Abraham Accords," said Ullah. "That realignment produced a moment without precedent. Israel deployed an Iron Dome system to defend Emirati airspace, a first for a foreign nation that is not the United States. It rendered obsolete the assumption that Gulf producers share a threat environment that makes collective discipline rational. They no longer do."

OPEC has always been a political institution. The standard mantra of OPEC is that it is an oil production cartel coordinating output to control revenue.

It's founding logic was sovereign solidarity, the assertion by post-colonial states that they would collectively manage a resource the West had treated as their own. That required a shared threat environment, a sense that members needed each other. – and they did for nearly 60 years.

The Abraham Accords ended the unity. The Iran war accelerated the process. It is a visible fracture running through OPEC's political foundation. The fiscal asymmetry deepens the rupture and makes it permanent. The UAE's fiscal break-even oil price sits below $50 per barrel. Saudi Arabia's exceeds $100. These are not negotiating positions. They are incompatible survival strategies.

Before its exit from OPEC, Abu Dhabi was holding back oil production by as much as 1.4 million barrels per day to honour quotas, absorbing compounding economic costs to maintain an institution whose political foundations were collapsing. Saudi Arabia must defend its prices to survive.

The UAE's move may have been abrupt, but it was also carefully timed. The country has for many years made clear that it wanted to produce more oil than its OPEC quota would allow.

The UAE's departure raises doubts over the long-term future of the oil cartel and reflects a fracture in the Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC), especially with Saudi Arabia, leaving the kingdom weaker as it tries to hold together an unravelling OPEC whose remaining members, including Iran, still sit on almost 75 percent of global proven crude reserves. Any weakening of OPEC is a win for America.

The White House declared that President Trump finally “broke OPEC” after the UAE announced its withdrawal from the cartel.

A new cold war turning hot at the start of 2026, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE building opposing nuclear-backed alliances and dragging the U.S., China, and Russia into the fray, as they take time out to deal with Iran, with European and Australian support.

Jeddah reached out to Ukraine, a nation with experience fending off Russian drones modelled on Iranian ones. The UAE got help from Israel, France and Australia. Italy is providing anti-drone and anti-aircraft systems to several Gulf armed forces.

In a meeting in Beijing on April 14, 2026, with Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for a more robust, resilient and dynamic strategic partnership with the UAE.

Jodie Wen, a researcher at Tsinghua University’s Centre for International Security and Strategy, described the visit as “highly significant.” She said the Iran War had further eroded Gulf states’

confidence in U.S.-centred security guarantees and driven them to expand cooperation with China.

“As a major regional power, the UAE’s decision to send its future leader to China at this moment is not accidental. It signals a clear intent: in the face of war, the UAE seeks more reliable security and economic partners,” Wen said.

China is the UAE’s biggest trading partner and one of the main customers for its oil.

The Iran War has brought together all the countries necessary to launch the *Abraham Peace Force* I discuss in chapter 12.

Saudi Arabia should focus on keeping the cohesion of the GCC together, join forces with Israel in the *Abraham Peace Force* -- to fight and force regime change in Iran -- instead of trying to save OPEC and giving Iran any influence – or more influence with a Helsinki Process 1975 like non-aggression pact, it floated with Tehran.

The kingdom should follow the UAE’s vision for the region. The UAE has been the most hawkish Gulf state towards Iran during the war and has justifiably criticized Arab institutions for not being more robust in their response to Iranian aggression.

MBS-U.S.-China Alliances

President Trump, in the meantime, has allied the U.S. with Saudi Arabia as he and MBS have found common ground. As a result,

Saudi Arabia is going to join a group of 20 major non-NATO allies of the U.S. The announcement was made during MBS's visit to Washington, where he met with President Trump on November 18, 2025.

In response to China's efforts to lure Saudi defence buyers, the U.S. also agreed to sell Saudi Arabia F-35 stealth jet fighters.

In return, MBS pledged to invest in the U.S. nearly $1 trillion, an amount analysts believe he will struggle to meet. A "political display" rather than a binding commitment.

"With international oil prices remaining depressed and the country's domestic spending expanding too aggressively, Saudi Arabia is struggling to balance its revenues and expenditures," said Niu Xinchun, director of the Institute of Middle East Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, before war broke out in the Middle East on February 28, 2026.

MBS is believed to have urged Trump to join Israel in attacking Iran. Although this move led to higher oil prices, it didn't help the kingdom, because its pipelines and terminals had been bombed by Iran, and the Strait of Hormuz was closed for tankers carrying Saudi oil. As a result, cash flow problem aggravated.

The kingdom was able to mitigate its losses by activating its Red Sea "Plan B" to divert crude oil via the port of Yanbu, allowing tankers – including Chinese very large crude carriers (VLCCs) – to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

Saudi Aramco, the world's leading oil producer announced in early March 2026, that it was diverting a larger share of crude flows to the Red Sea through its seven million barrel-per-day East West Pipeline to bypass Persian Gulf export terminals.

"The Yanbu route is open to all international buyers, but China bound cargoes are expected to take a significant share, given that China is a major customer of Saudi Aramco," Xu Muyu, a senior crude oil analyst at Kpler, said.

The alternate route lacks the capacity to fully offset the disruption of oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, Xu cautioned. Kpler estimated Yanbu could sustainably load about 4.5 million barrels per day of crude. This was below the 6.2 million barrels per day average for total Saudi exports in 2025, and far short of the roughly 14.5 million barrels per day of non-Iranian crude that moved through the strait before the conflict, Xu said.

In 2025, China imported more than 584 million barrels of crude oil from Saudi Arabia.

While Yanbu port offers a partial workaround to supply disruptions, the Red Sea lifeline is not without its risks. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi proxy rebel group lurk in the caves and sand dunes overlooking the Red Sea, with a track record of attacking vessels in retaliation for Israel's war in Gaza.

Trump and MBS talked regularly during Operation Epic Fury. The

advice Trump was getting from the prince was to keep hitting the Iranians hard – essentially repeating the advice that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who died in 2005, repeatedly gave to Washington: “Cut off the head of the snake.”

Yet, despite being an ally of the U.S., MBS refused to allow U.S. access to Saudi air space and military bases for striking Iran. The reason for this refusal was the China-brokered 2023 peace agreement, by which Iran and Saudi Arabia had agreed to bury the hatchet. In the years that followed, Beijing helped Riyadh and Tehran establish lines of communication and build trust, culminating in the third meeting of the China-Iran-Saudi Arabia Trilateral Joint Committee, held in Tehran in late 2025.

Had Saudi Arabia and Iran did not settle their differences through that China-brokered détente, Riyadh might have thrown its weight behind Operation Epic Fury, as it did after Iran bombed Saudi refineries. Hopefully, it will continue to do so.

MBS’s phone call to Xi Jinping on April 20, 2026, further amplified the kingdom’s shifting and recalibrated self-reliant strategic balance. He said Riyadh was ready to strengthen communication and coordination with China to “prevent the resurgence of hostilities, ensure the safety and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, and work together to find solutions for long-term regional stability and security.”

There is no better way to do that than Saudi Arabia planting the cornerstone of the Palestinian state in the Northwest corner of

the kingdom that borders Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel.

During the phone conversation, Xi said for the first time that the Strait of Hormuz should remain open, adding that it aligned with the "common interest of countries" in the region and the international community according to *Xinhua*.

Saudi state news agency SPA said on April 9 that attacks on the kingdom's energy facilities had reduced its oil output capacity by about 600,000 barrels per day. For MBS, the prolonged conflict amplifies regional instability and underscores its vulnerability, with Iran posing a security threat, and Israel's growing military assertiveness seen as a long-term destabilizing factor considering its military support and defence of the UAE.

Gu Dingguo, deputy director of the Shanghai Counterterrorism Research Centre, said the U.S.-Iran war has shattered America's security guarantees, creating an opening for China and the Gulf nations to strengthen ties.

"Can China become a security partner for Saudi Arabia? The answer is yes," Gu said.

For China, the Iran War is a chance to expand its diplomatic footprint. For the U.S., it is a reminder that its traditional dominance in the Middle East can no longer be taken for granted. The symbolism of the Saudi leader's phone call to Xi highlights a shifting balance of power. As the region grapples with instability, China's rising profile will be watched closely – not

only in Riyadh and Tehran, but Washington, Jerusalem, Ankara, and across the world.

War-Weariness has settled across the Middle East. Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are all tired of war. All except Netanyahu and his religious coalition agree that there can be no peace and security in the Middle East without a Palestinian State. Saudi Arabia continues to insist that there must be a road map to Palestinian statehood for it to recognize Israel. It's time for a paradigm shift in thinking about a two-state solution.

My proposed two-state solution, which is outlined in chapter 13, offers just such a map. By planting and rooting the new Palestinian state on the soil that Saudi Arabia and other Arab states as well as Israel would contribute should give MBS a reason to review and amend the timeline of Vision 2030, his ambitious plan to turn Saudi Arabia into the world's fifteenth-largest economy by 2050, as David Rundell recommends in his highly acclaimed book *Vision or Mirage; Saudi Arabia at The Crossroads*.

"Mohammed bin Salman's plan should probably have been called 2050. That would have represented a more realistic, if a less motivating, time frame for transforming the Saudi economy from one based almost entirely on oil-funded transfer payments into one partially on productive enterprise," says Rundell. "Even by 2050, the existing plan will not turn Saudi Arabia into South Korea. Then again, it does not need to. Like Canada and

Australia, Saudi Arabia will rely heavily on natural resource exports for many years to come, but its economy can become more diversified…. Finally, like everything else in Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 will be affected by oil prices. With $100-a-barrel, the entire plan will look inspired; at $40 a barrel parts of it will appear ill-conceived and at $20 a barrel it will need to be rewritten," he adds.

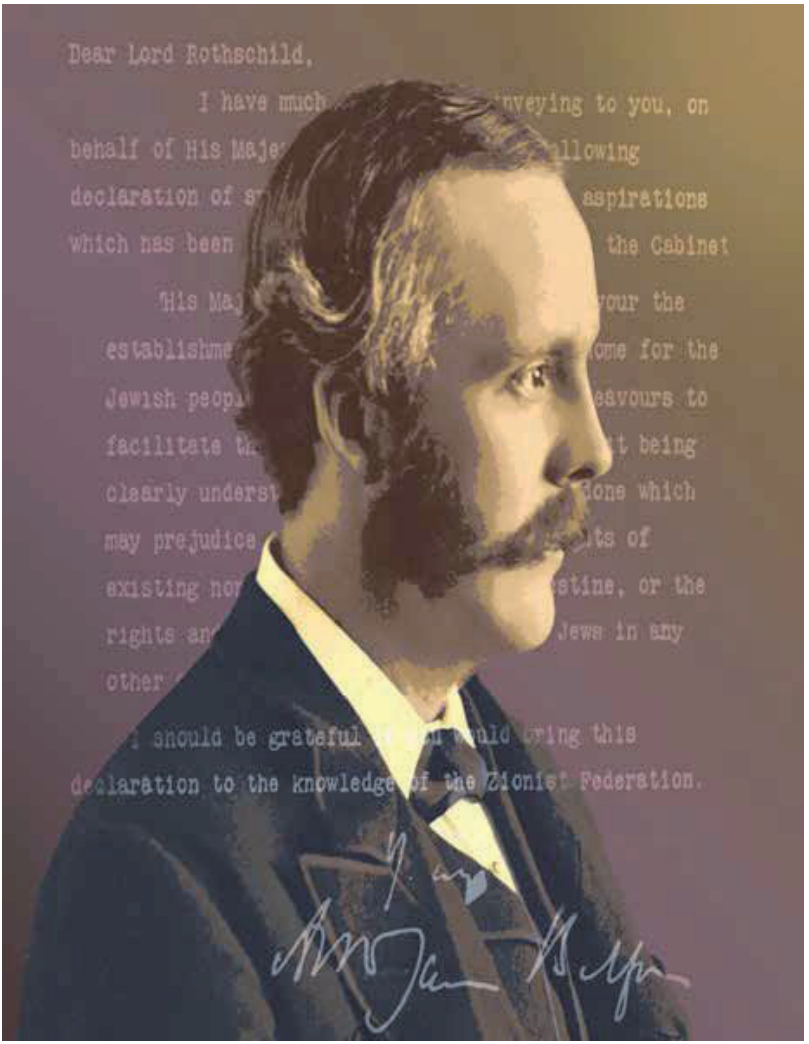
As this book was going to print in June 2026, although the Strait of Hormuz remained closed, and crude oil was selling at more than $120 a barrel, and could not be shipped through the Strait – the kingdom shipped it through its east-west pipeline to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, raising Aramco's adjusted earnings to $33 billion, 26 percent higher for the first quarter of 2026, than the same period in 2025. So, what now for MBS?

He should not only modify vision 2030 to 2050, but have it contribute the cornerstone land needed to establish a Palestinian state, with the estimated $71.4 billion for the reconstruction of Gaza, a figure put forward by a joint report prepared by the European Union, United Nations, and World Bank, that will be wasted and destroyed in Gaza in a future Hamas led war.

Any amount of money allocated to rebuild Gaza is better spent if reallocated on the building of the Palestinian state I propose.

The kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, worth roughly one trillion dollars in 2026, should be a cornerstone investor and banker of the new Palestinian state. That will enable it to dramatically

increase its financial returns and refashion MBS as the Creator-Founder of Palestine, regional peacemaker, and global diplomat.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Chapter Six

The Zionist Journey to The Balfour Declaration

Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets

– Napoleon –

Blood Libel Roots

When in 1840 the Jews of Damascus were charged with the blood libel, killing a child and using its blood in an act of ritual, Yehuda hai Alkalai, a pre-eminent religious Zionist, became convinced that the Jewish people could be secure only in their own land.

Alkalai was born in Sarajevo to Rabbi Sholomo Alkalai, the spiritual leader of the local Jewish community. During his youth, Alkalai lived in Palestine, where he was influenced by kabbalistic thought. In 1825 he served as a rabbi in Semlin in Serbia; in 1834, he published a booklet titled *Shema Yisrael* in which he advocated for the establishment of Jewish colonies in Palestine, a view at variance with the traditional Jewish belief that the Messiah would come through an act of divine deliverance. He believed in the creation of a homeland in anticipation of the advent of the Messiah.

There were many prominent religious Zionists like Alkalai, most notably Zwi Hirsch Kalischer, Abraham Isaac Kook, and Asher Zvi Ginsberg, later known as Ahad Ha-Am, who advocated that the

return to Zion was imperative for an authentic Jewish existence.
In contrast to religious Zionists, secular Zionists were preoccupied with anti-Semitism rather than religious and spiritual values. Modern secular Zionism begins with the writing of Moses Hess. Born in Germany, he lived and worked in Paris as the Paris correspondent of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, edited by Karl Marx. He argued that anti-Jewish sentiment is unavoidable. Progressive Jews think they can escape from Judeophobia by recoiling from any Jewish national expression, yet the hatred of Jews is inescapable.

Zionism

While Lawrence, Arabs, British, French, and Russians were gaming Arabia, European Jews, after centuries of antisemitism, were uniting around the dream of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

More than any other figure, modern secular Zionism has become identified with Theodore Herzl, born on May 2, 1860, in Budapest, Hungary. The idea gained momentum in 1886 with the publication of Herzl's book *The Jewish State*. Herzl, a Viennese journalist, encouraged the spread of a new Jewish nationalist movement know as Zionism, with the aim of creating "for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law."

Herzl's analysis of modern Jewish existence was not original. Many of his ideas were preceded in the writings of Moses Hess and Leon Pinsker. What was novel about Hertzl's espousal of Zionism was his success in stimulating interest in the debate about a

Jewish state in the highest diplomatic and political circles. This was due both to the force of his personality and to the passionate expression of his proposals.

Zionism began to take shape in 1881, when Russian revolutionaries assassinated Tsar Alexander II. His son, Alexander III, blamed the Jews. He immediately re-imposed the anti-Semitic policies his father had relaxed, most notably, the law confining Jews to settlements of 10,000 inhabitants or more. The Tsar's adviser, his former tutor, Constantin Pobiedonostsev, now chief procurator of the Holy Synod, vowed that one-third of Russian Jews would convert to the Orthodox Church, one-third would emigrate, and one-third would starve to death.

The new anti-Semitic Tsarist policies were the trigger for the great late-19th century Jewish exodus from Russia.

Russian, Russian Polish, and Russian Ukrainian Jews headed mainly to America and Western Europe. The third destination was various regions in the Ottoman Empire, of which Palestine was the number one choice. This is the route my mother's family took when they fled Ukraine and made their way across the Ottoman Empire to Palestine.

Since 1517, Palestine had been governed despotically by the sultans of the Ottoman Empire, which had been named for a Turkish Muslim warrior, Osman, whose followers were known as *Osmanliler* or Ottomans.

The Ottoman Empire held ambivalent feelings about Jews. Such ambivalence offended and angered many Arabs. On the one hand, the Turks did not want Jews establishing a Jewish homeland. They already had their hands full with other ethnic groups under their rule, especially Arabs wanting the same, which gave them enough political headaches.

Both Sultan Abdul Hamid II, and the revolutionary Young Turks of the Committee of Union and Progress, who deposed him in 1908-09, were resolutely anti-Zionist.

However, the sultan and the Young Turks welcomed Jewish immigrants on an individual basis, deeming them potentially useful and industrious citizens. They tried to steer them to the Anatolian region of the empire, away from Palestine. Yet it was Palestine that beckoned the Zionists, which they found easy to enter, sometimes bribing Turkish officials who had been instructed by Constantinople to exclude them, and at other times simply relying on the inefficiency of imperial officials who could not be bothered to act against them after they purchased land.

Thus, seven thousand reached Palestine in 1882, the largest number since the Romans had destroyed the Second Temple. They sought a peaceful life – not merely a place to die in peace. The most energetic and idealistic among them were determined to pursue the trade that was barred to them in Russia, namely agriculture. Jewish refugees from Romania, whose government took delight in making blood-curling pronouncements and issuing policies as harsh as those of the Russians, shared their mindset.

Together, Russians and Romanians comprised the largest part of the *First Aliyah* – the ascent to the promised land. In little more than 20 years, some 30,000 Jewish immigrants made a permanent pilgrimage to their ancient homeland.

They were not farmers. Yet, in many of them "burned fiercely the will to show the world that Jews could till the land, could root themselves in their own soil and live upon it. They would demonstrate that they were not natural ghetto-dwellers," as Jonathan Schneer explains in his book *The Balfour Declaration*.

Jewish philanthropists supported their goals. Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris, members of the London branch of his family, and other wealthy co-religionists provided the necessary cushion when crops did not grow or sell. They also funded equipment, tools, seeds, teachers, schools, doctors, and administrators. Most importantly, they funded the purchase of the land.

In 1869, even Mark Twain, the American innocent abroad, whose dyspeptic view of Palestine is legendary, could refer without irony to groves of lemon trees, "cool, shady, hung with fruit … and to breezy glades of thorn and oak."

At the time, roughly 700,000 people lived there, many were descendants of Canaanites, Philistines, Arabs, and Hebrews. There were also Druze, and other Christian and Jewish descendants of Europeans.

By 1914, Jews had purchased 130,000 acres, of which 90,000

were under cultivation across 26 distinct settlements throughout Palestine.

The first Zionist congress was held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1887.

The *Second Aliyah* began in 1904. It brought 33,000 settlers, many of whom preferred to live in towns. Some of them, inspired by beliefs in socialism, worker's rights, and cooperatives, established the *kibbutz* and *moshav* settlements. Their leader, David Ben-Gurion, would later become Israel's first prime minister.

During the *Second Aliyah,* the Jewish population of Haifa tripled, while in Jaffa it doubled, and next to Jaffa, the Jews founded a new city – Tel Aviv.

Among the prominent towns of Palestine, Jerusalem was the largest and most significant, housing sites sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians. In 1911, its 60,000 inhabitants included 7,000 Muslims, 9,000 Christians, and 40,000 Jews.

On the eve of World War I, when the *Second Aliyah* came to an end, about 85,000 Jews lived in Palestine, with a significant portion identifying as Zionists; roughly 12,000 lived in agricultural settlements.

Frictions emerged between newly arrived Jewish immigrants and local Palestinians, who regarded them as interlopers, newcomers and strangers. The primary source of tension stemmed from the

Jewish purchase of land. Funded by their patrons and Zionist organizations, Jews primarily acquired large tracts from absentee owners, seldom purchasing small farms from occupier-owners.

The fellahin, local farm workers, who had laboured on these large estates, and perhaps lived there, were invariably displaced, as the Jews were determined to be self-sufficient. Even if a fellah remained nearby and continued to work in adjoining fields, resentment toward the Zionists was inevitable.

To make matters worse, and compound the conflicts, the Jewish settlers did not recognize the fellah's traditional right to graze his flock on any field just harvested. "There was scarcely a Jewish colony which did not come into conflict at some time with its Arab neighbours," writes one authority quoted by Schneer in *The Balfour Declaration*, "and more often than not a land dispute of one form or another lay behind the graver collisions."

Other sources of friction also existed, with religion being the most prominent. The Prophet Muhammad asserted that Jews had broken their covenant with God, distorted their scriptures, and consequently were destined for severe chastisement on the day of reckoning. In a land where people lived according to the *Koran*, such beliefs made conflict inevitable. Nevertheless, Islamic law deemed Jews to be *ahl al-kitab*, possessors of a divine book allowing them to reside, albeit as second-class citizens, and to practice their faith freely.

Does this sound familiar? Has anything really changed today, over

a century later? Certainly not. This is the political reality that must be confronted head-on if there is to be a two-state solution.

Then, like today, anti-Semitism-Zionism, co-existed in pre-1914 Palestine – and worldwide.

Nevertheless, these Zionist pioneers were determined to build an independent Jewish homeland – and did – and will fight to the death to keep it.

Before World War I, such a prospect appeared unlikely. However, with the outbreak of the war, the head of the World Zionist Organization was Chaim Weizmann, a chemistry professor who discovered a way to produce acetone from scratch. After the war started, there was a shortage of acetone, a key ingredient in the production of cordite, the smokeless explosive used in ammunition.

Weizmann was awarded the Order of Merit for his invention by the British prime minister Lloyd George. After receiving the award, Weizmann broached the subject of a Jewish settlement in Palestine with the prime minister. Lloyd George knew how vital it was to keep Weizmann on side. He also believed that supporting Zionism could serve additional purposes, such as appealing to the powerful and wealthy Jewish lobby in America, which had recently entered the war. Most importantly, it could help disguise his true ambition to turn Palestine into a British possession after the war, while simultaneously deflecting criticism towards British

imperialism. The Prime Minister, like many other officials believed that the British had fought to hard for Palestine to simply relinquish it to France and Russia – or to the Jews.

The Declaration

On December 2, 1917, the 2,700-seat London Opera House was filled to capacity, with people crowding outside on a cold, rainy, and windy day under their umbrellas.

Inside, about a dozen men, all key architects of the Declaration, gathered near the stage. They included former Liberal cabinet minister Herbert Samuel, who hailed from the "Cousinhood" of wealthy assimilated Jewish Britons but nurtured deep Zionist beliefs. After World War I, he served for five years as Britain's first high commissioner in Palestine. Also present were the assistant foreign secretary, Robert Cecil, the son of Prime Minister Lord Salisbury and cousin of Arthur Balfour, who was himself a Conservative member of Parliament; the assistant secretary to the War Cabinet, Sir Mark Sykes, co-author of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the unofficial head of the British Jewish community, Lord Walter Rothschild, to whom Balfour addressed the famous letter. The two most important leaders of wartime British Zionism, Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow, who worked closely with Sykes, and travelled to France and Italy during the spring of 1917, and gained the support of those governments for Zionist objectives.

"We are met on the most momentous occasion in the history of Judaism for the last eighteen hundred years," said Lord

Rothschild the first speaker. “We are here to return thanks to His Majesty’s government for a declaration which marked an epoch … For the first time since the dispersion, the Jewish people have received their proper status by the declaration of one of the great Powers.”He referred to the Balfour Declaration, which the War Cabinet had approved just one month earlier and published on November 9, 1917.

On November 11, 1917, *The Times* published a letter from Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild. The 68-word letter, now known as the Balfour Declaration, read as follows:

> *“His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish com-munities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”*

The letter unmistakably advocated for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Balfour then pledged that the government “will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of the object.” The fact that the matter was never even discussed with the Arab community or had their approval ultimately became inconsequential.

Once again, the lands the Arabs were fighting for were being

carved up and allocated without their consent.

David Hogarth, Lawrence's former professor, who reassured Sharif Hussein of Britain's commitment to helping the Arabs in their quest for independence, also addressed the Balfour Declaration. He claimed that while Britain did support a Jewish settlement in Palestine, it was contingent upon Arab consent.

Hussein saw this as an opportunity. If the Sykes-Picot Agreement had made provision for France to rule Syria, then the Balfour Declaration could potentially serve as a counterbalance. By agreeing to accommodate the dream of Zionists, Hussein hoped to gain favour with both the British and Americans thereby enhancing the prospects of the Arabs ruling Syria. Given the context, he believed that giving up a small piece of Palestine was a price worth paying. Hussein was also aware that it would be impossible for the Arabs to rejoin the Ottomans. There was no choice but to forge ahead with the British and pray they would uphold their promises. As a result, he told Hogarth that "he welcomed Jews to all Arab lands."

England The Zionist Fulcrum

Prewar indifference toward Jewish nationalism was remarkably prevalent on a global scale, encompassing the British public, including a vast majority of British Jews. Of the 300,000 Jews living in Britain in 1913, only 8,000 belonged to a Zionist organization. Among the 150,000 Jews living in London, fewer than 4,000 identified as Zionists. The great majority of British Jews were recent immigrants or were children of immigrants.

Refugees from the pogroms of Russia and eastern and southern Europe were intent on earning a living. Few had time for the Zionists who spoke of a promised land thousands of miles away in Palestine.

Additionally, Jews whose families had lived in Britain for more than a generation or two and prospered were even less likely than the newcomers to identify with the Zionists. Many had become extraordinarily rich. In London the families occupying this apex were referred to as the "Cousinhood." This informally designated body consisted of a few extended families, often linked by marriage, the Rothschilds, Montefiores, Mocattas, Cohens, Goldsmids, Samuels, and Montagus, stand out as the most prominent. Most of these families were active in the world of finance and philanthropy, while a few had ventured into politics, serving in Parliament on both sides of the House. Two literal cousins belonging to the Cousinhood, Herbert Samuel and Edwin Montagu, served in Prime Minister Asquith's Liberal government.

British anti-Semitism was relatively mild. Therefore, most of the Cousinhood viewed with patriotic affection the country that since 1858 had afforded them equal civil and political rights. They considered themselves Jewish Britons, rather than British Jews, and they abhorred Zionists, who insisted that Jews constituted a separate people or nation, unassimilable by Britain or any other country – except Palestine.

Another reality at the time, although anti-Semitism was mild, it

still prevailed in the halls of power at Westminster and 10 Downing Street. Nur Masalha discusses at length Protestant Christian Zionism in his book *Palestine A Four Thousand Year History* and its support of Zionism, but also for a different political reason.

The religio-political roots of this British pro-Zionist commitment go all the way back to the Protestant Christian Zionist lobby – today's Evangelicals -- which was established in London in 1830s by Lord Shaftesbury.

Masalha argues that although Balfour's legacy became inseparable from the pro-Zionist Declaration he issued, the reasons for him issuing it are complex because "Balfour's brand of Christian Zionism was driven by a great deal of Judeophobia, hyped perceptions of 'Zionist Jewish power' and fears of mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe to Britain. As Prime Minister, Balfour had passed the 1905 Aliens Act, the main object of which was to restrict the entry into Britain of Jews from Eastern Europe."

Brian Klug, a senior research fellow in philosophy at Oxford University, put it rather cynically: "Keeping Jews out of Britain and packing them off to Palestine were just two sides of the same antisemitic coin."

Protestant Zionists and British imperialists believed that a "Jewish Palestine" would be convenient for a British protectorate there along the main route to India.

British Zionists agreed with Herzl that the great fulcrum upon which Zionists could shift world opinion was in England. For a variety of political reasons.

It became evident that a latent sympathy for Zionism underpinned this prewar indifference with the outbreak of World War I. The war changed everything, including the attitude of the British government toward both the Zionist dreamers and the Ottoman Empire. Once Zionism entered the realm of practical politics, British Jews rallied to the Zionist cause.

The English Zionist Federation (EZF), founded in 1899, was the most important of the three Zionist associations in Britain. It served as the local branch of the World Zionist Organization founded by Theodore Herzl in 1897.

Aside from its seeming utopianism, the EZF struggled to thrive before the war because its leadership engaged in unedifying infighting. A genuine ideological difference existed as well, mirroring a split in the international movement. Some Zionists, like Herzl, believed their proper role should be political and diplomatic, focusing on persuading the major powers to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Therefore, the Turkish sultan and his government must be the first target of their politicking, since Palestine was in the Ottoman Empire.

Herzl, was unable to find the right lever to sway the Turks and developed an alternative strategy in response to the dire plight of Jews in Russia and Romania. Herzl himself broached the

alternative at the sixth Zionist Congress in 1903 in Basel, Switzerland, after meeting with British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain and British Foreign Secretary Lord Lansdowne. Lansdowne had offered to allow unrestricted Jewish immigration to Uganda. East Africa was not Palestine, Herzl acknowledged to the Congress, but he argued it could be a safe refuge for any Jew wishing to escape Russia. Although most Zionist delegates supported Herzl's perspective, the opposition was fierce. The very Russian Jews most threatened by pogroms led the charge against it and marched out of the hall. In his willingness to abandon Palestine, even if only temporarily, they charged, Herzl had proved himself a traitor to Zionism.

A temporary compromise was reached: an exploratory group would report back the following year on Uganda's suitability for colonization. But Herzl died that year, some claim it was from a broken heart, and the East African scheme, though revisited at the next Zionist Congress in 1905, effectively died with him.

In the years leading up to World War I, political Zionists divided between those for whom Palestine was the sine qua non and the territorials, who believed that a way station in Uganda or somewhere else warranted consideration. In the wake of the 1905 congress when Uganda was taken off the table, some of the territorials led by the British author Israel Zangwill, broke away from the EZF to establish their own Jewish Territorial Association (ITO).

Meanwhile, within the EZF, a faction of practical Zionists

emerged to constitute a powerful opposition to the political Zionists. This group resembled, in one respect, Zangwill's territorials; they did not believe that a great power would support the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine any time soon. However, unlike the territorials, they failed to find Uganda, or any other temporary substitute to the Promised Land even slightly beguiling. Therefore, they devised an alternative strategy to both territorial and political Zionism. They emphasized building up Jewish society in Palestine and strengthening Jewish culture in the Diaspora. They worked to settle Jewish immigrants in the agricultural settlements and Palestinian towns; to improve conditions for them; and to establish schools, hospitals and strove to turn Hebrew into a living language. They founded the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, believing that such practical and cultural achievements were a prerequisite for a future Jewish homeland.

Personality clashes and ideological rifts between political and practical Zionism eventually led the practicals to partially secede from the EZF. While retaining their membership in the World Zionist Federation (WZF), they managed to take over a third Jewish organization in Britain with Zionist inclinations, a debating society known as the Ancient Order of Maccabeans, and persuaded the WZF that Zionist affairs in Britain should be managed by a Joint Zionist Council composed of EZF members and Maccabeans. Meanwhile, the ITO remained an outlier and was unrepresented in the WZF.

The practicals had never completely abandoned politics and

diplomacy; rather they had chosen to deemphasize them in favour of practical and cultural work. A faction among the culturals argued for a synthesis of practical, cultural, and political-diplomatic Zionism. At the 1911 WZF congress they carried the day.

The leader and spokesman of the synthetic Zionists at the 1911 congress was Chaim Weizmann, a delegate from Britain belonging to the WZF's actions committee. He was also a leader of the so-called Democratic Fraction of Zionists, which, while not explicitly endorsing strategy and tactics, did so implicitly by objecting to Herzl's grand airs and to the grandees surrounding him. Weizmann vehemently opposed Herzl's Uganda proposal.

This was the British Zionist arrangement on the eve of World War I.

Chaim Weizmann

Chaim Weizmann, more than any other individual, orchestrated the wartime campaign for British support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He attended every Zionist congress except the first.

Born in Motol, near Pinsk, Russia, in 1874, into a relatively prosperous timber transporting family, he attended a local Jewish elementary school, then went to high school in Pinsk. There, one of his teachers instilled in him a lasting passion for chemistry, a subject he decided to pursue at university in Germany. He went for graduate studies at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, where he earned the doctorate summa

cum laude in 1899. In 1904, he took up a chemistry position at the University of Manchester and became a naturalized British citizen by 1910.

Weizmann was described as “pre-eminently what the Jewish people call *folks mench*,” wrote one who knew him, “a man of the people, of the masses, not of the elite, a leader in whose heart beat the common heart of man.”

In England, Weizmann found himself ostracized by the London politicals, because of his opposition to Hertzl’s Uganda plan. So, he established an alternative school of Zionism in Manchester, which became an important source of financial and intellectual support for British Zionism.

Harry Sacher, Israel Sieff, and Simon Marks constituted the pillars of Weizmann’s Manchester base. Sacher, the son of Polish Jews, was born in London in 1881. His work at *The Manchester Guardian* fostered a crucial friendship between Weizmann and the *Guardian*’s editor C.P. Scott, , which helped Weizmann’s political ascent. Sacher, seven years younger than Weizmann, served as his political collaborator and adviser on policy and strategy.

Simon Marks and Israel Sieff played lesser roles in Zionist political deliberations, but they excelled as facilitators, fundraisers and organizers. The two had grown up on the same street in Manchester, attended the same primary and high school in the same class, and gone into business together, founding what would

become the Marks & Spenser department store.

Asher Ginzberg, who relocated from Russia to London in 1907 as representative of the Wissotsky Tea Company, was another close Zionist adviser to Weizmann. He emerged as a leading advocate for cultural Zionism and thought most seriously about the Arab population in Palestine. He criticized Zionist attitudes towards them. “We are used to thinking of the Arabs as primitive men of the desert, as a donkey-like nation that neither sees nor understands what is going around it. But that is a great error.” As early as 1891, he warned against the “repressive cruelty” the Zionists applied in their dealings with Arabs. Inherently an advocate of the underprivileged Ginsberg was part of the Democratic Fraction of the WZF, in which Weizmann played a pivotal role.

Ginsberg argued there could be no shortcut to Zion. As a observant Jew, he always insisted on the spiritual value of a Hebrew renaissance and emphasized Judaism’s rational and ethical aspects. Judaism was to him an ethos and a way of life, that should permeate the Jewish people and become inseparable from their daily existence. Only in this way, he wrote, could lovers of Zion attain their goal. An accomplished journalist, essayist, and polemicist, he published exclusively in Hebrew and adopted the pen name Ahad Ha’am – “one of the people.”

In 1911, Weizmann ran for and won one of the two WZF vice president positions. He dedicated the pre-war years to hard work on the practical and cultural fronts, especially in the campaign to

establish a Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

When the war broke out in 1914, Weizmann approached Ahad Ha'am to discuss, the appropriate questions for Zionists.

David Ben-Gurion

David Ben-Gurion led the Zionist movement in Palestine from the mid-1920s until well into the 1960s. Born David Gruen in 1886 in Plonsk, Poland, then part of Czarist Russia, he came to Palestine in 1906. An ardent Zionist, he was invariably dressed in a khaki uniform. When the collective dispositions started in 1948, he added a pistol to his military gear, and a *kaffiyya* around his neck, imitating the way his elite military units were dressed.

Although in his 60s and suffering from serious backaches, he joined his military unit and became the Zionist movement's highly energetic and hard-working leader.

The 22nd Zionist Congress in 1946 entrusted Ben-Gurion with the defence portfolio. It gave him total control over all security issues of the Jewish community in Palestine.

He had risen to power as a union leader but was soon too busy engineering the Jewish state in the making. How to achieve such a purely Jewish state was discussed at length in 1937, and a modest portion of the land, much smaller than discussed, was proposed by the British Royal Peel commission, first in 1937, and then again in 1942, that was accepted by Ben-Gurion as a good start, but he aspired to Jewish sovereignty over as much of Palestine as

possible.

Ben-Gurion gathered the leaders of the Zionist movement in the Royal Monsue hotel, in Paris, in the final days of 1946, to help him define a plan to take over all of Palestine. He then swayed the Zionists into accepting both his supreme authority and the fundamental notion that future statehood meant absolute Jewish domination. How to achieve such a purely Jewish state when only roughly six percent of land was owned, was also a topic of discussion around 1937.

Two words emerged: Force and Opportunity. The Jewish state could only be won by force but had to wait for the opportune moment to deal “militarily” with the demographic reality on the ground: the presence of a non-Jewish majority native population.

Nationalist Ideology

Until the occupation of Palestine by Britain in 1918, Zionism was a nationalist ideology of a Jewish homeland. At the time, Zionists made up no more than five percent of the country’s overall population, living in colonies, they did not affect, nor were they particularly noticed by the local population, who were used to foreigners coming and going over the centuries.

The early Zionist settlers directed most of their energy and resources towards buying up land and creating social and communal networks that could sustain their growing and economically vulnerable groupings.

The idea of taking over Palestine as a whole and creating a nation-state in the country, or in part of it, developed later in close association with Britain's ideas of how best to solve the conflict Britain itself had created.

When British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour gave the Zionist movement his promise in 1917, in the Declaration bearing his name, a national home for the Jews in Palestine, he opened the door to the endless conflicts that persist to the present, October 7, and the Gaza War that followed being the latest examples.

The Balfour Declaration promised to protect the aspirations of the non-Jewish population – a strange reference indeed to the vast native majority – but the declaration clashed with both the aspirations and natural rights to an independent Palestinian nation-state.

Jewish Access to British Foreign Office

In August 1914, Zionists had only limited access to the British Foreign Office. Lucien Wolf, a Jewish anti-Zionist, did, however, enjoy good access as director of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of British Jews, the offspring of two bodies -- the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BDBJ), and the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA). The BDBJ, founded in 1760, shaped British Jewish opinion, and represented it to the British government. It comprised delegates elected by members of British synagogues but was not a religious body. It was dominated by the Cousinhood. The mission of AJA that was founded in 1871 was to protect Jews from anti-Semitism both at home and abroad. Taking political

decisions on behalf of the Jewish people, it asserted that British Jews were Britons who happened to be Jewish.

While both the BDBJ and the AJA, maintained their distinct identities, they came together in 1878 to establish the Conjoint Foreign Committee of British Jews because both groups wished to influence British foreign policy more effectively where Jewish interests were at stake.

The Conjoint Committee comprised 14 members -- six from each of the two parent bodies, plus their presidents, who would serve as president and vice president of the new committee in alternating years.

The Conjoint Committee was formed specifically to influence the Congress of Berlin, which was to meet in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War. It lobbied British officials on behalf of Balkan Jews, urging them to encourage the congress to promote religious tolerance throughout the Near East, particularly in Romania.

After the pogrom in Kishinev in 1903, the committee approached Lucien Wolf, a journalist and expert commentator on British foreign affairs who believed in Jewish assimilation and took a leading role in opposing Zionism for advice on how best to mobilize the Foreign Office to protest to Russia.

Wolf abhorred Russia's official anti-Semitism, and his unsparing and trenchant criticisms of it brought him to the attention of the

Conjoint Committee.

Wolf born in London in 1857 and learned from his father to cherish British liberal traditions, religious tolerance, and political and economic freedom, had joined the Ancient Order of Maccabeans, whose aim was in part “the promotion of the interests of the Jewish race.” He was not a cultural Zionist, but the history of the Jewish people, from which their ethnic and religious identities could not be separated moved him. Ethnic labels meant little to him, religion even less. He wrote that a friend “once said of me that my Judaism was not a religion at all but a cult of auld lang syne, he was right.”

Between 1908 and 1914, when Balkan Jews were in continuous danger, Wolf gained control over the Conjoint Committee’s relationship with the Foreign Office. He cemented relationships with various Foreign Office officials.

Even better positioned to influence Britain’s foreign policy was Herbert Samuel, a member of the Cousinhood who in 1914 belonged to the cabinet of Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith. The son of a prosperous banker, Samuel had graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, with a first-class degree. In 1889, he campaigned for his brother Stuart’s successful political campaign to represent the East End district of Whitechapel on the London County Council. Whitechapel was a filthy, impoverished, overcrowded neighbourhood, and home to many thousands of recent Jewish immigrants. The terrible conditions Samuel saw there moved him deeply. Governments exist to ameliorate

poverty, he concluded, a conviction that never left him. In 1902, he published *Liberalism: Its Principles and Proposals*, which would provide a moral and practical foundation for many of the reforms the Asquith government would carry out a few years later.

Samuel's political ascent began in 1902, when he gained entrance to Parliament. When the Liberals won the general election in 1905, he gained a minor government position, and then in 1909 he attained cabinet rank as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Five years later, he became President of the Local Government Board.

Samuel nurtured an emotional bond with the Jewish people and held a romantic attachment to the goals of Zionism. "Zionism was the one political passion of a singularly passionless career," wrote the foremost historian of his life and times.

One of Samuel's political favours for Rabbi Moses Gaster, a family friend, was assisting in obtaining naturalization papers for a Russian émigré – Chaim Weizmann.

Nahum Sokolow, born in Wyszogrod, Russian Poland in 1861, became a leading representative of the World Zionist Organization. He learned to write and speak fluently in several languages. By 1913, he was a newspaper proprietor and editor, as well as one of the best-known and most prolific Jewish journalists and litterateurs in the world. His diplomatic and political prowess equalled his talent for journalism and writing. "His handsome appearance, his air of fine breeding, his

distinguished manner, his gentle speech, his calculated expression, his cautious action, his well-cut clothes, his monocle made him the diplomatist of the Zionist movement," wrote someone who knew and worked with him.

Sokolow spent the war years in London, where he was Weizmann's chief collaborator. At the suggestion of Mark Sykes, with whom he also worked closely, he travelled to France and Italy during the spring of 1917 and secured the support of their governments for Zionist objectives.

This was a considerable achievement, given the complexities of French politics. Powerful French businessmen had investments in Palestine as well as interests in Syria, and they were reluctant to allow France to cede control to the British or to the Zionists. To make matters more challenging for Sokolow, French Catholics opposed Zionist plans for Palestine, determined that France should protect the Holy places. Even French Jews were split over Zionism. The main French Jewish organization, the Alliance Israelite, was strongly anti-Zionist. Nevertheless, he got the French government to support a Jewish homeland with British oversight.

The French also recommended that Sokolow visit Italy and Rome – as did Sykes --to gauge support for Zionism. There, he met with Italian government officials, and the Pope who indicated support for the Zionist cause and received the Pope's blessing for a Jewish homeland. His telegram to Weizmann, after meeting the Pope, expresses his excitement:

> *Have been received by Pope in special audience which lasted three-quarters of an hour. Pope attentively listened to my re-port . . . declared Jewish efforts of establishing national home in Palestine met sympathetically. He sees no obstacle whatever from the point of view of his religious interests concerning only Holy Places which he trusts will be properly safe guarded by sp-ecial arrangement . . . The whole impression of honouring me with a long audience and tenor of conversation reveal most favourable attitude.*

He was intimately involved in the discussions that produced the Balfour Declaration.

The announcement of war on August 4, 1914, struck Chaim Weizmann, Nahum Sokolow, Lucien Wolf, and Herbert Samuel like a thunderbolt. For these Jewish protagonists in the struggle for and against the Balfour Declaration, it had a profound impact upon their lives, which would now intersect in unforeseen ways.

The Road to The Balfour Declaration

The outbreak of World War I caught the world off-guard. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914; Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, and on France on August 3. Britain declared war on Germany on August 4.

Jews fought on every front, often against each other, for their respective countries of residence. Zionism, being a worldwide movement compelled the World Zionist Organization to attempt

to remain neutral, but to no avail.

British Jews faced three significant concerns: Apprehension for loved ones serving in rapidly deploying armies across Europe; fear for their coreligionists in Russia, where anti-Semitism was scaling new heights, and in Hapsburg Poland, which lay directly in the path of the tsar's advancing army; and the fate of Palestine becoming dreadful and, moreover, uncertain. Ahad Ha'am wrote to Weizmann: "Our colonies, our institutions – everything may now be swept away." Weizmann lamented.

When Türkiye entered the war in November 1914 on the side of Germany, it called into question the future of the Ottoman Empire, which directly affected the future of Palestine. Concern about the Zionist colonies in Palestine gave way to a surging anticipation. If Britain were to win the war against Türkiye, Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Middle East would become contested territory. Perhaps then, Palestine could be extricated from Türkiye.

"The moment Türkiye entered the war the position was entirely changed," said Herbert Samuel, the pre-war proto-Zionist, the self-described "first member of the Jewish community ever to sit in a British cabinet," emerged as the Zionist movement's most effective and influential champion. He balanced duties to Britain with his duties, as he now saw them, to the Jewish people. On November 9, 1914, a week after Türkiye entered the war, Samuel met with Britain's Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey to discuss Palestine. He got straight to the point. "Perhaps," he told Sir

Edward, “the opportunity might arise for the fulfilment of the ancient aspiration of the Jewish people and the restoration [in Palestine] of a Jewish state.” He outlined why Britain should support this “ancient aspiration.” Most importantly, “the geographical situation of Palestine and especially its proximity to Egypt would render its goodwill to England a matter of importance to the British Empire.” But almost equally significant in the present wartime circumstances, if Russia could be induced to back the Zionist policy, then Russian Jews would have some reason to support their government. That would benefit Russia’s ally, Britain. For that matter, Samuel contended, a pro-Zionist policy would rally Jewish opinion worldwide in favour of the Allies.

Such a state, he added, would not only benefit Britons but would also be advantageous for everyone: “It might become the center of a new culture. The Jewish brain is rather a remarkable thing and under national auspices the state might become a fountain of enlightenment and a source of a great literature and art and development of science.” Obviously, it would be good for the Jews themselves: “If they could see men of their own kin achieving great things it would have a profound influence on their outlook.” And this would benefit their Middle Eastern neighbours as well: “Raising their [the Jews] character would add to their usefulness to the peoples among whom they lived.”

Zionism, which would undermine Türkiye in the Middle East if given free reign, had finally entered the realm of practical politics in Britain.

“The idea had always had a strong sentimental attraction for him Samuel recalled Grey saying. “The historical appeal was very strong. He was quite favourable to the proposal and would be prepared to work for it if the opportunity arose.”

Samuel broached the same subject later that day with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, who said he was “very keen to see a Jewish state
established there.”

It is worth noting the parallel evolution of British interest in and sympathy for the rise of both Arab and Jewish nationalism. Before the war, both Jewish and Arab aspirations for statehood were frequently brushed aside. In Cairo, Lord Kitchener and Sir Ronald Storrs had given polite but short shrift swift dismissals to Sharif Hussein’s son Abdullah; and in London, Zionist approaches to the Foreign Office were rebuffed.

However, once the Ottoman Empire was declared an enemy, there was a coincidence of contradictory interest of British Arab and British Zionist nationalist movements –two mutually exclusive strategic policies -- progressing in unsuspecting tandem.

Weizmann-Rothschild Relationship

Weizmann developed a relationship with Baron Edmond de Rothschild in Paris during his pre-war advocacy of a Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He also knew the baron’s son, James, and his wife Dorothy (Dolly) Pinto who resided in London. When the

war broke out, James joined the French army while Dolly remained in London.

On November 7 and 8, Weizmann met with Dolly to inquire whether the Rothschild family and friends would be willing to take up the Zionist mission. Dolly wrote to Weizmann less than two weeks later: “I have spoken to Mr. Charles Rothschild, not in any sort of way officially, but in the course of conversation he thoroughly approved of the idea of a Jewish state and in fact thought it would be the only possible future.”

Charles was the second son of Nathan Rothschild and the younger brother of Walter Lionel Rothschild, who would become the Lord Rothschild to whom the Balfour Declaration would be addressed. Thus, the first strands of a great web were woven.

Dolly became the political intermediary between Weizmann and members of the Rothschild family. She informed Weizmann that she had also spoken with the Earl of Crewe, Asquith’s Secretary of State for India, who was related to the Rothschilds by marriage. According to Dorothy, he too believed that “our compatriots would not be unwelcome in Palestine … if by some chance it became British.”

Unaware of Kitchener’s promises to the Sharif and their plans for Arabia, Weitzmann was thrilled by Dolly’s letter. Three days later, he met with Dolly and her husband James, who was on leave from the French army. Baron James urged him “to try and influence members of the British government” and to advocate

for more ambitious goals than practical Zionism previously pursued. “One should ask for something which … tends towards the formation of a Jewish State.”

Through Baron James and Dorothy Rothschild, Weizmann was introduced to other members of the Rothschild family, notably the Hungarian-born Rozika, wife of Charles Rothschild, to whom Dolly had spoken about Palestine. Through Rozsika, he would meet Charles and his older brother, Walter. Charles, Rozsika, and Walter became important supporters of Zionism. Rozsika also introduced Weizmann to Robert Cecil, a cousin of Arthur Balfour and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Weizmann-Scott Relationship

One of Weizmann’s most important contacts was C.P. Scott, owner and editor of *The Manchester Guardian* – Britain’s most famous Liberal newspaper -- whom he met at a tea party in early November 1914. This marked the beginning of an extraordinary relationship. “I saw before me a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman, advanced in years but very alert and attentive. He was inquisitive about my origin and work.” Weizmann told him, “I am a Jew and if you want to talk to me about that, Mr. Scott, I am at your disposal.”

Scott, the elderly editor, would soon take a nearly paternal interest in the younger Weizmann. He found Weizmann “extraordinarily interesting, a rare combination of idealism and the severely practical, which are the two essentials of statesmanship.” He was particularly struck by Weizmann’s

“perfectly clear conception of Jewish nationalism, an intense and burning sense of the Jew as Jew, just as strong, perhaps more so, as that of the German as German or the Englishman as Englishman, and secondly arising out of that and necessary for its satisfaction and development, his demand for a country, a home-land which for him and for anyone sharing his view of Jewish nationality can be no other than the ancient home of his race.”

For Scott, like Grey and Lloyd George, who spoke with Herbert Samuel at roughly the same time, it was the entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I that marked the shift from between mere sympathy to active support. Scott asked Weizmann for a memorandum encapsulating the Zionist vision which Weizmann prepared with Harry Sacher, a journalist and Zionist who introduced him to Scott, and helped frame the Balfour Declaration in November and December.

Scott arranged for Weizmann to meet with Herbert Samuel, President of the Local Government Board. “For God’s sake, Mr. Scott, let’s have nothing to do with this man,” expostulated Weizmann, if a member of the Cousinhood would vehemently oppose Zionism.

Scott arranged the meeting with Samuel who floored Weizmann when he said: “Since Turkey had entered the war, I had given the problem much . . . consideration. . . Realization of the Zionist dream was now possible . . . Big things would have to be done in Palestine . . . The Jews would have to build railways, harbours, a University, a network of schools, etc.” Flabbergasted, Weizmann

responded, “If I were a religious Jew, I should have thought the Messianic times were near.” Shortly after the meeting, he repeated this in a letter to his wife: “Messianic times have really come . . . He told me that his program is more ambitious than mine.”

“He said: *We would rebuild the Temple, as a symbol of Jewish unity*,” he wrote his friend Ahad Ha’am three days after their meeting to report on his discussion with Samuel.

Weizmann was invigorated. He had secured the support of important members of the Rothschild family, influential editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, and established contact with Samuel, the president of the Local Government Board, a
key political insider.

Weizmann had now set his sights on even bigger aspirations. Arthur James Balfour, a former prime minister, and currently a Conservative member of parliament for the City of London, was also serving in Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith’s War Council.

He had briefly met Balfour eight years earlier in Manchester during the general election of 1905-1906, and soon thereafter engaged in a more extensive discussion about Zionism. Now, he asked a mutual friend to request a third audience.

This was a shrewd request, as most of Weizmann’s important political contacts belonged to the Liberal Party: As Ahad Ha’am

had cautioned, “it is very possible that after the war there will be a Conservative government with Balfour at its head.”

Balfour

Arthur James Balfour is a pivotal figure in the history of Zionism, known for the Declaration that bears his name, his role in the events leading up to its release, and his strong, sympathetic support in the following years. Given his background, he was an unexpected and surprising protagonist. He was a scion of the aristocratic Cecil political dynasty, which began in the 16th century with Lord Burghley, the adviser to Queen Elizabeth I, and continued through the years to Balfour’s uncle, the third Marques of Salisbury, who had served as Conservative prime minister after Disraeli. The lineage extended to the present generation, with Balfour himself as its most eminent representative among a host of successful relatives who served in Parliament, Foreign Office, and the diplomatic corps.

Balfour’s demeanour betrayed his aristocratic background, aptly described by Jonathan Schneer in his book *The Balfour Declaration*. He displayed a sense of aristocratic indolence and imperturbability. Tall and willowy he rarely stood straight but leaned against a wall. In the House of Commons, he slouched low in his seat, with his boots on the railings before him. His spoken contributions in Commons were so graceful that, even when he criticized or directly attacked opponents, they almost appreciated his attention. Beneath his smooth exterior, however, lay a steely resolve. When he served as Irish Home Secretary under his uncle, Lord Salisbury, his appearance initially brought

ridicule from Home Rulers, who called him *Daddy Long Legs and Niminy Piminy*. Then when he defended policemen found guilty of wilfully murdering three tenants at Mitchelstown during a rent strike, they learned to call him *Bloody Balfour*. Eventually, *Daddy Long Legs* further confounded them by ascending the greasy political pole, replacing his uncle, who resigned as Prime Minister in 1902.

Critics accused him of laziness for not bothering to read blue books. They accused him of dilettantism as politics was only one of his many interests. He belonged to the Royal Society, the British Academy, and the Society for Physical Research. He authored thoughtful philosophical works of philosophy that attempted to reconcile Darwinism and religion. Acute, subtle, detached, and profoundly conservative, he was no democrat; he believed in a representative parliament for the British and their kin but for few others. “Even in the West,” he once pointed out to cabinet ministers, “Parliamentary institutions have rarely been a great success, except amongst the English-speaking peoples.” He shared the attitudes of his time and class regarding the various races of the world. “They have been different and unequal they are destined to remain.” He supported British imperialism because he believed it was good for Britain and beneficial for the world. To cut to the chase, he was not, on the surface, a likely ally for the much-despised Jews.

Balfour met Weizmann on December 12, only two days after his meeting with Herbert Samuel. Weizmann brought him up to date on Zionist achievements since 1906 and lamented that the war

had interrupted progress. No doubt contemplating the impeding defeat of Türkiye, Balfour replied: “You may get your things done much quicker after the war.”

Weizmann was far from finished at the meeting. His subtle and difficult task was to explain to a sceptical, patrician philosopher-cum-politician the tragedy of anti-Semitism and how to overcome it. He hoped not to ask for favours but rather to ask Balfour for specific support while striving to educate and convert him.

The two men discussed the Jews in Germany. They had contributed much to German greatness, Weizmann pointed out, “as other Jews have to the greatness of France and England, at the expense of the whole Jewish people whose sufferings increase in proportion to ‘the withdrawal’ from the people of the creative element which are absorbed into the surrounding communities – those same communities later reproaching us for this *absorption* and reacting with anti-Semitism.”

Balfour listened intently and was deeply moved – “to *tears*,” Weizmann reported in near disbelief to Ahad Ha’am, “and he took me by the hand and said I had illuminated for him the road followed by a great suffering nation.” As the meeting ended and Balfour escorted his guest to the door, he said: “Mind you come again to see me, I am deeply moved and interested, it is not a dream, it is a great cause and I understand it.”

Balfour visited Palestine in 1925. He was the guest of honour at

the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He was greeted enthusiastically by the local Jewish community; and boycotted by the Arabs who welcomed him with black flags.

The Road to The Declaration

On January 15, 1915, Weitzman met with the future prime minister Lloyd George, and Herbert Samuel at 11 Downing Street. As Scott had predicted, Lloyd George bombarded him with questions. He must have responded well, as Lloyd George became a supporter.

Less than two weeks later, Samuel forwarded his memorandum to Grey and Asquith for approval before submitting it to the cabinet. He no longer advocated for a Jewish state in Palestine; instead suggested that the territory be annexed to the British Empire.

> *It is hoped that under British rule facilities would be given to Jewish organizations to purchase land, to found colonies, to establish educational and religious institutions, and to cooperate in the economic development of the country, and that Jewish immigration, carefully regulated, would be given preference, so that in course of time the Jewish people, grown into a majority and settled in the land, may be conceded such degree of self-government as the conditions of that day might justify.*

And he concluded:

> *The Jewish brain is a physiological product not to be despised. For fifteen centuries the race produced in Palestine a constant succession of great men – statesmen and prophets, judges and soldiers. If a body be again given in which its soul can lodge, it may again enrich the world. Till full scope is granted, as Macauley said in the House of Commons, "let us not presume to say that there is no genius among the countrymen of Isaiah, no heroism among the descendants of the Maccabees."*

Six weeks later, on March 13, 1915, Prime Minister H.H. Asquith's Liberal cabinet convened to discuss the future of Palestine as envisioned by a British Jewish nationalist. Samuel had toned down the memorandum by removing the rhetorical flourishes, that Asquith had disdainfully referred to as practically "dithyrambic." This time, he explicitly ruled out any attempt to establish a Jewish state there. "Whatever be the merits or the demerits of that proposal, it is certain that the time is not ripe for it." However, the justifications for British action in the region remained consistent with the original memorandum, and this time he took great care to emphasize that non-Jews in the region must receive equal treatment under any future scheme."

According to Asquith, only Lloyd George strongly supported the proposal, stating that he "does not care a damn for the Jews or their past or their future, but . . . thinks it would be an outrage to let the Christian Holy Places . . . pass into the possession or under

the protectorate of 'Agnostic Atheistic France'!"

The prime minister didn't bother to hide his distaste for a Palestine into which the scattered Jews of the world "could in time swarm back from all quarters of the globe and in due course obtain Home Rule (What an attractive community!)."

Most British Jews regarded Zionism with scepticism. It complicated matters for the Zionists. British Jews were anti-Zionists, and viewed Weizmann, born not in Britain, but in Russia, as an interloper. British Jews disapproved of Weizmann's activities. Most of the Cousinhood and its auxiliaries, including the Board of Jewish Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association with their Conjoint Committee, held very different views on how to resolve the "Jewish problem."

Known as *Assimilationists*, they believed that Jews should assimilate into their home countries and fight anti-Semitism on a national level, something Zionists claimed was unattainable.

Journalist Lucien Wolf, the expert commentator on British foreign affairs dominated the Conjoint Committee of the Anglo-Jewish Association and Board of Deputies of British Jews. One aim of these bodies, and of Wolf personally, was to persuade British policy makers to defend and support Jewish interests outside Britain. Wolf, like many Jews, believed in Jewish assimilation and played a leading role among Jews in Britain opposing Zionism. He believed that anti-Semitism will increase upon the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth. The Zionist

approach, he believed, ran “counter to all experience and probabilities and is essentially reactionary.”

Wolf rejected the Zionist’s fundamental premise, stating, “The idea of a Jewish nationality, the talk of a Jew ‘going home’ to Palestine if he is not content with his lot in the land of his birth, strikes at the root of all claims to Jewish citizenship in lands where Jewish disabilities still exist. It is the assertion not merely of a double nationality . . . but the perpetual alienage of Jews everywhere outside Palestine.”

World Jewry

The war was not running beneficial to Britain and its Allies. After suffering defeat by the Turks at Gallipoli, and with stalemates on the European fronts, both the Brits and Turks reached a similar conclusion: they needed to secure the support of world Jewry as well as encourage America to either join their side or remain neutral.

In early 1916, Britain began to seriously explore some kind of arrangement with “world Jewry” or “Great Jewry” to sway the war in their favour. The British never believed that the Jews alone could tip the balance of the war, but they did come to see that the Jews could assist in funding it; perhaps more importantly, they could help persuade America to join the fight.

In 1916, many Britons, including policymakers, subscribed to the notion of a monolithic and powerful Jewish influence in world affairs.

This belief was shared by Gerald Henry Fitzmaurice, the former British dragoman and Turkish-speaking consular official, who served in Constantinople from 1905 to 1914. During the war, he served in naval intelligence. He shared the sharif's admiration for Sultan Abdul Hamid II, as well as his hatred for the Young Turks. "An eagle mind and a personality of iron vigor," according to T.E. Lawrence, who was not particularly fond of him. Lawrence suspected that Fitzmaurice exercised too much influence, and wielded excessive and improper grip over a series of British ambassadors to the Ottomans.

Fitzmaurice, meanwhile, believed that the Young Turks who had overthrown Sultan Abdul Hamid II and controlled the Ottoman Empire were influenced by Jews and "crypto Jews" seeking to acquire Palestine for the World Zionist movement. He also advocated that Jewish power, both in Türkiye and elsewhere, held the key to the victory of the Entente (Britain, France and Russia) in World War I.

He shared his conclusion with Hugh James O'Bierne, Commander of the Victorian Order (CVO), and Commander of the Order of Bath (CB), an accomplished, well-respected, and influential British diplomat who accepted Fitzmaurice's observations, and helped shift the tectonic plates of Britain's Jewish policy. On February 28, 1916, O'Bierne composed the first Foreign Office minute to link the fate of Palestine with both Jewish interests and British chances of victory. He aimed at influencing the Jews of Türkiye, not those in America. "It has been suggested to me," he told colleagues, "that if we could offer the Jews an arrangement

as to Palestine which would strongly appeal to them, we might conceivably be able to strike a bargain with them as to withdrawing their support from the Young Turk government which would then automatically collapse."

However, the influence of American, Italian, and French informants, at Quai d'Orsay (location of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs), as well as Weizmann and Lucien Wolf, meant that the focus would shift from Turkish Jews to those in America and eventually to Jews worldwide. "To obtain Jewish support," Lord Reading explained to Edwin Montagu three weeks after O'Bierne wrote his initial minute, had become finally "the objective of the Foreign Office."

This view was shared by none other than Sir Henry McMahon in Egypt, who was in intense negotiations with Grand Sharif Hussein about an independent Arabia that he would rule, and Sir Mark Sykes, who was negotiating with Francois Georges-Picot the terms of the treaty they authored.

In the meantime, Chaim Weizmann was perfecting a process for fermenting acetone from grain rather than wood, which was growing scarce. Acetone is an essential ingredient in the manufacture of cordite for explosives. His work was so vital to the war effort that it brought him into further contact with leading British government officials, including Lloyd George, whom Prime Minister Asquith had just appointed Minister of Munitions.

The Rothschild women were coaching Weizmann on how to speak and act within British high society. A testament to their success was a dinner party at which the Marchioness of Crewe was heard to remark to Robert Cecil, a Conservative member of Parliament, son of Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, and cousin of Arthur Balfour: “We all in this house are ‘Weizmannites’. “

One evening, Nancy Astor invited Weizmann to dine with British high society luminaries that included Balfour and Philip Henry Kerr, the editor of the influential *Round Table*, who later became a member of Lloyd George’s personal secretariat. “You must speak Zionism to Dr. Weizmann,” Mrs. Astor instructed.

Weizmann became an effective lobbyist for Palestine to become a Jewish homeland.

Like the British, the French also believed American Jews could make a decisive difference in the Allies victory in the war. They were concerned that the Germans were more effective in recruiting Jewish support, which could have dire consequences for France. Not wanting to alienate the Russian Tsarist government, while seeking to pressure it into gaining the support of American Jews, the Quai d’ Orsay instructed Jewish professors to inform American Jews that the end of Ottoman rule in the Middle East would lead to an increase in liberty and Jewish settlement in Palestine.

One must bear in mind that British foreign policy regarding Palestine favoured Arabs due to the necessity of their support in

Arabia to fight the Turks and Germans. At this very preliminary stage of their courtship of “world Jewry,” British officials who had previously been wooing Arabs now understood they faced a fork in the road. “It is evident,” wrote the percipient O’Bierne, “that Jewish colonization of Palestine must conflict to some extent with Arab interests. All we can do, when the time comes to discuss details, is to try and devise a settlement which will involve as little hardship as possible to the Arab population. We shall then of course, have to consult experts.”

It is important to remember that the Sykes-Picot Agreement became a tripartite Anglo-French-Russian agreement in March 1916, the terms of which granted Russian control over Constantinople and the Turkish straits of Ottoman Armenia. Russia essentially accepted the division of the remaining territory between Britain and France. In the words of Jonathan Schneer: “Thus did the Triple Entente divide the prospective carcass even before they had skinned it, even before it was dead; thus, in the spring of 1916, did they fight the war to end all wars, on behalf of small powers, national integrity, liberalism, and the like.”

As much as Britain sought to gain Jewish support by offering the prospect of Palestine, it could not act alone as a free agent. It was a partner in the Triple Entente alongside Russia and France. Russia would probably go along, provided that the Christian holy places did not fall into non-Christian hands. Additionally, Russia preferred to make concessions in distant lands as a means to alleviate domestic anti-Semitic policies.

France, although also courting Jewish support, had longstanding claims to “greater Syria,” which included Palestine, as agreed by Sykes and Picot. Thus, the British had no legitimate claim to offer. If an offer of Palestine were to be presented to the Jews, France had to be a party to the offer.

This presented a challenge. Picot did not agree to Jews controlling any land in Palestine. He predicted that French patriots would resist such a policy, even resorting to violence if necessary. However, Sykes and Picot maintained a collaborative relationship and devised a plan for Palestine that they hoped would appeal to all three prospective signatories, along with the Jews and Sharif Hussein. Their proposal called for a representative of the sharif, possibly one of his sons, to be made sultan of Palestine under French and British protection and with Russian concurrence. The three great powers would agree on a framework for managing Palestine’s holy places. The new state would establish an incorporated chartered company to purchase land for Jewish colonists, who would then gain citizenship and equal rights alongside Arabs. Britain would arbitrate any disputes between the chartered company and the state, while France would arbitrate any disagreements regarding the administration of the holy places.

London, however disagreed and rejected the proposal. The British believed that the charted company would lead to Jewish domination in Palestine, which would provoke opposition from the Arabs, and that appointing an Arab sultan would alienate the Jews.

More importantly, the Allies required the Arabs to revolt against the Turks. While the Arabs might have believed that Britain promised them Syria, including its coastal region, France claimed all of Syria including the coast. Furthermore, the Arabs had no inkling that Britain and France were contemplating making any gestures towards the Jews involving Palestine, which was land that the Arabs also desired and believed had already been promised to them by Britain.

Sykes cautioned the Foreign Office: “Keep actual terms of provisional agreement from knowledge of Arab leaders.”

Sykes argued that secret diplomacy was essential because when “we bump into a thing like Zionism which is atmospheric, international, cosmopolitan, subconscious, unwritten, nay often unspoken,” and is “the key of the situation,” by which he meant nothing less than the key to achieving victory in the war. “With ‘Great Jewry’ against us,” he warned, “there is no possible chance of getting the thing thro,” in other words -- defeating Germany.

Jewish ill-will would lead to “optimism in Berlin, dumps in London, unease in Paris, resistance to last ditch in C’ople, dissention in Cairo, Arabs all squabbling among themselves,” Sykes added. However, if the Zionists were given a reason to support the Allies, everything would change. “If they want us to win they will do their best which means they will (a) calm their activities in Russia; (b) Pessimism in Germany; (c) stimulate in France, England and Italy; and (d) enthuse in USA.” He felt

encouraged because “Picot now sees this and understands it and will put it to those who count in France.”

Sykes was also concerned about the Armenian question and their suffering and persecution by the Turks. To him, the Armenian question stemmed from the same root as his interest in the Arab rebellion and his growing interest in Zionism. The three nationalities – he now believed the Jews to be a nation as well – could fulfil the needs of the British Empire in the former Ottoman territories, and the empire could reciprocate by addressing the needs of these long-suffering peoples. Sykes’ evolving views on race, nationalism, and imperialism are explored in other books. It is sufficient to say here that just as he sought Zionists to collaborate with London, he also sought out Armenians, who, like the Jews, were a self-conscious and active community in London.

James Aratoon Malcolm, a politically active Armenian with an Anglicized name, played a key role in introducing Sykes to Weizmann on January 28, 1917. Sykes immediately recognized Weizmann as the Zionist he had been trying to connect with, while Weizmann acknowledged Sykes as the prominent British official with whom Zionists could work with. A critical step in gaining the support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Palestine

Loosely governed from Jerusalem in the south and from Beirut in the north by agents of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine’s borders were vague. To the east it merged with the Jordanian plateau; to the south, the Arabian deserts; to the north, the grey mountain

masses of Lebanon; and to the west, the Mediterranean.

The territory is small -- less than 200 miles long and 50 miles wide. It is not much larger than present-day Massachusetts in America, and about the size of Wales in Britain.

Like today, then the Zionist and Arab nationalist movements, while advancing, were on a trackless desert with many intersecting collisions.

While Weizmann was gaining the support of Sykes for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Sharif Hussein and his sons had won the British backing for the establishment of an Arab kingdom that would include Palestine. That is why they launched their rebellion against the Ottoman Empire in early June 1916.

As Sharrif Hussein and his sons fought for their cause on both diplomatic and battlefield fronts, risking their lives, the Zionists focused their efforts on the diplomatic front in London.

The heavy losses Britain was sustaining on the Western Front in Europe brought about the downfall of Prime Minister Asquith's government on December 5, 1916. He was succeeded by David Lloyd George, who appointed "Easterners" to his cabinet – including Arthur J. Balfour as Foreign Secretary – who shifted the government's full attention from the Western Front to the Middle East, specifically Arabia which included Syria and Palestine.

Lloyd George's government looked favourably upon those who

requested support for the Arab Revolt against the Turks, or who asked for reinforcements for the army in Egypt, so that it could engage the Turks in Palestine and push them out of Syria altogether. The Zionists in London realized that this strategy would also benefit them, as much as it would benefit the Arabs, given their preference for a British protectorate in Palestine.

British troops were encouraged by the Easterners. “The War Cabinet is very impatient. They want a victory every day and if they do not get it, they begin to propose going to some fresh place to find one. They are giving me a good deal of trouble,” wrote Sir William Robertson, chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Robertson, a “westerner,” who believed that victory depended on breaking through the German lines and opposed the “easterners,” including General Sir Archibald Murray, who had taken command of the British forces in January 1916, and successfully thwarted an Ottoman attack on the Suez Canal in August, occupied Sinai, and moved into Palestine. However, he failed twice to capture Gaza and was replaced in June 1917 by General Edmund Allenby.

Lloyd George instructed Allenby, whom he had recalled from France, to seize Gaza and advance directly up through Palestine into Syria. The ultimate goal was to capture Damascus and eliminate the Ottoman Empire from the war. However, Allenby needed to capture Jerusalem en route, ideally by Christmas, as a fine seasonal gift for the British public. Lloyd George assured Allenby he would have the necessary means to achieve this.

Lawrence coordinated with Allenby to strategize how he, and the Arab tribesmen he was leading, would attack Turkish targets along the way, in coordination with the British troops under Allenby's command.

Meanwhile, the Zionists in London sensed these evolving political and military dynamics and adeptly navigated them. This began with Weizmann's introduction to Sir Mark Sykes on January 28, 1917, facilitated by the Persian Armenian James Malcolm, who represented Armenia in London, and acted as an intermediary between Zionists and British officials throughout the war years. Weizmann and Sykes realized each other's importance, leading to a follow up meeting scheduled for February 7.

Malcolm relished his intermediary role and was keen to support an effective Zionist movement. He recognized that Sykes increasingly viewed the peoples of the Ottoman Middle East – Armenians, Arabs, and Jews – as essential links in a future chain of British dependencies. He took this opportunity to advise Sykes about Jews: "Most people have misunderstood the Jewish character. The Jew will always stick to his bargain, but he will never consent to readjusting the terms of an agreement."

Despite this, Malcolm did not stop from sharing his own anti-Semitic views, including the unfounded belief that Jews had instigated World War I: "In the Near East hitherto the Jew has pursued an exclusive policy, which has perhaps contributed more than anything else to bring about the present war." On the other hand, he also believed the Jews held the key to future peace.

“The question of finance will be a great factor in the future,” he lectured Sykes. “It would therefore be important to secure the sentimental support, at least, of the Jewish people.”

For the Zionists, the week preceding the February 7 meeting, was a busy time filled with preparations and internal political manoeuvring by various factions and players. Weizmann’s diligent cultivation of the Rothschilds paid off. James de Rothschild, and his brother Walter, who upon his father’s death had taken on the role of the titular head of the British branch of the family, and consequently, the Jewish community, agreed to attend the February 7 meeting, along with Herbert Samuel, Nathan Sokolow, and Harry Sacher. It was to be a gathering of Weizmannites with the man they now recognized as playing a crucial role in advising the British government on its Middle Eastern policy.

Weizmann had decided to sideline Moses Gaster, the chief rabbi of Spanish and Portuguese Jews in England and replace him with Nathan Sokolow. Gaster had played a leading role among British Zionists but had an abrasive personality.

At the February 7 meeting, where a British government official finally met a Zionist delegation and took its claims seriously, Weizmann, Sokolow, and their appointees dominated and negotiated on behalf of the movement.

Sykes was presented with a document encapsulating the Zionist program. He stated that he would present it the following day to

Picot, who was then attached to the French embassy in London, and asked for a Zionist to accompany him to present the Zionist case to Picot. Sokolow was nominated as the representative by James de Rothschild.

Sykes attended the meeting intending to mobilize the most effective Zionist leaders on behalf of the Allies and British suzerainty in Palestine, and to throw this in the face of France – an idea the Weizmannites endorsed. They sought a British protectorate in Palestine, believing that Britain afforded its white colonial subjects more liberty than any other imperial power. In contrast, France insisted on making its colonial subjects' French citizens, thereby erasing their national identities, which Jewish nationalists could not accept. They could not even accept a British French joint imperial control of Palestine.

The Weizmannites, except for Herbert Samuel, who was bound by a cabinet oath not to speak, did not realize that Sykes and Picot had agreed a year earlier to international control of Palestine.

The February 7 meeting was based on at least three layers of deceit. First, Sykes was attempting to undermine an agreement with France that he and Samuel knew the British government had already accepted, one that he himself had helped negotiate and which bore his name. The second layer involved the Sykes Picot and Tripartite agreements being kept secret from everyone, even though James de Rothschild had received a hint about them from his French contacts and had twice asked Sykes to confirm that

Britain had made no promises regarding Palestinian territory to France. The first time, Sykes replied that “no pledges had been given to the French concerning Palestine,” which was an outright lie. The second time, he referred the question to Samuel: “Mr. Samuel replied that he could not reveal what had been done by the Cabinet.”

The third layer, probably the most historically significant and known only to Sykes, was the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, which led the Arabs to believe that Palestine had been promised to them. In this regard, Sykes merely stated: “The Arabs professed that language must be the measure [by which control of Palestine should be determined] and [by that measure] could claim all Syria and Palestine. Still the Arabs could be managed, particularly if they received Jewish support in other matters.”

Given this triple burden of ignorance, Sokolow performed remarkably well the next day when he met Picot. When asked for a general explanation of the aims of the Zionist movement, Sokolow delivered eloquently. Picot expressed great interest and complimented him on his exposition but wanted to know how “the Jews proposed to organize themselves as a nation in Palestine?”

> *“Mr. Sokolow replied that they would establish themselves in the same way the French and the English had established themselves in Canada or the Boers in South Africa, viz. by settling on the land. A nation should*

> *be built up like a pyramid on a broad base and str-ong foundation. The foundation was the land."*

Notably, Sokolow did not mention that Arabs were already residing in Palestine. They appeared to be as invisible as black Africans had been to Boers intending to move to Cape Town, and as Native Americans were to the French and English colonists on their way to Canada.

> *"M. Picot expressed his approval of this view and said he had never believed that Jews, who had been out of touch with the land for so many years, would be able to succeed as agricultu-rists. But having seen with his own eyes the new Jewish colonies in Palestine he was convinced of the possibility. "What I have seen is marvelous." [Ce que j'ai vu la-bas est merveilleux]*

So at that moment, the Arabs seemed invisible to Picot too.

Picot remarked at one point, "In one respect, France was specially disposed to take an interest in the Zionist movement." He referred to the cause of "the small nationalities which, in France had been taken up with greatest ardour and was inspiring every citizen to an extraordinary extent." With these words Picot conceded the core Zionist argument -- that Jews constituted a nation, rather than merely adherents of a belief system.

Sykes was impressed by Sokolow's performance, to the extent that the British government recognized Sokolow and Weizmann

as leaders of a movement worthy of support. As a result, they aimed to obtain from the British government a statement of support that would constitute a binding form of official recognition.

Sykes and Sokolow continued to confer with the English Catholic and Russian Jew getting along like a house on fire. Sokolow thought they did so because of Sykes's religion: "Often he remarked to me that it was his Catholicism that enabled him to understand the tragedy of the Jewish question, since not so long ago Catholics had to suffer much in England."

Sykes recognized in Sokolow an effective Zionist diplomat who could help him revise the Tripartite Agreement and pry Palestine loose from France. On the other hand, Sokolow sensed that Sykes was Zionists most effective lobbyist.

Weizmann saw Lloyd George and Balfour at a dinner hosted by the Astors on March 13, 1917, shortly after General Murray's forces had taken El Arish in the Sinai as he attempted to capture Gaza. As serious discussions could not occur during a social occasion, Balfour agreed to a formal meeting with Weizmann nine days later when they could focus on the matter.

"I have seen Balfour and for the first time I had a real business talk with him," Weizmann wrote to Ahad Ha'am, the pen name of Asher Ginzberg, a leading Zionist essayist and thinker afterward. "I am delighted with the result." Weizmann emphasized the necessity for Palestine to be a British protectorate. "I think I

succeeded in explaining that to him," Weizmann wrote to C.P. Scott, "and he agreed with the view, but suggested that there might be challenges with France and Italy," which is not surprising due to the Sykes-Picot Tripartite Agreement and Italy's recent demands to be included in the agreement.

Balfour believed the prime minister would also accept Weizmann's Zionist vision as a British protectorate. "Mr. Lloyd George took a view which was identical with" Weizmann's, Balfour told him, noting that it is of "great importance to Great Britain to protect Palestine."

Balfour thought Weizmann and the prime minister should discuss matters in person. "You may tell the Prime Minister that I wanted you to see him," he told Weizmann. This was conveyed indirectly by quoting this remark in his letter to Scott, who would relay it to Lloyd George, leading to the meeting a few days later. During a breakfast at 10 Downing Street, the prime minister informed Weizmann and others attending that Palestine "was to him the one really interesting part of the war," and went on to reject the possibility of Anglo-French control of Palestine once the war was won. He speculated about others. International control being one as outlined in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. "That would be a shade worse than the Anglo-French as it would mean not control but mere confusion and intrigue," the Zionist warned. What about an Anglo-American condominium? asked Lloyd George. That would be acceptable, Weizmann replied, and the prime minister agreed. America, however, had no interest in such an arrangement.

Sykes and Sokolow were diplomats-in-arms and together persuaded France, Italy, and Russia – most importantly France -- to accept Britain as the sole administrator of Palestine.

Sykes prepared the French for their meetings with Sokolow in Paris. “If the great force of Judaism feels that its aspirations are not only considered, but in a fair way towards realization,” he exhorted Picot, “then there is hope of an ordered and developed Arabia and Middle East. On the other hand, if that force feels that its aspirations will be thwarted by circumstances that are doomed to remain only a painful longing, then I see little or no prospect for our own future hopes.” Satisfying Zionist aspirations, he asserted, would also “give a very strong impetus to the Entente cause in the USA,” where a decision to enter the war hanging in the balance and where he believed that Jews represented a powerful political and economic force. He promoted the notion of an all-powerful, albeit subterranean, Jewish influence. He succeeded in persuading Picot to conclude that if the Jews desired a British protectorate in Palestine, then, given the war situation, it was in France’s interest to let them have one.

Henry Morgenthau Deceit

The British and French were not the only ones deceiving Weizmann and the Zionists; America also deceived. After America entered the war on April 16, joining the Allies against Germany, it did not declare war on Türkiye, nor did Türkiye declare war on the U.S. At the urging of Germany, it only grudgingly, severed diplomatic relations with the U.S. President Wilson took this as a

positive sign and thought he could forge a separate peace agreement with Türkiye for the Allies, asking Henry Morgenthau to explore such a treaty with the Turks.

Morgenthau served as Wilson's Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from late February 1913 until late February 1916. Himself a Jew, he played an honourable role as a protector and guardian of Ottoman Jews, particularly those in Palestine. He sympathized with Zionism but was not a Zionist. He had made a fortune speculating on real estate. Before leaving Constantinople, he publicly claimed that he almost succeeded in persuading the Ottomans to sell Palestine to the Jews --just another real estate deal.

In the same Cincinnati speech where Morgenthau claimed to have almost acquired Palestine. He said "It is utterly impossible to place several millions of people in Palestine. There would be grave danger from the Arabs . . . If Jews continue there as at present, at the end of the war there will be no friction."

British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour was visiting Washington at the time and was told by Secretary of State Robert Lansing about the separate Turkish-Allies peace scheme. Balfour confirmed that the Turks were already "nibbling" at the idea of a separate peace. "If matters took a favourable form," he added, "results might be of enormous advantage," which was true as far as the British were concerned, but debatable for Zionists who sought British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine separate from the Ottoman Empire.

Morgenthau's speech caught the attention of Mark Sykes, who cautioned the Zionists that "Nothing could be more unfortunate or dangerous." The Zionists agreed.

Taking a group of distinguished members of the American Jewish community with him, Morgenthau disguised a trip to Palestine as an expedition to assess the condition of Jews in Palestine. The group that included the distinguished Harvard Law School Zionist and future Supreme Court justice, Professor Felix Frankfurter, who invited his assistant Max Lowenthal, and Elihau Lewin-Epstein, the treasurer of the Zionist Provisional Executive Committee in New York City had the appearance and trappings of a Zionist mission, an impression that the government furthered with leaks to the press.

Morgenthau did not disclose his true mission to Frankfurter, Lowenthal and Lewin-Epstein. He kept them in the dark.

The State Department requested that Britain and France send someone in authority to Gibraltar to meet with Morgenthau "to discuss the question thoroughly."

Morgenthau thought the British should send Weizmann, and the State Department agreed, asking the British Foreign Office to comply. It did not occur to them that Weizmann might oppose the primary purpose of the trip.

Weizmann had already learned about Morgenthau's mission from Louis Brandeis, the American Zionist and Supreme Court

justice who had obtained the information from Frankfurter – but its real purpose directly from President Wilson himself. He immediately cabled Weizmann, advising him to intercept the American mission without disclosing any details. Weizmann knew Brandeis had close relationship with Wilson and accepted the explicit warning.

In addition to Brandeis's warning, the Armenian James Malcolm's keen awareness alerted Weizmann to "rumours here in London's pro-Young Turk circles about "some manoeuvres" for a separate peace with Türkiye initiated by Mr. Wilson "at the instigation of Mr. Morgenthau in tacit cooperation with the British and French governments."

A separate peace with Türkiye had the potential of undermining Armenian nationalist aspirations, just as it did the Zionist aspirations.

Malcolm and Weizmann got together to create a comprehensive picture and plan based on all the rumours and facts both men had heard. Wickham Steed, an influential foreign correspondent for *The Times,* called during their meeting. He had also heard the same rumours about Morgenthau and the Turcophiles. Steed opposed a separate peace with Türkiye, albeit for reasons different from those of the Zionists and Armenians. *The Times* advocated for total victory over Britain's enemies, believing that settling for anything less would contribute to the German agenda. Historically, *The Times* had not been sympathetic to Jews, nor had Steed. However, both were prepared to play the

Zionist card. Steed reassured that it would be better for the British Empire to assume a protectorate over Palestine, dominated by Jews, than for Palestine to remain part of the Ottoman Empire beholden to the Germans.

On Sunday, June 9, after a phone call with Steed, Weizmann met with Ronald Graham, the assistant under secretary of state at the Foreign Office. Graham later reported to Robert Cecil: “Dr. Weizmann, whom I happened to see this morning . . . referred in the course of the conversation to Mr. Morgenthau whom he described as closely connected with . . . the anti-Zionist Jews in the U.S., and as being pro-German and especially pro-Turkish. He said ‘I am expecting to see Mr. Morgenthau employed in some intrigue for a separate peace with Türkiye and believe he is coming to Europe for this purpose. If so the whole thing is a German move’.” Weizmann had taken up the line pursued by Steed in his newspaper.

Weizmann and Malcolm lobbied the British Foreign Office and arguing that Morgenthau “was notoriously pro-German,” and that he acted “on behalf of an international ring of Jewish financiers in Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna, Paris and New York.” His aim was “an inconclusive Peace which would give German capital and German Jews an ascendant importance throughout the Turkish Empire and particularly Palestine.” Unbeknownst to him, the Americans wanted Weizmann to meet Morgenthau; he ended with a request that would have pleased them: “If any Jew is to be sent to meet Mr. Morgenthau . . . he, Dr. Weizmann, should be sent.” At the instigation of Weizmann and Malcolm,

the British government began to oppose Morgenthau's approach to the Turks.

The Foreign Office had concluded, as mentioned earlier, that Britain needed the support of "international Jewry" to win the war. In his denunciation of Morgenthau, Weizmann had shrewdly emphasized the influence of this cosmopolitan cabal and Morgenthau's role within it. What Weizmann didn't know was that the British were simultaneously exploring their own secret peace treaty with Türkiye in Switzerland.

America and Britain were independently considering the feasibility of a separate peace treaty with Türkiye, an initiative that Weizmann unknowingly undermined. When they met, Weizmann asked Morgenthau if he knew what terms the Turks would accept in a separate peace treaty, given that they were on the brink of defeat. No one knew. Weizmann then told Morgenthau what Britain's terms to such a separate treaty must be. It must be "satisfied that Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are to be detached from the present Turkish Empire." Was this wishful thinking on Weizmann's part? It was a brilliant negotiating tactic, as no one present challenged him. Weizmann also made it clear to Morgenthau that it was a mistake to associate his mission with Zionism. "On no account should the Zionist organization be in any way compromised by his negotiations," Weizmann lectured the diplomat. "On no account must the Zionist organization be in any way identified or mixed up even with the faintest of attempts to secure a separate peace . . . We Zionists feel about this point most strongly, and we would like

assurances from Mr. Morgenthau that he agrees and understands this position." The assurance was given and the deeply humiliated Morgenthau capitulated on all fronts, ending his mission and subsequently opposing the Zionists.

Weizmann continued to insist on a British protectorate in Palestine and oppose a separate peace with Turkey. He staked everything on Allied victory, and his gamble paid off. History belongs to the victors.

Intrigue and double-dealing, as much as bravery and vision, were foundational to the essence of the Balfour Declaration. The Balfour Declaration did not only result in Zionists celebrating its birth of a Jewish homeland, but over time, in disillusionment, distrust, and resentment – an unending cycle of conflicts and wars.

The unpredictable contradictions, deceptions, and duplicity of the British towards Arabs, Zionists, French, and Turks, resulted in misinterpretations and wishful thinking leading to the Balfour Declaration. This has produced a tragic legacy that Arabs, Jews, and Palestinians endure to this day.

More than a century later, the bitter emotions, compounded over the decades, continue tragically to bloodily unfold today. Something must be done to end the bloodshed, pain, and suffering, for both Palestinian Arabs and Jews, as well as Jewish-Arabs. This effort should be in the spirit and letter of the 37 words of the 68 word Balfour Declaration:

> "…***it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of exist-ing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."***

It is important to remember not only what happened to Arab Palestinians in Palestine, but also what happened to Jewish-Arabs in Arab and Muslim lands if a two-state solution is to be realized and sustained. It is addressed in Chapter Nine.

It is also important to remember that: "Israel was not created because of the Balfour Declaration; it was created "in spite of the Balfour Declaration," reminds Michael B. Oren, an Israeli American historian who served as Israel's ambassador to Washington and as a deputy minister in the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.



Chapter Seven

The Troubles Leading to 1948 Partition of Palestine

Anger is a powerful catalyst but a life-sucking companion
– Brene Brown –

Background to Balfour Declaration

As World War I was approaching its end, a struggle for influence in Palestine began to unfold, but without the contending parties, Arabs and Zionists, realizing that they were in a contest and it was entering the homestretch. This blissful situation prevailed until about six months before the release of the Balfour Declaration on November 12, 1917. Thus, both sides misidentified their adversaries. The Zionists in Britain focused their efforts on Whitehall, hoping that skilful diplomacy would persuade the British government to support them. Rarely, if ever, did King Hussein and his armies in the Hejaz and Syria, cross their minds.

Meanwhile, Sharif Hussein and the Arab armies sought to improve their military capabilities and effectiveness against the Ottomans, with British aid. If they thought they were in a competition, it was not against the Zionists, but rather with the French, who they knew had designs on Syria. They believed that the British would help them establish control over that territory, including most likely Palestine. Zionism was not on their radar screen.

T.E. Lawrence had developed a genuine sympathy for Arab nationalist aspirations by early 1917. He also recognized these aspirations would run up against the interests of the Zionists, French and British aspirations.

Lawrence learned about Zionist ambitions for Palestine when he met Aaron Aaronson in Cairo. Aaronson, a leading agronomist in Palestine before World War I, was best known for utilizing his expertise for Britain during the war and his Zionist activities. This troubled Lawrence, who had enough insight to suspect that McMahon's correspondence with Hussein contradicted certain aspects of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, even though he was unaware of the agreement's specifics. Lawrence concluded that if Hussein wished to claim any part of Syria, his troops, led by his son Feisal, must enter Damascus before any troops of any other country, especially those from Britain. He, Feisal, and some of Feisal's advisers agreed. "We all swore to not go to Mecca till after we had Damascus," believing that this meant securing Palestine.

So, as Lawrence was recruiting Arab tribes to attack the strategically crucial port of Aqaba by land across a waterless and broiling desert, because the Ottoman guns at the port were facing the water, protecting against British and French warships, and not expecting an attack by land. Meanwhile, Zionists in London moved to assert control of the British Jewish community and the British Foreign Office.

The tragedy from the Arab point of view was that the war in

Arabia moved at a much slower pace than diplomacy and lobbying in London. It took Feisal longer to defeat the Ottoman army and enter Damascus on September 30, 1918, than it took Weizmann to arrange meetings with British politicians and vanquish any Jewish opposition to Zionism.

Feisal did not know that the Balfour Declaration was being contemplated. An interesting question was, had Feisal reached Damascus before November 2, 1917, would the British have felt secure enough about the future of that territory to not release the Balfour Declaration? If that had happened, and the British government decided to withhold the release of the Balfour Declaration, Middle Eastern, and even world history, might have turned out differently.

Meanwhile, Lawrence tore his soul into pieces trying to juggle Britain's Arab interests and work with General Allenby to capture Gaza and Damascus, knowing the Arabs had helped the British achieve their military and political objectives – but too late to help themselves.

On October 31, Allenby launched his attack on Gaza. The Turks retreated, and Allenby chased them up the coast: a few days later, he entered Palestine. Unfortunately for the Arabs, the Balfour Declaration had been written six days before Gaza fell and was published the next day. The Arabs had lost the race for Palestine, although they did not realize it at the time.

The Turks surrendered Jerusalem on December 9, exactly one

week after the great Zionist celebration at the London Opera House.

Neither Zionists nor Arabs focused their attention on the Arab anti-Jewish riots of the 1920s that led up to the Arab revolt of 1936-1939, the most significant uprising against the British Empire in the 20th-century, taking place in Palestine.

The steps taken by the Zionists to create *Eretz Israel* were met with increasing hostility on the part of the Arab population, which erupted into the Easter 1920 riots led by Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who then went on to lead the Arab Revolt.

According to Ottoman law, when the post of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem falls vacant it must be filled through an election. In the election thus held in mid-April 1921, Al-Husseini came in fourth despite his infamy as the principal instigator of the anti-Jewish riots during Easter 1920. He claimed the election was rigged and stolen by Jews to install a pro-Jewish mufti. As a result, anti-Jewish riots erupted once again, and by May 7 forty-seven Jews had been killed and one hundred and forty-six wounded, while forty-eight Arabs were killed and seventy-three wounded.

The election was subsequently invalidated, and on May 7, Hajj Amin was appointed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem inciting outrage within the Jewish community. To add fuel to the fire, the British military sought to undermine the Balfour Declaration. By the end of June, General Sir Walter Congreve, commander of the British forces in the Middle East, travelled to London to argue against

the Zionist cause.

In October, General Congreve issued a circular to officers that expressed support for the Arabs. Shortly thereafter, Arabs in Jerusalem attacked Jews who were celebrating the fourth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, resulting in the death of five Jews. At Christmas 1921, after receiving a copy of Congreve's circular, Churchill determined that the Air Ministry should assume responsibility for the defence of Palestine signalling an end to military support for the Arab population in opposition to British policy.

After the League of Nations passed the Mandate for Palestine on July 24, 1922, the British government proposed a Palestinian Constitution that would establish a Legislative Council. Although Arabs would hold majority in the council, the Jewish population accepted the Constitution. Nevertheless, the Arabs adamantly rejected the plan during the Palestinian Arab Congress.

The failure to create representative institutions meant that Palestine had to be ruled by the High Commissioner and his officials without any consultations with the Jewish and Arab communities. This led to Jews and Arabs forming separate political governing bodies. On the Jewish side the most important organization was the Zionist Executive, which had received official recognition under the Mandate. An additional organization, the National Council, that represented the *Yishuv*, which itself had two specialized institutions: the *Histadrut*, which embraced the trade unionists and cooperative movement, and

the *Hagena*, the Jewish armed forces.

On the Arab side, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem became the president of a newly established Supreme Muslim Council in January 1922. This council was responsible for financial and legal affairs, which had previously fallen under the purview of the Ottoman rulers. By 1923, a tripartite system of government was established in Palestine to manage their own affairs throughout the period of the Mandate.

The Grand Mufti opposed any legislative council made up of a majority of Arabs, along with Jews and Christians, as he felt that the Holy Places in Palestine were under threat from the Jewish population and immigration. He initiated a campaign against Jews using mosques and the press, which resulted in Arab mob attacks on Jews. As a result, 133 Jews were killed and 339 wounded.

In Palestine and across the Arab world, the Grand Mufti was perceived as a leading figure in the struggle against the Zionist threat. Increasingly, British circles, recognized that the establishment of a Jewish National Home was impossible because of the Arab response.

The British concerns resulted in the *White Paper* published on 21 October 1930, which halted Jewish immigration to Palestine and threatened to renounce the Balfour Declaration. When the *White Paper* was debated in the House of Commons in November 1930, it was widely criticized. On February 13, 1931, the prime minister read to the House a letter he had written to Weizmann in which

he emphasized that the Mandate had an obligation to facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine without jeopardizing the rights of all sections of the population. For Arabs, this letter became known as the *Black Letter*.

The Zionists felt the letter had not gone far enough, and they anticipated a new *White Paper*. Weizmann, having resigned as the president of the Zionist Organization over the *White Paper*, was eclipsed by Jabotinsky at the Seventh Zionist Congress in Basel from June to July 1931. During the session, he was rebuked by the Congress for his statement in an interview that he had no sympathy for the demand for a Jewish majority in Palestine. This internal conflict within the Zionist Organization was further complicated by the rise of Nazism and the ascension of Adolph Hitler as Chancellor of the German Reich in January 1933.

From 1933, the Zionists and the Nazis cooperated in the immigration of Jews from Nazi Germany to Palestine. On August 25, 1933, Eliezer Siegfried Hoofien, the general manager of the Anglo-Palestine Bank, agreed with the German Ministry of Economics that Jewish assets should be used to purchase materials needed in Palestine. In the same year, the Anglo-Palestine Bank created the Trust and Transfer Office Ha'avara Ltd, in Tel Aviv. In Berlin, a parallel body was created with the assistance of two Jewish bankers, Max Warburg and Siegmund Wassermann. This company was responsible for negotiating with the German government the settlement of bills for German exports and contracts involving German Jews who were immigrating to Palestine. Between 1933 and 1939, approximately

50,000 Jews used these services.

The growing influx of new immigrants agitated the Arab population. Not only were the Jews viewed as enemies of the Arab cause, but the British also came under scrutiny. In October 1933, anti-British disturbances broke out in Jaffa, Nablus, Haifa and Jerusalem. In the conflict 26 Arabs were killed. Over the next few years, the Arab press supported Italy in its struggle against Britain. During this period, the Jews also rebelled against British rule.

Meanwhile, back in Palestine, the conflict between Arabs and Jews intensified. In a terrorist operation, Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his band were surrounded and killed. As a martyr to the Arab cause, al-Qassam's death put pressure on Hajj Amin to launch a Muslim revolt. On April 15, 1936, a group of armed Arabs abducted two Jews from a bus in the Nablus mountains and killed them. Two days later, two Arabs were killed by Hagenah in retaliation.

The opening act to the Arab Revolt.

The Arab Revolt

In the words of Oren Kessler in his introduction to *Palestine 1936*, the Arab Rebellion of 1936-39, "cast the mold for the Jewish-Arab encounter ever since."

The Great Revolt of 1936-1939 served as the crucible in which Palestinian identity coalesced. It united rival families, both urban

and rural, rich and poor, in a singular struggle against a common adversary: the Jewish national enterprise – Zionism – and its midwife, the British Empire. A six-month general strike, one of the longest in modern history, rallied Arabs and Muslims worldwide to the Palestinian cause.

Then, as now, the revolt ultimately turned inward. A wave of infighting and score-settling shredded the Arab social fabric, sidelining pragmatists in favour of extremists, and leading to the first wave of refugees fleeing the country as Jewish refugees fleeing Europe were coming in. British forces exacerbated the situation by seizing arms, occupying cities, and waging a counterinsurgency that left thousands dead and tens of thousands wounded. Arab Palestine's fighting capacity was debilitated, its economy gutted, and its political leaders banished.

The revolt to end Zionism, then as now, crushed the Arabs themselves, leaving them crippled in face of the Jewish movement toward statehood, which has since expanded.

It represented the closest the Palestinians would, or will, ever come to military victory.

During this period, three Arab princes, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, Ghazi, King of Iraq, and Abdullah of Transjordan became parties and involved in the British Mandatory government. All three detested Zionism and saw they could personally gain politically from their participation in the affairs of

Palestine. Has anything truly changed today?

The British, in their quest to quell the Arab Revolt, hoped the Arab princes would encourage the rebels to cease their actions. However, the Arab fighters were undeterred by such foreign intervention because they saw their struggle against the British as a Holy War.

In the meantime, the British had created the Peel Commission that arrived in Palestine in November 1936 to investigate the roots of the Palestinian question. The Commission held sixty-six meetings, largely dominated by Jewish evidence, as the Arabs boycotted most of the proceedings.

Weizmann and Ben-Gurion appeared before the commission and spoke about the plight of Jews in Europe and the inherent right of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland. Hajj Amin, in his testimony, emphasized that the Jewish claim to Palestine was in direct conflict with Islam.

In July 1937, the Peel Commission issued its report, declaring the Palestinian problem to be insoluble and recommending the Mandate for Palestine should be terminated and Palestine be partitioned. On September 17, 1938, partition was reaffirmed by the League of Nations, and the British appeared to be committed to establishing a Jewish state due to their repression of the Arab revolt.

Two months later, in November, the British government

confirmed its intention to abandon the policy of partition and invited Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Transjordan to St James Palace in London for a conference on the future of Palestine. A Palestinian delegation and the Zionist Executive were invited to join the British hosts. However, the three bodies of delegates did not meet; instead, the British met separately with the Arabs and Jews because the Palestinian Arabs refused to be in the same room with the Jewish delegates.

In May 1939, a new *White Paper* was published. It ruled out partition for the creation of a Jewish state yet stipulated that a Palestinian state would be created within 10 years, and that after five years, Jewish immigration would not be permitted unless approved by the Palestinian Arabs. Despite this apparent anti-Jewish bias, the *White Paper* allowed 75,000 more Jews to settle in Palestine during the five-year period, contingent upon the establishment of adequate safeguards for the Jewish community.

In effect, the *White Paper* endorsed a double veto: the Arabs were empowered to block the growth of the Jewish National Home, while the Jews could prevent the Arabs from achieving an independent state.

Anxious to prevent this change in policy, the Jews contested the legality of the *White Paper*. In its report to the Council of the League, the Permanent Mandates Commission stated that the *White Paper* did not align with the interpretation that the Commission had placed upon the Palestine Mandate. Under Article 27 of the Mandate, the Council's consent was required for

any change in its terms. However, with the outbreak of war, the Council never convened to discuss the issue. Such a change in policy was profoundly disturbing to the *Yishuv*, leading the Zionists to perceive that Britain had abandoned the Balfour Declaration. For many Zionists, it became clear that force was now necessary to oppose the *White Paper*. Previously, the Arab community had rebelled against British rule; now, the White Paper reversed the situation. A Jewish revolt had begun.

Jewish Armed Resistance

Five hundred Jews lost their lives during the insurgency. Nevertheless, to the Jews the Arab Revolt was perceived as a gift from heaven. It was then that Zionist leaders began to abandon illusions about Arab acquiescence and confront the unnerving prospect that fulfilling their dreams of sovereignty might mean forever clinging to the sword. The revolt saw thousands of Jews trained and armed by Britain, the world's supreme military power, turning their amateur guard units into the seeds of a formidable Jewish army, complete with special forces and an officer corps.

It was also during the revolt that some Jews – facing fascism in Europe and carnage in Palestine – concluded that mere passive defence was national suicide, which gave birth to Jewish terrorism.

In 1920, the Jews established the Hagenah – a defence force -- a paramilitary organization because the British failed to defend them during the Arab pogroms of that year. Two additional

military groups were also established in the 1930s: Etzel, which the British called Irgun, and Lechi, which they called the Stern Gang, a breakaway group from Etzel. Both groups moved from defensive to offensive operations against Arabs and Britons. The British considered them terrorists. They reached a bloody climax in the years after World War II, with Etzel and Lechi carrying out assassinations, beatings, and bombings, most notably against the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, where they killed 91 and injured 46.

That is how low British-Zionist relations had sunk. British Arab relations sank even lower. The most important Palestinian leader during the British Mandate period, Haj Amin al-Husseini, gained the lifetime post of grand mufti, the highest Muslim religious office in Jerusalem, with the support of Herbert Samuel, who thought he could help maintain order among Arabs. In fact, al Husseini was an uncompromising Palestinian nationalist, an impulsive enemy of British occupation and Zionism. He led the Arab Revolt of 1936. Hunted by the British, he fled to Nazi Germany during World War II, where he sought Hitler's support for Arab independence.

He was sidelined when hatred and violence boiled over yet again leading to the 1948 war between Arabs and the newborn state of Israel with decisive results.

What is important to remember is that al-Husseini's beliefs and viewpoints about Jews and Zionists have not been sidelined; t h e y remained as potent as ever.

Hamas's armed wing is named after *Qassam,* the fighter-preacher whose martyrdom sparked the rebellion; today's boycott of Israel is a direct descendant of the 1936 strike. When Israeli troops detain suspects without charges, establish checkpoints, and demolish homes, they employ tactics and laws inherited from their British predecessors. Furthermore, when Washington advocates for a two-state solution, it references the 1937 Peel proposal, the progenitor of all later partition plans from the U.N.'s in 1947, through the Clinton Parameters for peace, the Trump "deal of the century," and the official policy of the Biden administration.

The rebellion was Arab in nature, not the Zionist counter-rebellion comprising the military, economic, and psychological transformation of the Jewish community which is a vital but often overlooked aspect of how Palestine evolved into Israel.

Kessler correctly reminds us in *Palestine 1936*, "that it was then – not in 1948 – that Palestine's Jews consolidated the demographic, geographic, and political basis of their state-to-be. And it was then that portentous words like 'partition' and 'Jewish state' first appeared on the international diplomatic agenda."

Ultimately, the Arab Revolt also persuaded Britain that its two-decade Zionist experiment had proven too costly – in blood, treasure, and the goodwill of broad swaths of its empire. As war with Hitler loomed, the Chamberlain government concluded it was high time that Palestine's doors – virtually the only ones still open to Jews – be shuttered – exactly what the *White Paper*

enacted. Few decisions in the 20th-century would have consequences as profound.

An event that turned many Jews against the British during World War II was the sinking of the Struma, a ship carrying 769 Jewish refugees from the Romanian Black Sea port of Constanza, which ultimately arrived in Istanbul. The refugees' visa applications for Palestine were denied, and the ship was sent back to the Black Sea, where it sank.

When Churchill replaced Chamberlain, the *Yishuv* believed the *White Paper* would be overturned. As a result, Ben Gurion focused on defeating Hitler and getting refugees to Palestine rather than attempting to reverse the *White Paper*.

The 1939 *White Paper* was repudiated by the Churchill government, and on December 20, 1943, a cabinet committee recommended the partition of Palestine based on the 1937 Peel Report.

On February 18, 1947, the British government announced that it had no authority under the Mandate to determine whether Palestine belonged to the Arabs or the Jews. Consequently, the only way forward was to submit the issue to the United Nations. Thus, Britain requested a special session of the General Assembly to consider the matter.

The meeting took place from April 28 to May 15, 1947. It resolved to set up an 11-member investigating body, the United Nations

Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). The committee completed its report on August 31. The report recommended the end of the British Mandate and that Palestine be partitioned into an Arab and a Jewish state, with an international zone designated for the Holy Places.

Both the British and the Arabs were bitterly opposed to this proposal. On October 17, 1947, the British government made it clear it would not accept responsibility for enforcing such a settlement. On November 29, the General Assembly deliberated on the report and two-thirds of the assembly voted in favour of partition.

In December, the British indicated that they would continue to govern Palestine until May 15, 1948. After that date the Mandate would come to an end. In the meantime, British forces would only be used for self-defence; meaning they would not intervene in any conflicts between Arabs and Jews.

In November, the Jewish population was subjected to a series of attacks, which were followed by retaliatory strikes. In April 1948, the Irgun attacked Deir Yassin, an Arab village near Jerusalem, killing 107 people. This led to the flight of the Arabs from areas with large Jewish populations. By mid-May, about 300,000 Arabs had fled – marking the beginning of the *Nakb*a -- seeking refuge in nearby Arab countries where they were housed in permanent refugee camps.

In retaliation of Deir Yassin, Arabs ambushed a medical convoy,

killing 77 doctors, nurses, teachers, and students.

Mustafa Kabha, a historian at Israel's Open University, laments that in Palestinian collective memory the rebellion has been marginalized, even silenced by Arabs "completely overshadowed by the memory of the 1947-48 Nakba-Catastrophe." It seems natural, he observes, "to dwell on the Nakba, due to the magnitude of the disaster and the fact that much of the blame can be attributed to external factors: the Zionists, the Arab states, the British and other actors. Dealing with 1936-1939 requires much more soul-searching."

The 1948 Partition of Palestine – Creation of the State of Israel

While Sharif Hussein was negotiating with the British for his Arab Kingdom, the Zionists were pursuing their dream of establishing an independent Jewish state. The next two decades was also the time when the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel were aggravating American relations with Arab countries.

Ibn Saud was as outspoken and adamant against Zionism and Israel as any Arab leader. He said that Jews had been the enemies of Arabs since the seventh century. American support of a Jewish state, he told Truman, would be the death blow to American interests in the Arab world, and should a Jewish state come into existence, the Arabs "will lay siege to it until it dies of famine."

In his opposition to the Jewish state, Ibn Saud held what a British official called a "trump card." He could punish the U.S. by

cancelling the Aramco concession given to American oil companies. That possibility greatly alarmed not only the interested oil companies, but also the U.S. State and Defence departments.

By this time, the creation of Israel had its own momentum. In 1947, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine recommended the partition of Palestine, which was accepted by the General Assembly and by the Jewish Agency but rejected by the Arabs.

The United Nations in 1947 only had 57 member states – Israel becoming the 58th in 1948. The decolonization of the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese empires resulted in the 193 U.N. member states in 2025.

Through the partition resolution of 1947, the U.N. recognized the right of the Jewish people to establish their own state, which would henceforth be known as the State of Israel. The Jewish state, the Declaration concluded, would be open to immigration and would be based on freedom, justice, and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel.

Despite the threat of Arab attack, on May 14, 1948, in Tel Aviv, Ben-Gurion and other leaders put their signatures to Israel's Declaration of Independence. On the day of independence, notices were posted throughout Tel Aviv by the Hagana indicating that the new state was in imminent danger.

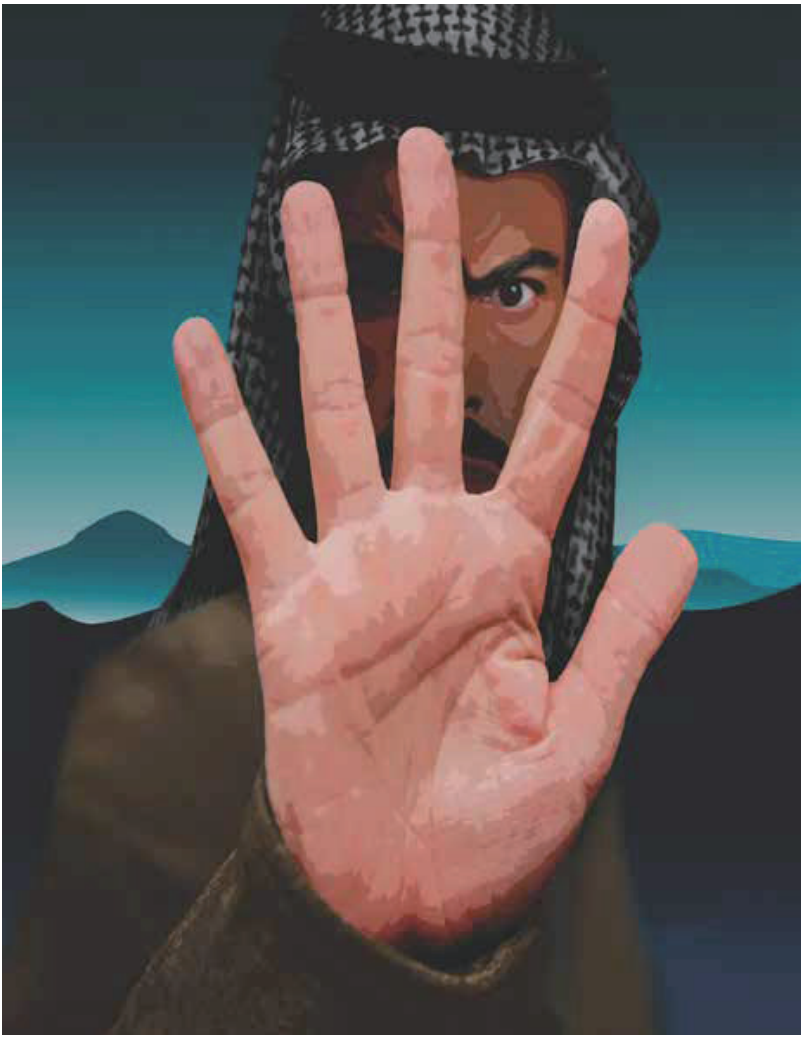
Tel Aviv was immediately bombed by Egyptian jets. The next day, the armies of five Arab states launched an attack. Syrian troops attacked in the Jordan Valley, capturing the town of Zemah. On May 20, they attacked Dagania, which managed to repel the Syrians by May 23, and forced them to withdraw.

In the north the Lebanese army invaded northern Galilee but was stopped by an Israeli counterattack. Other Arab forces succeeded in penetrating into central Galilee, where they were met by Palestinian Arabs.

To the south of the Syrian, Lebanese and “Liberation Army” of Arabs that had attacked the Galilee and the Jewish section of Jerusalem, the Iraqis captured the settlement of Gerulim, but were subsequently driven out by Israeli forces, who captured Arab villages and the town of Jenin. Meanwhile, in the Negev, Israel was attacked by the Egyptian army.

On May 15, the Transjordanian forces crossed the Jordan River and attacked the Jewish New City of Jerusalem. By May 24 the assault had been repelled; however, the Transjordanians continued their offensive on the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

Violence gripped Palestine.



Chapter Eight

First "River to The Sea" War 1948

The wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings
-- Winston Churchill –

War of Independence & Survival

As mentioned earlier, Britain gave up its mandate in 1948 and withdrew its army and administration, plunging Palestine into anarchy. On May 14, 1948, the Jewish National Council proclaimed the State of Israel. It was recognized almost instantly by the Soviet Union, followed quickly by the U.S. The Arab League launched a full-scale attack. The first Arab Israeli *River to the Sea* war had started.

The fact that President Truman had recognized the State of Israel on May 15 was a critical political fact. On May 17, the U.S. introduced a resolution in the Security Council, stating that the situation in Palestine was a breach of the peace under Article 39 of the U.N. Charter. Britain added an amendment to this resolution, deleting the reference to Article 39. This intervention drove the pro-Israel lobby in Washington to put pressure on the government to suppress the American loan to Britain under the Marshall Plan. The Atlee government capitulated and agreed to stop its arms shipments to Arab states.

On May 29, the Security Council called for a cease-fire and

prohibited the importation of arms or military personnel into Palestine or any Arab nations. On June 11, the cease-fire went into effect.

The truce lasted nearly a month, during which time the U.N. tried to formulate a lasting peace plan. The Security Council appointed Count Folke Bernadotte as mediator and tasked him with coming up with a plan. His plan, which he submitted on June 27, recommended the union of the whole of Mandate Palestine in a partnership between the Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Israel.

According to the proposed plan, Jordan would continue its possession of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; the Arabs would acquire the entire Negev; and Israel was to be allocated Western Galilee. Jewish immigration would be unlimited for two years and then controlled by a U.N. agency. Besides, all Arabs were to be allowed to return to their former homes.

Not surprisingly, the plan was unacceptable to both Arabs and Jews.

On July 8, the day before the cease-fire was set to expire, fighting broke out in the Negev. It continued for 10 days. As a result of this conflict, the Israelis succeeded in widening the corridor to Jerusalem and captured significant portions of lower Galilee.

By mid-July, general hostilities had ceased, although occasional conflicts continued.

When the second cease-fire went into effect in late July, more than half a million Arab refugees had fled from Israeli territory. While some were forced to leave, a large number, including the Palestinian Arab leadership, departed voluntarily. Most refugees went to Jordan while others found refuge in Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon.

The General Assembly proposed a modification to the Bernadotte plan. The unification of Israel and Jordan was eliminated, with a suggested partition between Israel and Jordan. Jerusalem and the Negev were to be allocated to Jordan, while Israel would retain western Galilee.

The plan was supported by the U.S. and Britain; however, Israel viewed it as granting too much to the Jordanians. Within the Arab world, the Grand Mufti and the Egyptian leaders stirred opposition against the plan. The Russians, too, regarded this new plan as detrimental to their interests in the Middle East. Additionally, several Catholic states sought to internationalize Jerusalem and its Holy Places. As a result of the conflicting demands, the proposal was defeated.

While the Bernadotte plan was under consideration Ben Gurion sought to lay claim to the Negev which the U.N. had awarded to Israel. A first attack on the Egyptians in October drove them out of much of the Negev; two months later, the Israelis completed the task and dislodged small Transjordanian forces stationed in the area. The Israelis then advanced into the Sinai Desert -- something Israelis have long been doing, during and after every

conflict -- executing the “Greater Israel” strategy -- and will do again after the Gaza War and battles with its October 2023 adversaries in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Iran.

On February 24, 1949, Israel reached an armistice with Egypt, followed by armistices with Lebanon on March 23, Jordan on April 3, and Syria on July 20.

The State of Israel, since its founding in 1948, has been expanding geographically after every war initiated by the Arabs and it will likely do so again after its conflict with Hamas and its allies in Gaza and the West Bank.

During the fighting between Arabs and Jews, a sizable area of Arab territory had been seized and legalized by the Knesset under the Land Acquisition Law of 1953. In addition, Arab lands were taken by the military on national security grounds and given to Jewish settlers.

Most of the land and houses taken belonged to Palestinian Arabs who fled during the fighting. It was confiscated under the Absentees’ Property Law of 1950. This property was given to Israel’s new immigrants, some of whom were themselves refugees from Arab lands. Approximately 418 Arab towns were taken over during this period. Any wonder dispossessed Arabs harbour resentments?

To make matters worse, this transformation of Arab life in Palestine was coupled with the loss of Arab control. Arabs had no

political power under Ottoman or British rule. Nevertheless, Arabs did have high social status as well as wealth which they were able to transform into collective political power – but not used correctly to create a state.

An example of their poor political judgment is their continued support of Hajj Amin as Mufti of Jerusalem. The Supreme Muslim Council had exercised considerable authority in Palestine. The main source of such control resulted from the religious endowment from the *waaf* to which rich Arabs contributed for the benefit of the faithful. After Israel's defeat of the Arab armies in 1949, Ben Gurion instituted the law of abandoned property in 1950, resulting in the acquisition of agricultural land, urban real estate, houses and shops. In this way Arab wealth and influence were seriously undermined. Within this framework, Israel also assumed responsibility over the mosques within its borders.

The more territory Israel annexed, the less was left for a Palestinian state, and the less control Palestinians could have over their lives. Is this the road Palestinians want to stay on? I, for one, don't think so. Hence my proposed alternative solution.

Why?

Let's look at what happened, and what can happen again, not only in the Arab world – but also with its new Middle East neighbour, Israel.

Zionist Israel became a force to contend with after the armistices

were signed. The fierce Arab indignation regarding these agreements and the leaders who signed them, resulted in deadly regime changes.

In Egypt, Premier Nokrashy was assassinated in December 1948; King Farouk's reign ended with a military coup nearly four years later. In Syria and Iraq, a series of coups took place, and in Jordan, King Abdullah was assassinated.

Those who led such rebellions were angry and hostile towards the political establishment, Jews, Zionists, and Israel. Pre-eminent among these radicals was Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who led the coup against King Farouk, and rose to power in 1954.

Meanwhile, in Israel, the January 1949 democratic elections to the Knesset, Israel's parliament, saw Ben Gurion's Mapai Party winning the largest number of seats. Much like today in Israel's parliamentary system, it cobbled together several small parties, most of which had a religious leaning, to form -- unlike today -- a united, secure, and strong government. At Ben Gurion's invitation, Weizmann became president of Israel, a largely ceremonial role.

At this point, Israel was surrounded by Arab states bitterly opposed to the creation of a Jewish homeland. To rid themselves of the Zionists, a total economic boycott was implemented. Trade between Israel and the Arab world was forbidden, and other countries were put on notice that any government that established trade relations with Israel would be excluded from

trade with Arab nations. Border crossings were barred, and Arab airspace was closed to planes flying to Israel.

By the winter of 1950, Israelis were surviving on a subsistence economy with rationing of vital foods and goods.

By 1953, the Israeli government's four-year program which started in 1950 to ensure agricultural self-sufficiency, was beginning to pay off, and a program of economic austerity began to halt ruinous inflation. In addition, foreign capital from the U.S. and Western Europe helped bolster the economy.

During this early period of independence and growth, Germany undertook to pay reparations to Israel as compensation for the Jewish property that the Nazis confiscated. By the end of 1965, Israel received nearly five billion dollars, providing 20 percent of Israel's state development budget.

Such economic improvements led to a resumption of immigration, and by the mid-1950s, a considerable number of Jews from the Maghreb, Tunisia, and Morocco migrated to Israel.

Nevertheless, Israel remained fearful that the U.S. would not continue to support the growing Jewish state, especially when, in October 1953, John Foster Dulles, U.S. Secretary of State, decided to suspend American aid to Israel in response to Israeli raids on Arab border villages.

Saudi Pressure

The U.S. was also under pressure from the Saudis. Ibn Saud threatened to apply sanctions against the American oil concessions because of its support of Israel, “not because of his desire to do so but because the pressure upon him of Arab public opinion was so great that he could no longer resist it.”

Ibn Saud could certainly have cancelled the concession, but at considerable risk. For Aramco was the sole source of his rapidly rising wealth, and the broader relationship with the U.S. provided the basic guarantee of Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity and independence. Ever suspicious of the British, the king feared London might be sponsoring a new coalition to champion the Hashemites, as it had done after World War I, enabling the Hashemites – whom Ibn Saud had driven from Mecca only two decades earlier – to recapture the western part of his country. His apprehension mounted when Abdullah, the Hashemite King of Jordan, was said to have “likened the Saudi regime to the occupation of Palestine.” And the Hashemites constituted, to Ibn Saud, an even greater enemy than the Jews. The Soviet Union and communists were also a more dangerous threat, due to Soviet pressure to the north and the impact of communist activity within the Arab world.

Here we are today, facing the same questions with different political players and philosophies.

French Alliance

Anxious to protect the new state from such changes in policy,

Ben Gurion sought to establish an alliance with France.

From 1945 to 1967, France was Israel's biggest supporter in the West. Part of that was rooted in its wrenching experience with decolonization. In 1954, France faced an anticolonial uprising in Algeria, where the nationalists were backed by Egypt's nationalist president, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

France, viewing Israel as a bulwark against Nasser, drew close, supplying Israel with Mirage fighter jets and nuclear technology that became the foundation of its undeclared nuclear weapons program. But in 1967, days before Israel launched a military strike against Egypt, Charles de Gaulle, then president of France, imposed an arms embargo on Israel and shifted his support to the Arab states.

Understandable, since France has both the largest Muslim and Jewish communities in Western Europe, has faced numerous Islamist terrorist attacks over the years that have caused many members of the Jewish community to leave.

The U.S. then replaced France as its number one ally in the 1967 war. France went on to become the first Western country to develop close ties to the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

In the autumn of 1956, Ben-Gurion along with the army chief of staff Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres, an administrator from the Defence Ministry, flew to a military airfield southwest of Paris for a meeting with the French Prime Minister, Guy Mollet. They

were joined by British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd. During the meeting it was agreed that Britain, France, and Israel would take back the Suez Canal and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt.

Waking up that late September or early October morning to the rumbling sound of the military heavy vehicles, I was a 10-year-old surprised to see so many British and French military vehicles -- trucks, tank carriers with tanks and armoured vehicles --driving to position themselves in the vacant lots next door to my house in Neapolis, in preparation for the Suez military campaign.

My mother, who spoke French and English fluently, was already there talking to the French and British soldiers as they milled around waiting for their next deployment.

Being a deep sleeper then, as I am today, I did not hear the overnight arrival of the military equipment. Greek and Turkish Cypriot playmates, their siblings, and parents were up and about with my mother, asking her what was going on. She explained, as I translated, that they were on their way to the Holy Land.

We kids played football with the soldiers for the few weeks they were around, as we enjoyed the candies they handed out.

On October 29, 1956, Israel launched an attack with a paratrooper drop deep inside Sinai. Under the command of Moshe Dayan, Israel's attack resulted in the expulsion of the Egyptian forces from all of Sinai.

On the political front, the Israeli offensive gave rise to a hostile reaction from the U.S. President Eisenhower sent Ben-Gurion a message asking Israel to withdraw its forces after liquidating the fedayeen bases that had been attacking Israel regularly and return to its original borders. When Ben-Gurion delayed responding, Eisenhower proposed to the U.N. Security Council that an immediate cease-fire come into effect and that Israel withdraw its troops behind the armistice lines.

Security Council members Britain and France naturally rejected the resolution. They had issued their own ultimatum to Israel and Egypt, threatening direct intervention if the combatants did not withdraw to the armistice lines.

The U.S., angered that Britain and France had not consulted with the U.S. before embarking on the Suez campaign, brought the matter before the U.N. General Assembly, where the Suez campaign was severely criticized. On November 4, an Israeli representative informed the General Assembly that Israel would agree to a cease-fire if Egypt did as well.

On November 6, British and French troops landed in the Canal Zone, determined to separate the combatants.

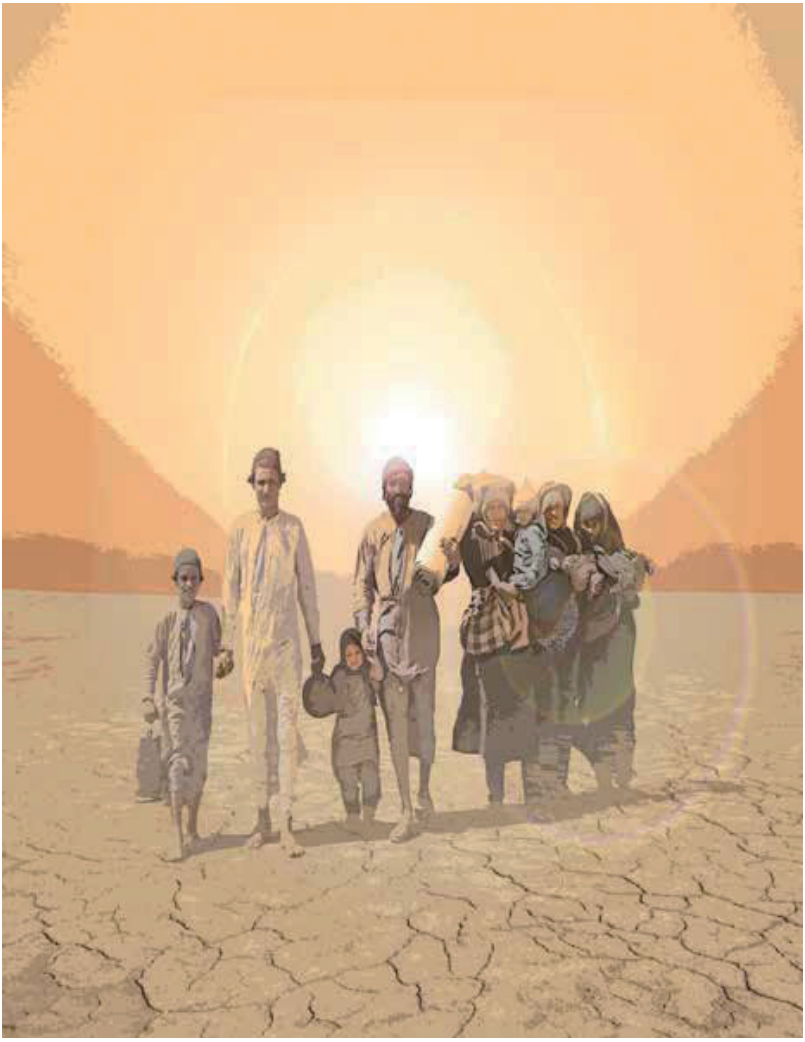
In the meantime, Russia, Egypt's financial, military, and economic supporter, threatened to annihilate Israel if it did not withdraw, and attack Britain and France. America warned Russia it would retaliate if it followed through on its threats.

Although the Russian threat was taken seriously by the Israeli leadership, Ben Gurion was more concerned with Israel's military triumph over Egypt. On November 7, he delivered a victory speech in which he declared that the armistice lines were no longer of any consequence. He also stated that Israel would not agree to stationing U.N. forces in Israel or in any of the occupied territories.

Under U.S. pressure, Britain, France, and Israel withdrew. Following the Suez crisis, there was a widespread feeling that the West had been humiliated and that the Soviet Union had increased its international influence. The U.S. had let down its allies.



Peter de Krassel a founding member of
Democrats for Reagan meeting
Governor Ronald Reagan during the 1980
presidential campaign.



Chapter Nine

Nakba of Palestinian Jews and Arabs

A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective

–Sun Tz—The Art of War

Nakba

The "Disaster" known as Nakba, for some bewildering, irrational, and illogical reasons, is limited in discussions and the media to Palestinian Arabs who left or fled their homes in Israel --whether because they feared for their lives, or because they were told to do so by Arab leaders to avoid injury, or worse, with a promise of return after the end of hostilities.

No mention was made of the Nakba of Jewish Palestinians who were forced to leave their homes and property in Arab-controlled Palestine and Arab countries. There were just as many, if not more, Jewish Palestinians and Jews victimized and forced to flee their Arab countries, communities, and homes than Palestinians who fled Israel.

I will first briefly summarize the plight and flight of Jews in and from Arab countries, because one of the goals of this book is to cancel *Cancel Culture* and take an honest, transparent historical look at Nakba -- the catastrophe that befell Palestinians in 1948 -- and post October 7, 2023, for the two-state solution dream to

become a reality. It is also worth remembering that Jews in Arab countries lost everything and, unlike Arab Palestinians rejected by Arab countries, were resettled in Israel.

Jewish Refugees from the Middle East

In the words of Professor Ada Aharoni, "The cruel displacement of 850,000 Jews who were born and grew up in their ancient communities in Arab lands... should be thoroughly researched by serious academics. ... To be able to reach a peaceful solution, the forced migration of Jews from Arab countries must be acknowledged as one of the tragedies of this long and painful conflict."

Who is a refugee? "A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence," according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The plight of Jews forced out of Arab and Muslim countries before and after 1948 is all too well known. Approximately 850,000 Jews became refugees. Sometimes referred to as "the forgotten refugees," they never received recognition or help rom the international community or compensation for their great losses.

"When the last Jew dies, the temples and religious artifacts and books that were the property of what was once probably the wealthiest Jewish community of the Mediterranean will go to the Egyptian government -- not to me, or my children, or to any of

the numberless descendants of Egyptian Jews," said Andre Aciman, a Jewish refugee from Egypt.

Indigenous Jews of the Middle East

The Jewish people are indigenous to the Middle East. Jews have had a continuous presence in Israel and elsewhere in the region for over 3,000 years.

While the center of ancient Jewish life was in Israel, Diaspora communities developed in Babylon (Iraq), Damascus (Syria), Libya, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and parts of the Roman Empire.

After Rome crushed Jewish revolts in 70 and 135 C.E. and destroyed Jerusalem, the Diaspora grew further. Rome renamed Judah, calling it Syria-Palestina to erase all traces of Jewish civilization. Jewish life continued in the northern part of the land for centuries despite Rome's efforts, but eventually, Jews became an oppressed minority in their ancestral home.

Some survivors were brought to Rome as slaves, forming the nucleus of European Jewry. Meanwhile, many Jews remained in the Middle East and came to be known as "Mizrahim" or "Easterners." Though Jews everywhere have Middle Eastern roots, Mizrahi Jews are those who never left the region.

Colonization

In the seventh century C.E., Arab armies swept out of Arabia under the banner of a new religion, Islam, and conquered vast

regions of the Middle East and North Africa. They came to rule over the Kurds, Jews, Amazigh, and other indigenous peoples. Over the centuries, through a process of colonization, these regions became known as the "Arab world."

After this colonization, Jews and Christians in the region were legally classified as *dhimmis*, an Arabic word meaning "protected person." In return for this "protection," Jews and Christians were expected to pay a special tax and act as an inferior, subject population.

Persecution and Expulsion of Jews

The expulsion of Jews from Arab states constituted an unjust and racist backlash against the reestablishment of Israel in 1948. Contrary to prevailing myths, Jews and Arabs did not always co-exist harmoniously for centuries. Jewish communities thrived at various times and in specific locations, producing some of Judaism's most influential rabbis, scholars, and leaders. During other periods, they suffered severe marginalization, discrimination, and even massacres, though not as frequently as Jews in Europe. Throughout this history, Jews were often relegated to the status of second-class citizens at best and brutally oppressed at worst. Their expulsion by Arab governments in the 20th century was rooted in this historic oppression.

"The condition of the Jews is another form of slavery," the Reverend Lancelot Addison, British Chaplain in Tangier, Morocco, 1662-1669, accurately described.

During European colonial rule in the Middle East, dhimmi rules were mostly abolished. Jews began to participate fully in economic, political, and cultural life. They became lawyers, bankers, and civil servants, and in some cases, they rose to high government positions.

However, this improved status also fuelled resentment and hostility towards Jews amid the 20th-century Intolerance and marginalization of non-Arab population. Newly independent Arab states marginalized and suppressed the cultures of non-Arab and/or non-Muslim people, such as Copts, Assyrians, Kurds, Amazighs, and Jews.

The Influence of Nazism

Nazi Germany exerted significant influence in the Middle East in the 1930s. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 and later subsidized by German funds, made anti-Jewish racism central to its ideology.

Palestinian Arab leader Haj Amin al-Husseini collaborated with Adolf Hitler during World War II, broadcasting Nazi propaganda throughout the Arab world from a Berlin radio station. He hoped to bring the "Final Solution" to the Middle East, and his racist propaganda fuelled more anti-Semitism in the Arab world. He met Adolph Hitler in 1941.

Today this racism against Jews remains a significant influence in the Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood is a powerful organization throughout the region, and Hamas, which held sway

over Gaza, is the Palestinian wing of this legacy.

Jews were regarded as individuals, who could generally be tolerated if they accepted the dominance of Muslims, but who were viewed as lacking honour and unable to fight. This context is crucial for understanding the sense of humiliation within the Islamic world at being defeated militarily by Israel. A s Arabs used to say in the schoolyard, “It is like being beaten by a girl," as noted by Tunisian-Jewish writer Albert Memmi. In the mid-20th century, the dual forces of pan-Arab nationalism and political Islamism brought about the demise of Mizrahi Jewish communities.

Today, a remarkable 99 percent of these communities no longer exist. Before and after Israel declared independence in 1948, hostility toward Jews surged dramatically across the Middle East. Arab regimes, coordinated by the Arab League, enacted legislation denying human and civil rights to Jews. As a result of discrimination, violence, expulsion, and prevailing fear, 850,000 Mizrahi Jews became refugees, forced to leave everything behind.

Zionism and the aspiration for a Jewish homeland was seeded and started after 1,900 years of dispossession and oppression across Europe and the Middle East. Theodore Herzl promoted Zionism as a liberation movement and worked tirelessly to reestablish a Jewish state in their ancestral homeland. Unfortunately, Arab leaders refused to recognize Jewish rights to self-determination. The Arab League, founded in 1945, not only

initiated a war to destroy Israel in 1948 but also enacted discriminatory laws against Jews living in Arab countries.

Iraqi (Babylonian) Jews

The Iraqi Jewish community was one of the world's oldest. In 586 B.C.E., the Babylonian Empire conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem leading to the exile of most Jews to Babylon (Iraq).

About 50 years later, Babylon was conquered by the Persians, whose ruler, Cyrus the Great, decided to free all exiled peoples. Many Jews returned to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem and reestablish Jewish sovereignty, while some chose to remain.

After Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Jewish life shifted to the Galilee and to Babylon. Babylonian Jews produced many great scholars whose influence on Judaism endures to this day. By the 20th century, about 150,000 Jews lived in Iraq and played a vital role in shaping the country following its independence in 1932.

In 1933, after the Nazis took power in Germany, key Iraqi Arab nationalists, seeking an anti-British ally, contacted German intelligence. Nazi propaganda soon appeared in Baghdad, influencing Iraqi government policies. In 1934 scores of Jews were fired from positions in Iraq's government, and anti-Jewish quotas were introduced in universities and the civil service.

In 1941, pro-Nazi Iraqi officers, known as the "Golden Square," overthrew Iraq's government with significant popular support.

From June 1 to June 2, 1941, inspired by anti-Jewish broadcasts, thousands of Iraqis armed themselves and attacked Jews in Baghdad and Basra, killing hundreds and wounding 2,000. A mass grave for 600 Jewish bodies was dug.

In 1948, the Iraqi government passed a series of racist laws depriving Jews of their livelihoods. Many Jews began to flee, and in 1951, Israel launched Operations Ezra and Nehemiah to help them escape. About 120,000 to 130,000 Iraqi Jews were airlifted to the Jewish state. As they left, Iraq stripped them of their citizenship and confiscated their property. Today, no Jews remain in Iraq. Their ethnic cleansing is complete.

Egyptian Jews

In 1937, there were 63,500 Jews in Egypt—a place where Jewish communities had existed since Biblical times. In the 1940s, the rise of Egyptian nationalism contributed to a rise in anti-Semitism. In 1945, riots erupted, resulting in the death of 10 Jews; 350 injured, and numerous Jewish institutions torched.

Between June and November 1948, the Egyptian government engaged in violence and repressive measures. A series of bombings killed more than 70 Jews and wounded nearly 200. Rioting over the next few months resulted in many more Jewish deaths. Two thousand Jews were arrested, and many had their property confiscated.

In 1956, the Egyptian government sent 1,000 Jews to prisons and detention camps and expelled 25,000. They were allowed to

take only one suitcase and a small amount of cash and were forced to sign declarations "donating" their property to the Egyptian government.

By 1957, the Jewish population of Egypt had dropped to 15,000. After the 1967 Six-Day War, Egypt renewed its persecution, and the community dwindled to just 2,500. By the 1970s, after the remaining Jews were granted permission to leave the country, the community had dwindled to only a few families.

Jewish Refugees from Arab and Muslim Countries – 1948 – 1978

In 1948, almost one million Jews lived in Arab-Muslim lands. Jews are an indigenous Middle Eastern people who lived across the region since before the founding of Islam. In the early 20th century, Baghdad was composed of 40 percent Jews.

After 1948, these Jewish communities were decimated. Jews were stripped of their citizenship and, in most cases, dispossessed of their property.

Approximately 650,000 Jewish refugees went back to their homeland in Israel, where they and their descendants became most of Israel's population and an integral part of Israeli society. Two hundred thousand fled to the West.

In 1948, more than 750,000 Palestinian Arabs became refugees because of the conflict with Israel, a number roughly equivalent to that of the Jewish refugees. About 165,000 of them remained, became Israeli citizens, and now make up approximately 20

percent of the population. In contrast, Jewish refugees from Arab countries fled primarily because of the active oppression they faced from Arab governments.

Another key difference between these refugee crises is that the UN set up a special agency-UNRWA-to assist the Palestinians and has passed more than 100 resolutions concerning their plight. UNRWA still operates today.

In stark contrast, Jewish refugees received little recognition and no help from the U.N. They were absorbed and settled in Israel, while Arab countries refused to accept and settle Arab Palestinians in a similar manner. Instead, they were placed in refugee camps as a deliberate political strategy. Today, 99 percent of Jews have been ethnically cleansed from Arab and Muslim countries.

An Unresolved Injustice

The Nakba, along with the history and rights of Jewish refugees, must be acknowledged. Although they were ultimately absorbed in Israel and Western nations, the injustice they suffered needs to be addressed. They were displaced and their vibrant, rich cultures were destroyed – no different from those of the Palestinians.

Israel has designated November 30 as the Memorial Day for Jewish refugees from Arab states and has begun raising awareness through events at the U.N.

Why is the Jewish refugee issue so critical?

Too many people view the Middle East conflict through a distorted lens.

They remain unaware of the suffering endured by Jews who were forced out of their centuries-old communities in the Middle East and North Africa. Today, there is a growing recognition that there is a moral and legal imperative for the rights of Jewish refugees to be placed on the international agenda alongside the Palestinian issue.

In 2008, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution requiring that Jewish refugees be mentioned in all official documents that refer to Palestinian refugees.

In 2010, the Israeli Knesset enacted a law stating that no peace agreement can be signed unless compensation for Jewish refugees from Arab countries is addressed.

"We were uprooted and expelled. We have been denied compensation. We watch helplessly as our culture, language, and legacy disappear and our part in history is systematically erased. In short, we have been truly ethnically cleansed," said Raphael Luzon, a Libyan Jew whose uncle and eight cousins were murdered in Libya in 1967.

At least half of Israel's Jewish population consists of Jewish refugees from Arab countries and their descendants. The vast majority do not wish to return to the places where they suffered intolerable persecution and violence. What they desire is for the

international community to recognize their plight and to integrate full compensation for lost property into any final Middle East peace agreement. The assets lost by Jewish refugees are estimated to be 50 percent greater than those lost by Palestinians.

"Only the acknowledgement of the inconvenient truth will lead to reconciliation, because without the truth, there can be no reconciliation," reminds Gina Bublil Waldman, a Jewish refugee from Libya.

Israeli Spin

Israeli historians and spin doctors have constructed a self-image, a myth, that Arab Palestinians fled Palestine voluntarily after the State of Israel was founded on May 15, 1948, “temporarily” due to a request of the neighbouring Arab armies that were coming to their defence, making way for them to destroy the fledgling Jewish state, with the expectation that they could return after an Arab victory, or out of fear of being killed by Israelis defending the newborn state. A moral victory for brave fighters against hostile Arabs is a partial narrative that I have recounted numerous times over the decades whenever I gave a talk about Israel or got into discussions on the subject.

In July 2022, after a dinner in New York City with Ken Tiven, a friend and fellow board member of the *Breaking Housing Matters* charity, and his son Oren-Andrew Wentzel, a precocious 19-year-old transferring from Antioch College to Chatham University in Pittsburgh, I was prompted to engage with this topic.

Oren convincingly challenged my views, leading me to research the *Nakba,* or "Catastrophe," in Arabic*.* The pro-Palestinian protests on university campuses across the U.S. in the wake of October 7, 2023, and Gaza War, confirmed the necessity for such research, pushing me toward the most objective conclusions I could reach.

During my research, I came across Ilan Pappe's book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, first published in October 2006. Pappe, an Israeli historian and socialist activist, serves as a Professor of History at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the College of Social Sciences and International Studies and Director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Exeter.

The book is a relevant scholarly historical account of the Nakba – the catastrophic removal of Arab Palestinians from *Eretz Israel*, the Land of Israel -- that must be acknowledged if Israel is to coexist peacefully with a Palestinian State.

While I do not agree with many of his conclusions – also with the title of the book -- I do agree with him that "the painful journey into the past is the only way forward if we want to create a better future for us all, Palestinians and Israelis alike."

The *Nakba* that befell Palestinians, is an elusive term Pappe reminds us, as "it refers more to the disaster itself rather than who and what caused it."

Palestinian Population

In early December 1947, the population of the future state of Israel was 1.3 million, of which one million were Palestinians with 600,000 Jews among them, and the remainder belonging to various Arab Christian sects. The indigenous Arab Palestinians accounted for two-third, down from 90 percent in 1917 when the British Mandate began. One third of locals were Jewish including long-time residents and Jewish Zionist refugees from war-torn Europe and survivors of the Holocaust.

At the end of the British Mandate, almost all of the cultivated land was owned by indigenous Arabs, with only 5.8 percent in Jewish hands in 1947. Settler colonies were spread across the country surrounded by Arabs and their fertile landscapes, similar to the settler communities on the West Bank.

Most Jewish immigrants preferred to live in the cities, rather than in the countryside as farmers, resulting in towns that were almost equally inhabited.

The question at the time was how to devise two distinct states, Arab Palestine and Jewish Israel, from such a mismatched human patchwork.

Partition was the British solution and became a centrepiece of Zionist policy as early as 1937. Earlier, the British had put forward several other options, notably the creation of a bi-national state and a cantonized Palestine following the Swiss model, which both sides refused to consider. In the end, London abandoned efforts

to find a solution for the looming conflict and transferred the question of Palestine to the U.N. in February 1947.

Partition became the name of the game at the U.N. because both Britain and the Jews in Israel backed the plan while the Arab leadership boycotted the meetings. Consequently, the interests of Palestinians were excluded from the process.

On November 29, 1947, the U.N. General Assembly passed Resolution 181, partitioning Palestine.

Partition Plan

The inexperienced two-year old U.N. was entrusted with the issue of Palestine's future. Its fate was placed in the hands of a Special Committee for Palestine, (UNSCOP), none of whose members had any prior experience in conflict resolution or substantial knowledge of Palestine's history.

I devoted a chapter in *Custom Maid Knowledge for New World Disorder,* to why the U.N should be abolished, and replaced, by a global body relevant to the 21st-century.

UNSCOP recommended partitioning Palestine into two states, bound together in a federation-like manner through economic unity. It also recommended that Jerusalem be established as a *corpus separatum* under an international regime administered by the U.N.

The Catholic Church, various Protestant missionary societies, and

governments in the European concert, led by Britain and France, competed among themselves for the future of a “Christian” Palestine which they sought to pry away from the Ottoman Turks.

Back in February 1947, when the British first announced their intention to leave Palestine, the two communities seemed closer to total warfare than ever. Anxieties and tensions ran high but no outbreak of any significant violence occurred before the U.N. adopted its Partition Resolution.

As long as it remained unclear how the U.N. would vote, life carried on normal. Nonetheless, law and order collapsed soon after the Partition Plan was announced and a sense of foreboding descended sparking endless conflicts.

Partitioning an overwhelmingly Arab Palestinian province into two equal states and placing the Holy City of Jerusalem in the hands of the U.N. was a non-starter for both Palestinian Arabs and Zionists.

However, the Partition Plan designated the Negev, the coast, the eastern valleys, Marj Ibn Amir, Baysan Valley, and lower Galilee to the Jewish State of Israel.

Ben-Gurion wanted more. He had formed an informal “war cabinet” of Jewish officers who had served in the British army. When other *Hagana* members complained about being excluded, he disbanded the group. Nevertheless, he continued

to meet with them informally and impressed upon them the importance of the takeover of the country. In October 1947, Ben-Gurion wrote to General Ephraim Ben Artzi, the most senior officer among them, explaining his desire to create a military force capable of repelling a potential attack from neighbouring Arab states and occupying as much of the country as possible, and ideally all of it.

Left to their own devices to resolve, even before the British announced when they would leave, Zionist leaders decided to determine the territory of their future state according to the location of the most remote and isolated Jewish settlements. All the land between them – isolated at the extreme ends of the Mandatory state – had to become Jewish and preferably enveloped by additional "security zones" as buffer areas between them and Palestinian areas.

Being privy to the British negotiations with the Hashemites in Transjordan, several members of the Zionist leadership discussed one constraint that could influence the shape of their future homeland: the possibility that certain areas in the east of Palestine, today's West Bank, could become part of a future Transjordan rather than Israel. In late 1946, the Jewish Agency had embarked on intensive negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan, the son of the Hashemite royal family in the Hejaz, governing the holy Muslim cities of Mecca and Medina, as discussed in an earlier chapter.

Abdullah had been promised the Kingdom of Iraq, but when his

brother Faisel, who was given Syria by the British, was ousted by the French who governed Syria, he was compensated by the British with Iraq, leaving Abdullah with Transjordan.

As the eldest son of the Hashemite dynasty, Abdullah was unhappy with his share of the deal. Transjordan was little more than an arid desert principality east of the River Jordan, full of Bedouin tribes and Circassian villages. He wanted more. He wanted to expand into fertile, cultural, and populated Palestine. The best way to achieve this, he soon found out, was to cultivate a good relationship with the Zionist leadership. After the Second World War he reached an agreement in principal with the Jewish Agency on how to divide post-mandatory Palestine between them. Serious negotiations started after the U.N. Partition Plan in Resolution 181 was announced.

As there were very few Jewish settlements in the area the king wanted, today's West Bank, the Zionist leadership agreed to give up this part of Palestine, even though it included some biblical Jewish sites, such as the city of Hebron. In return, the king agreed not to join any Arab force against the Jewish state – a decision for which he paid with his life to an assassin's bullets.

The reason there were so few Jewish settlements in the West Bank was that the Jordanian army, with support from an Iraqi contingent, successfully repelled repeated Jewish attempts to settle in parts of the West Bank throughout the latter part of 1948.

The first Arab Israeli War began in 1948 without the Jordanian army being part of the Arab Legion, which meant the Legion lacked the serious capacity to defend Palestinians or prevent collective displacement.

Immediately following the adoption of U.N. Resolution 181 that partitioned Palestine, the Arab League, based in Cairo and composed of the foreign ministers of Arab states declared, in December 1947, that they would dispatch arms and troops to defend Palestine – and, indeed, did. This political move provided fodder for the spin, serving as manna from heaven for the Jewish community, which seized upon the official declaration to portray doomsday scenarios – an imminent "second Holocaust!"

The Jewish leadership was fully aware that the Arab leaders' rhetoric was in no way matched by any serious preparations on the ground. They were well- informed about the Arabs' poor equipment, lack of battlefield experience, and training, and limited capability to wage any kind of war.

Ben-Gurion, and the Zionist leaders, were confident they had the military upper hand and could implement most of their collective displacement plans. They were right in this assessment.

On the eve of the 1948 war, Jewish armed forces consisted of around 50,000 troops, of which 30,000 were combat soldiers. The rest were auxiliaries living in various settlements. These troops were supported by a small air force, a navy, tanks, armoured vehicles, and heavy artillery.

The 7,000 Palestinians facing the Jewish army consisted of irregular paramilitary groups that lacked military structure or hierarchy and were poorly armed. In February 1948, they were joined by approximately 1,000 Arab volunteers, which brought their numbers to around 3,000 over the next few months.

Until May 1948, both sides were poorly equipped. Then, the newly established Israeli army, with the support of the country's Communist Party, received a substantial shipment of heavy arms from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, while the Arab army volunteers also acquired some heavy weaponry.

A few weeks into the war, Israeli recruitment was so efficient that by the end of the summer, its army numbered 80,000 troops. The Arab regular force never exceeded the threshold of 50,000. In addition, it had stopped receiving arms from Britain, its main arms supplier.

Many Zionist leaders regretted the decision to relinquish the West Bank and were instrumental in the push to occupy and settle it after the Six-Day War in 1967, and again during the post-October 7 Gaza War which triggered the West Bank collective displacement by Jewish settlers.

Plan D

Codenamed Plan *Dalet,* D, this was the fourth and final blueprint prepared by Ben-Gurion on March 10, 1948, in collaboration with 10 Zionist leaders and military officers, all of whom would later assume political and military leadership positions in the future

Israeli government, diplomatic service, and the military. Notable figures like Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Yigal Allon, Yigael Yadin, and Moshe Sharet merit mention, due to their prominence. They all moved up within the political and military ranks of the future State of Israel.

The group was known as *Haveadah Hamyeatzet* – the Consultant Committee, an ad-hoc assembly formed primarily to plan the collective displacements of Palestinians.

The plan contained direct references to the geographical parameters of the future Jewish state, called for the removal of Arab Palestinians residing therein, and outlined the destruction of their rural villages and urban areas.

This plan was distributed to the commanders of the *Hagana* brigades as unambiguous operational orders for action: occupation, destruction, and expulsion, as clearly illustrated in the Israeli documents released from the IDF archives in the late 1990s.

It took six months to execute and resulted in the removal of more than 750,000 people, the destruction of 531 villages, and 11 urban neighbourhoods.

The policy of the plan was initially based on retaliation against Palestinian attacks on Jewish communities and convoys in February 1947, which then transformed itself into an initiative aimed at the collective displacement of Palestinians. “Only a

state with at least 80 percent Jews is a viable and stable state," Ben-Gurion said in 1947.

"The British played a truly diabolical role, as they disarmed Palestinian residents who had weapons, promising to protect the people against Jewish attacks, but then instantly reneged on that promise," Pappe wrote. They stood by and did nothing to protect the Palestinians from December 1947 until they left on May 15, 1948, even though it was their duty to protect the Palestinians during the Mandate until they departed. Their conduct, as many British politicians would later admit, formed one of the most shameful chapters in the history of the British Empire in the Middle East.

No wonder one can still hear Palestinians say today: "The main responsibility for our catastrophe lies with the British Mandate." This quote was first stated by Jamil Khaddura, a refugee from Suhmata, near Acre, who bore this sense of betrayal with him throughout his life and repeated it before a joint British parliamentary Middle East commission of inquiry on Palestinian refugees established in 2001.

The British avoided any serious intervention as early as October 1947, standing idly by in the face of attempts by Jewish forces to control outposts; nor did they try to stop small-scale infiltration by Arab volunteers. In December 1947, they still had 75,000 troops in Palestine, but they were dedicated solely to safeguarding the eviction of the Mandatory soldiers, officers, and officials. The U.N. officials in Palestine also took no action beyond

watching and reporting.

Wingate

British officer Orde Charles Wingate was the person who made the Zionist leaders realize that the idea of a Jewish statehood had to be closely associated with militarism and an army, firstly to protect the growing number of Jewish enclaves across Palestine, but more crucially, because acts of armed aggression were an effective deterrent against the possible resistance of local Palestinians. From there, the road to contemplating the enforced transfer of a large number of indigenous people was very short.

Wingate was born in India to a military family and received a deeply religious upbringing. He began an Arabophile career in the Sudan, where he gained prestige with a particularly effective ambush policy against slave-traders. He was transferred to Palestine in 1936, where he became enchanted by the Zionist dream. He actively took it upon himself to teach and encourage Jewish settlers and their troops to adopt more effective combat tactics and retaliation methods against the local population.

Wingate transformed the *Hagana* – which literally means "defence" -- the principal Jewish paramilitary organization in Palestine, established in 1920 to defend Jewish settlements. Under his influence, the *Hagana* quickly became the military arm of the Jewish Agency, the Zionist government body in Palestine that ultimately developed and then implemented plans for the Zionist military takeover of Palestine.

An important part of the Zionist military was the training of the *Palmach*, a special commando unit founded in 1941. It was originally created to assist the British Army in the war against the Nazis in case they reached Palestine. Once it became clear that the Germans were not coming, their zeal and activities were directed against the Palestinian rural areas.

Wingate succeeded in attaching *Hagana* troops to the British forces during the Arab revolt so that they could learn firsthand what a "punitive mission" to an Arab village ought to entail.

The *Hagana* also gained valuable military experience in World War II when many of its members volunteered for the British war effort. Others who remained behind in Palestine were organized in 1933 into an intelligence unit, whose main function was to intercept British messages between Arab political institutions inside and outside Palestine. It infiltrated the 1,200 or so Palestinian villages that had dotted the countryside for centuries, to build *Village Files* carefully charting and mapping rural Palestine in preparation for the future takeover of the country and setting up a network of spies and collaborators inside the rural hinterland that helped identify the thousands of Palestinians who were later executed on the spot or imprisoned.

Jewish National Fund

Founded in 1901, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) was the principal Zionist tool for the acquisition of land in Palestine. Inaugurated by the fifth Zionist Congress, it spearheaded the Zionization of Palestine throughout the Mandatory years. It was

designed, from the outset, to be the “custodian,” on behalf of the Jewish people, of the land the Zionists gained possession of in Palestine.

One of the unpleasant tasks assigned to the JNF was to evict Palestinian tenants from land they had toiled on for generations, land bought from absentee landlords who lived in towns or cities as far afield as Haifa, Jaffa, Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, and Istanbul.

Many of the evictions were facilitated by the *Hagana*. Over time, they became more comprehensive and widespread. The *Hagana* was joined by the Zionist Irgun, Stern Gang, and other Israeli fighters executing a plan for forced evictions and confiscations. They seized land, homes, and businesses, and killed Arabs along the way, regardless of whether the individuals got in their way or resisted.

The official Zionist strategy was spun and fed throughout this period by two key impulses. The first consisted of ad-hoc reactions to two startling developments on the ground: one was the fragmentation, if not total disintegration, of the Palestinian political and military infrastructures; the other, the growing disarray and confusion within the Arab world in the face of the aggressive Jewish initiatives and the simultaneous international endorsement of the Jewish state.

The second impulse was to exploit to the maximum the unique opportunity that had emerged to make their dream of an

exclusive Jewish state a reality.

I agree with Pappe that there was, and still is, a need -- both historical and political-- to go beyond contemporary stubborn, ingrained positions for us to fully understand the roots of the current Israeli Palestinian conflict, and the wars in Gaza and the West Bank. Only then can we resolve it with the creation of a Palestinian State.

For readers interested in learning more about punitive missions, Pappe describes several in detail, citing the murders, plunders, and crimes that took place based on archival material released by the Israeli Defence Forces.

Ethnic Cleansing

I disagree with Pappe's description of the *Nakba* as "ethnic cleansing." The term "Ethnic Cleansing" only emerged as a definition of a crime that became widely recognized in 1994, following the war in former Yugoslav provinces of Kosovo and Serbia -- re-ignited conflict between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. Tracing back through a Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and British empires, the Crusaders participated in the ongoing battles between two religious factions, vying for control over Jerusalem and the land of Palestine.

The roots of collective dispossession are ancient with foreign invaders regularly enacting the "Ethnic Cleansing" concept against indigenous populations from biblical times to the height of colonialism, -- including the colonization of Australia, New

Zealand, and the United States of America.

I personally witnessed this phenomenon while living in Cyprus in the 1960s, when Greek Cypriots engaged in similar practices against Turkish Cypriots.

Zionists were not the first to engage in the practice – or the last – as we witnessed in Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, other African countries, and more recently when Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008; and later Ukraine, first in 2014, and again in February 2022, and the war that followed.

Nakba 2.0 Redux

The Gaza War, which was triggered by Hamas on October 7, 2023, has shifted from a defensive Israeli military operation to a collective dispossession of Gaza and the West Bank.

"I'm afraid I won't be able to go home like in 1948," said Saleema al-Saadi, 83, a resident of the Jenin camp who said she had been displaced during that earlier conflict.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asserted that the enemy would pay a "huge price" for the attack and that the I.D.F. would turn parts of Gaza, where Hamas was operating, "into rubble," and called on "the residents of Gaza" to "leave now because we will operate forcefully everywhere," indicating that the occupation will last indefinitely.

"Gaza will be totally destroyed," said Israeli Finance Minister

Bezalel Smotrich, predicting that people “will leave in great numbers to third countries.”

Netanyahu had urged his citizens to remember “what Amalek did to you,” a phrase many interpreted as a reference to the demand in the biblical passage calling for the Israelites to “kill alike men and women, infants and suckling’s” of their ancient enemy. Government and military officials characterized their adversaries as “human animals,” and subsequently called for “total annihilation.”

The largest contiguous area the army controls is around the Gaza border, where the military has razed Palestinian homes, farmland and infrastructure to the point of “uninhabitability," according to Israeli soldiers and rights groups. This military buffer zone has doubled in size. Israel has depicted its tightening grip as a temporary necessity to pressure Hamas into releasing the remaining hostages taken during the October 7, 2023 attack that started the war.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has said that even after Hamas is defeated, Israel will keep security control in Gaza and push Palestinians to leave.

The demolition close to the border and the systematic expansion of the buffer zone has been going on since the war began, five Israeli soldiers said.

"They destroyed everything they could, they shot everything that

looks functioning... [the Palestinians] will have nothing to come back to, they will not come back, never," a soldier deployed with a tank squad guarding the demolition teams said. He and four other soldiers spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

A report documenting the accounts of soldiers who were in the buffer zone was released early April 2025 by *Breaking The Silence*, an anti-occupation veterans' group.

"The IDF has now completed its takeover of the Morag axis, which crosses Gaza between Rafah and Khan Younis, turning the entire area between the Philadelphia Route along the border with Egypt and Morag into part of the Israeli security zone," said Defence Minister Israel Katz in April 2025.

"Now is the time to rise up, remove Hamas and release all the Israeli hostages – this is the only way to end the war," Katz added.

Israel announced a major expansion of military operations in Gaza in early April 2025, saying large areas of the Palestinian territory would be seized and added to its security zones, accompanied by large scale evacuations of the population.

Katz's statement did not make clear how much land Israel intended to seize or whether the move represented a permanent annexation of territory which would add further pressure on a population already living in one of the most crowded areas in the

world. The reality is, Israel is annexing Gaza.

According to the Israeli rights group *Gisha*, Israel has taken control of some 62 square kilometres or about 17 percent of the total area of the Gaza Strip, as part of a buffer Zone around the edges of the enclave.

Seizing the buffer zone, which contains infrastructure, including wells, sewage pumping stations and wastewater treatment facilities, as well as a significant part of Gaza's agricultural land, would also increase pressure on the enclave's ability to sustain itself.

But Israel wants more than that. Netanyahu made that clear on April 7, 2025, during his press conference with Trump, and again the next day, after Trump repeated his idea of turning Gaza into a Riviera. Netanyahu praised it as beneficial to the people of Gaza.

In Israel, the idea that Palestinians would be deported from Gaza was once the province of a far-right fringe. Since Trump proposed in February 2025 that Palestinians be removed from Gaza to make room for a Riviera on the Med, Netanyahu and other Israeli politicians have talked more openly about a future in which Israel controls Gaza indefinitely. Israel’s defence minister has established an office to oversee the policy.

“The encouragement, the boost it has given is to a camp in Israel which is very extreme, very sum-zero that was gaining power but is now really feeling it can operationalize things,” said Daniel

Levy, the president of the U.S./Middle East Project, a group based in London and New York.

Gaza Today

Gaza today is a scene of devastation, marked by rubble, buried bodies, and shell-shocked, starving civilians, because of the horrific images Hamas terrorists captured on handheld cameras of their murderous rampage on October 7, 2023, and showed it to the world. The shocking images depicted burned bodies, children's beds soaked in blood, abducted women stripped down and paraded through cheering crowds in the streets of Gaza." Hamas massacred entire families in their homes, raped women, and attacked innocent people enjoying a music festival, slaughtering 1,200 of them and taking 251 hostages, "ranging from a 9-month-old baby to an 86-year-old man."

We're "living in a world fundamentally reshaped by Hamas' murder spree and Israel's bloody reprisal – with no sense on the horizon that what's broken will be repaired," said Zack Beauchamp in *Vox*.

Hamas has declared "victory" over Israel, with some of their officials vowing that their fighters will carry out more October 7-style attacks in the future. Hamas has refused to surrender because the group wants to secure its future in Gaza. Its unwillingness to disarm and surrender is rooted in its ideology.

The group's leaders have acknowledged that the Israeli response to the October 7 has caused enormous destruction. However,

they said it is a “price” Palestinians must pay for their ultimate freedom.

“Surrender, as Israel and America are calling for it, is not in Hamas’s dictionary,” said Khalid al-Hroub, a professor at Northwestern University in Qatar, who has written books about the group.

Izz al-Din al-Haddad, the leader of Hamas’s military wing, said during the 2025 ceasefire negotiations, that if he could not get what he described as an honourable deal to end the war with Israel, then the conflict would become a war of liberation or the group would face “martyrdom,” according to a senior Middle Eastern intelligence official familiar with al-Haddad’s thinking.

What Hamas considers to be an “honourable deal” is an agreement that could lead to the end of the war and enable the group to continue wielding power in Gaza. Hamas has firmly rejected ending the war on terms set by Israel, which includes Hamas disarming and its leaders going into exile. It has shown a willingness to tolerate the suffering of civilians in pursuit of the deal it wants.

The group’s extensive tunnel network spanning 450 miles is partially hidden beneath hospitals, schools, mosques, U.N. offices, and civilian infrastructure. This network, some wide enough for Hamas officials to drive a car inside, connects underground weapons factories to storage facilities – with close to 5,700 shafts leading to them, with entry and exit points in

homes across Gaza -- are a subterranean nightmare for the Israeli military and the core of Hamas's ability to survive. "The Hamas tunnel system was an essential, if not existential element of their original battle plan," said Ralph F. Goff, a former senior C.I.A. official who served in the Middle East.

The Hamas handbook for underground combat describes, in meticulous detail, how to navigate in darkness, move stealthily beneath Gaza, and fire automatic weapons in confined spaces for maximum lethality.

The I.D.F. has repeatedly opposed a full occupation of Gaza, warning that demolishing all Hamas tunnels and bunkers could take years. The underground-combat manual also contains camouflage techniques and instructions for using compasses or GPS to locate tunnel entrances, swiftly entering and exiting them and moving efficiently with night-vision goggles equipped with infrared to ambush Israeli soldiers.

"Hamas combat strategy is based on underground tactics," said Tamir Hayman, a former head of Israel's military intelligence. "This is one of the primary reasons they have managed to withstand the I.D.F. thus far."

The aim, according to Salah al-Din al-Awawdeh, a Hamas member and former fighter in its military wing who is now an analyst based in Istanbul, "is to vanish, avoid direct confrontation, while launching tactical attacks against the occupation army. The emphasis is on patience."

Before October 7, the Qassam Brigade operated as “an army with training bases and stockpiles,” said al-Awawdeh. “But during this war, they are behaving as guerillas.”

According to *Airwars*, a London based conflict monitor, Israel is using Artificial Intelligence in its war against Hamas. A case in point is the killing of Ibrahim Biari, a top Hamas commander who had helped plan the October 7 massacres. He was hiding in the Gaza network of tunnels making it difficult for Israel to locate him. Israel had intercepted his calls and tested the A.I. audio tool, which gave his approximate location. Israel ordered airstrikes to target the identified area on October 31, 2023, killing Biari.

The audio tool is just one example of how Israel has used the war in Gaza to test and deploy A.I. backed military technologies to a degree not seen before. An example being combining A.I. with facial recognition software to match partially obscured or injured faces to real identities. It has also created an Arabic language A.I. model to power a chatbot that could scan and analyse text messages, social media posts and other Arabic language data.

No other nation has been as active as Israel in experimenting with A.I. tools in real-time battles. After Israeli ground troops invaded in late October 2023, Hamas further transformed civilian areas of Gaza into military zones, setting booby traps in numerous neighbourhoods, creating confusion about what a combatant looks like by dressing its fighters as civilians clad in jeans, sweatshirts, sandals, and sneakers. They used residential buildings and homes to store weapons which they could pick up

and use when exiting the tunnels. They also employed children as lookouts.

Hamas showcased most of these tactics in an extensive eight-minute video released on its social media channel in early April 2024.

Israeli officials assert that Hamas's tactics explain why Israel has been forced to strike so much civilian infrastructure, resulting in the deaths of many Palestinians and the detention of numerous civilians.

For Hamas, "it was always about avoiding losses for as long as possible so they can fight another day," said Andrew Kreig, an expert on military strategy at King's College London. "They're nowhere near being defeated."

International law requires combatants to avoid using "civilian objects," which include homes, schools, hospitals, and mosques for military objectives.

"Anyone who has spent time fighting Al Qaeda or ISIS or Hamas knows that those groups think civilian suffering advances their cause. They don't burrow into cities and wear civilian clothes and hide behind hospitals and mosques simply to conceal themselves; they do so knowing that any military response will also kill civilians. They want the world to see images of civilian deaths and suffering," says David French in his August 5, 2025, opinion piece in *The New York Times International Edition*, and goes on to

ask, “So why is Israel giving Hamas what it wants?”

The answer is simple. Israel wants to annex Gaza. If it did not, it would have heeded the proposal from former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett who called for a “squeeze approach,” which he saw as essential to “not play along with the lines that Hamas wrote for us.” Bennett’s central insight was that Israel should avoid being lured into nonstop urban combat, but instead surround and isolate the battlefield, allowing food and medicine to get in but not the things Hamas would need to maintain a war machine, particularly fuel for generators in the tunnels.

Mousa Abu Marzouk, the Qatar-based head of Hamas’s foreign relations office, said in an interview with *The New York Times* that he would not have supported the attack if he had known the havoc it would wreak in Gaza.

How many more generational regrets must we hear? Isn’t enough, enough?

The only way to address the current regrets and despair is with a genuine and workable permanent two-state solution.

Rebuilding Gaza is not a solution. All that will happen is that reconstruction funds will again be stolen by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to fund their war of terror against Israel.

A lawsuit filed on June 24, 2024, in federal court in Manhattan by about 100 Israeli plaintiffs – including at least one who was held

hostage -- alleges the UNRWA officials named in the lawsuit, knew that Hamas siphoned off more than $1 billion from the agency to purchase, among other things, tunnelling equipment and weapons that aided its attack on October 7.

UNRWA has long been accused of having links to Hamas. In January 2024, Israel accused a dozen agency employees of playing a role in the attacks on October 7 or in their aftermath. The U.N. stated that it had dismissed several employees after being briefed on the allegations. The claims prompted eight countries, including the U.S., to suspend some aid to UNRWA.

Is it any wonder Israel doesn't trust the U.N. and its humanitarian aid and food distribution system, much of which it asserts winds up in the hands of Hamas?

Gaza Aid

From March through late May 2025, Israel prevented food and fuel from reaching Gaza, even as aid groups and some Israeli soldiers warned that the territory was on the brink of starvation.

Sean Carroll, president and chief executive of American Near East Refugee Aid, in his opinion published May 7, 2025, in *The New York Times International Edition*, titled *Palestinians need food, not words*, expressed his disgust at Israel exploiting aid as a tool of war.

"Senior Israeli officials have declared what effectively is the intent to use starvation as a tactic to pressure Hamas to release the

remaining hostages – a clear violation of international law. Many Palestinians fear it is also part of a plan to expel them from Gaza," he stated.

The fact that Israeli officials believed that Hamas which has used its people as human shields – resulting in the deaths and injuries of hundreds of thousands --would be compelled to release hostages because the rest might be starved to death, was not only naïve, but also idiotic and self-destructive to Israel's global standing. The intent to use hunger as leverage is unconscionable.

To *Let the U.N. save Gaza's children,* as Catherine Russell, the executive director of UNICEF, suggests in her opinion piece in *The New York Times International Edition* on May 31-June1, 2025, was not an acceptable option for Israel or the U.S. based on the U.N.'s dismal and corrupt track record that allowed Hamas to siphon off large amounts of aid and profit from its sales.

The U.N. acknowledged that aid trucks had been robbed and its warehouses broken into but maintained there are mechanisms in place that prevent any "significant" diversion.

Contradicting Russell's claim, the Israeli government maintained that its blockade on food, medicine, and fuel to Gaza did not pose a major threat to civilian life in the territory, even as the U.N. and other aid agencies said a famine was looming. However, Israeli military officers who monitor humanitarian conditions in Gaza confirmed the concerns of aid agencies and warned their commanders in May 2025 that unless the blockade was lifted,

many areas of the enclave were likely to run out of food to meet minimum daily nutritional needs.

Regarding aid, Prime Minister Netanyahu had to balance right-wing political allies who oppose sending food to Gaza and foreign allies – including the Trump administration – who feared that the blockade would lead to famine. The equivocation over the ground invasion reflected Netanyahu's need to satisfy far-right cabinet ministers, who were pushing for the full re-occupation of Gaza, and Israel's top generals, who believe such a move would be difficult to sustain and dangerous for the hostages held in Gaza.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, the minister of national security, a man convicted several times of inciting racism, has suggested that not even "a gram of food or aid should get into Gaza," and has called for "the clearing of one million people" through "voluntary immigration."

Bezalel Smotrich, the hardline Israeli finance minister, has called for "total annihilation" in Gaza. "They are to be destroyed, destroyed, destroyed," he said in 2024. Both Smotrich and Ben-Gvir reside in the West Bank.

"While far-right ministers in Israel seek permanent control of Gaza, the military leadership has doubts about the sustainability of permanent occupation, given the concerns over the willingness of military reservists to staff it over a long-term period, and worries about the fate of the hostages," said Daniel B. Shapiro, a

former U.S. ambassador to Israel and fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based research group.

The new Gaza Humanitarian Foundation set up in Switzerland in early May 2025 by Israel and the U.S. to replace the U.N.'s distribution system, did in fact have a shaky, disruptive, and poorly coordinated start and was far from ready to provide food for more than two million Palestinians.

There is no clarity on how the GHF is being funded; and its opaque organizational structure has drawn scrutiny.

A briefing paper issued on behalf of the group and reviewed by *The New York Times* stated that it aimed to provide a "functioning humanitarian lifeline in Gaza that mitigates suffering, upholds international humanitarian law, and demonstrates a scalable model for aid delivery in complex environments."

U.N. aid chief Tom Fletcher told the Security Council that the GHF plan made "aid conditional on political and military aims … It makes starvation a bargaining chip."

On May 19, 2025, Israel asked the U.N. to revive its aid operation, as the GHF was not fully operational and needed to rely on established aid agencies for support. The reversal highlighted Netanyahu's juggling act, noted Dr. Shira Efron, director of research at Israel Policy Forum, a New York-based research group.

“Netanyahu is trying to do a little bit of everything,” she said. “By announcing a bigger ground operation, he is showing his base he is doing something. By announcing the resumption of aid, he is responding to pressure from the Trump administration, while buying more time for hostage negotiations.”

I agree with Arabella Duffield, a proud Zionist, nutritionist, public health expert, and trustee of a philanthropic foundation in Israel, who said in an article titled: *Gaza’s children don’t deserve to starve,* published in the *Financial Times* on May 30, 2025, that, “By first withholding aid and then agreeing to resume only limited humanitarian supplies to Gaza after facing significant external pressure, the current government of Israel is endangering what’s left of its moral authority. No one should ever make the choice to allow children to starve.”

Former general Yair Golan, leader of The Democrats party in Israel, said on the radio that Prime Minister Netanyahu’s government was “endangering” the country’s existence with its conduct of the war against Hamas, which has provoked concerns even within the Trump administration. “Israel is on the way to becoming a pariah state, like South Africa was, if we don’t return to acting like a sane country,” Golan said. “A sane country does not fight against civilians, does not kill babies as a hobby, and does not give itself the aim of expelling populations.”

Nissim Vaturi, the deputy speaker of the Israeli Parliament, said on X that Israel’s task must be “erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of the earth.” Israel’s actions can be understood only as the

implementation of the expressed intent to make the Gaza Strip uninhabitable for its Palestinian population.

Omer Bartov, a professor of Holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University who was raised in a Zionist home and served in the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) states, “I believe the goal was – and remains today – to force the population to leave the Strip altogether or, considering it has nowhere to go, to debilitate the enclave through bombings and severe deprivation of food, water, sanitation and medical aid to such an extent that it is impossible for Palestinians in Gaza to maintain or reconstitute their existence as a group.”

His opinion titled, *I’m a genocide scholar. I know it when I see it*, published on July 19-20, 2025, in *The New York Times International Edition*, is a read I highly recommend.

Israel had blocked any food from entering Gaza for almost 80 days after it ended a ceasefire in mid-March 2025.

A small but rising number of genocide scholars, including the International Association of Genocide Scholars, are concluding that Israel’s actions in Gaza amount to genocide. On July 28, 2025, B’Tselem, a respected Israeli rights group, reached an identical verdict. In a report, it said Israel’s policy and “its horrific outcomes … leads to the unequivocal conclusion that Israel is taking coordinated action to intentionally destroy Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip.”

On September 16, 2025, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory released its report that concluded Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

Bret Stephens disagrees. *No, Israel is not committing genocide in Gaza* is the title of his opinion carried by *The New York Times International Edition* on July 24, 2025. “The first question the anti-Israel genocide chorus needs to answer is: Why isn’t the death toll higher? The answer, of course, is that Israel is manifestly not committing genocide, a legally specific and morally freighted term that is defined by the United Nations convention on genocide as the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such.”

Note the words “intent” and “as such”, Stephens alerts readers. Genocide does not mean simply “too many civilian deaths” – a heart-breaking fact of nearly every war, including the one in Gaza, he adds.

“It means seeking to exterminate a category of people for no other reason than that they belong to that category: the Nazis and their partners killing Jews in the Holocaust because they were Jews or the Hutus slaughtering the Tutsis in the Rwandan genocide because they were Tutsi. When Hamas invaded on Oct. 7, intentionally butchering families in their homes and young people at a music festival, they also murdered Israelis ‘as such’,” Stephens points out.

By contrast, he continues, the fact that over a million German civilians died in World War II – thousands of them in appalling bombings of cities like Hamburg and Dresden – made them victims of war but not of genocide. The aim of the allies was to defeat the Nazis for leading Germany into war, not to wipe out Germans simply for being German.

The same holds true for America's atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The aim was to end the war, not to wipe out Japanese.

Stephens goes on to ask why does the argument over the word genocide matter? He gives two reasons.

First, while some pundits and scholars may sincerely believe the genocide charge, it is also used by anti-Zionists and antisemites to equate Israel with Nazi Germany. The effect is to license a new wave of Jew hatred, stirring enmity not only for the Israeli government but also for any Jew who supports Israel as a genocide supporter. It's a tactic Israel haters have pursued for years with inflated or bogus charges of Israeli massacres or war crimes that, on close inspection weren't. The genocide charge is more of the same but with deadlier effects.

Second, if genocide – a word that was coined only in the 1940s – is to retain its status as a uniquely horrific crime, then the term can't be promiscuously applied to any military situation we don't like. Wars are awful enough. But the abuse of the term "genocide" runs the risk of ultimately blinding us to real ones

when they unfold.

Israelis are “talking past each other,” Etgar Keret, an Israeli writer, noted in his article: *Talking past each other in Israel,* that appeared in *The New York Times International Edition* on August 22, 2025. Keret, and his wife, join a silent vigil most Saturday nights in Tel Aviv where each participant holds a photograph of a Gazan child killed by I.D.F. attacks.

Some passers-by stop to look at the pictures and read the children’s names; others throw out a curse and keep walking. “Strangely, unlike at many anti-government protests I attend, where I feel a bit pointless, at this vigil I do feel of some use,” said Keret. “It’s not much, but I am creating an encounter between a dead child and the gaze of a person who didn’t know that child existed.”

Keret and his fellow vigilantes remain silent and do not respond when criticized or verbally abused. However, one such verbal outbreak with a man in shorts led Keret to believe that he and the verbal critic had some things in common: “We both think the government is a disgrace, we’ve both lost someone and something of ourselves in the past 22 months. It’s just that I am holding a picture of a Palestinian child killed by Israeli soldiers, and the way he sees it, that is an act that has no possible explanation or meaning. It doesn’t even have a name,” said Keret.

Suddenly, the whole scenario seemed less like a political dispute and more like a modern Tower of Babel, Keret notes, where God

made everyone speak different languages to stop their effort to build endlessly upward, a check on human arrogance.

“It’s a story in which we are all living in a building, trying to reach the clouds. It keeps growing and growing, and we keep climbing up with it, higher and higher: with more knowledge, more confidence, more purpose, yet somewhere along the way – and not just because of arrogance – we lose our fundamental ability to communicate,” Keret notes, reminding us that each of us is trapped in our separate feeds, our separate languages, with different facts and different conclusions, which grow only more and more solid. “When we stop looking at the tower’s walls and instead look into one another’s eyes, we see something completely foreign,” Keret adds.

At the end of the biblical story, the people abandon their project to build the tower. “Many stories in the Bible end badly, and ours seems to be heading that way, too. That is, unless we can manage – me, the guy in the swim shorts and everyone else – to find a common language again, a language that has a name for everything, even for a person holding a photograph of a dead child,” Keret concludes.

“Deaths from a full-blown famine in Gaza could reach five figures,” said Jeremy Konyndyk, president of U.S.-based Refugees International. “There’s nothing like the level of the humanitarian operation needed to save lives.”

A former head of the U.S. office of Foreign Disaster Assistance,

Konyndyk said he saw similarities between starvation in Gaza and famines in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Yemen, where he oversaw relief efforts.

“We know these patterns. We know what happens when we begin to rapidly see an exponential rise in starvation paths,” said Konyndyk. “It is terrifying to watch
this unfold.”

Even President Trump acknowledged, while speaking with British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer in Scotland on July 28, 2025, that the images he had seen of malnourished children were real. “That’s real starvation stuff,” Trump said. “I see it, you can’t fake that. Those children look very hungry,” he said, describing what he had seen on television. “We have to get the kids fed.”

Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov asked whether you would let a single child suffer the most horrible torture and death so that the whole of humanity will be free of suffering forever more.

“What a naïve idealist Ivan was! The real question is how many children we will allow to die the most painful and horrific death before the people who claim to be enlightened and free will collectively speak out and say – ‘Enough is enough! Enough blood!’,” asks Alex Lo in his May 12, 2025, column in the *South China Morning Post*.

Those were the words of the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the signing of the Oslo Agreement, Lo reminds us.

Having surveyed the whole history up to his time, Arnold Toynbee concluded that great civilizations died by suicide, rather than murder, Lo adds.

The West has just proved his point. It will of course always exist as a geographic reference. But it's just places on the map now, not an inspiring idea.

As an ideal, it has died by its own hand with the horrifying screams and dying breaths of tens of thousands of children in Gaza, Lo concludes.

The enduring anguish of the kind of starvation that has taken hold in Gaza lives on in personal and collective memory for generations. "Starvation also lives on in the body, especially for the young. For children who survive acute malnutrition, the resulting physical and cognitive damage can last a lifetime," says Alex De Waal, executive director of the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University and the author of *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*.

"Children should not be made to carry the consequences of decisions they have not made," reminds us Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002-2012.

In addition to suffering from an abnormal horrific, hungry childhood, most children in Gaza have been out of school for more than two years, lack basic academic knowledge – and have the highest proportion of child amputees.

It is indeed unfortunate that innocent children, mothers and elderly have suffered from acute malnutrition, characterized by rapid weight loss and a low weight-to-height ratio, teetering on the brink of starvation.

Is this the lifestyle that both Palestinians and Israelis wish to perpetuate and return to in the future? How many more generations on both sides of the conflict must suffer due to the unrealistic and unsustainable political goal of establishing a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank?

On August 5, 2025, Australia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Penny Wong, told journalists that "there is a risk there will be no Palestine left to recognize." There is, but not one including Gaza, or the West Bank.

The world has failed the Palestinian people – a failure that will haunt western nations, Arab States, and Israel for years to come – unless a Palestinian state is established.

The memory of the horrors of Gaza, like Nakba, will fade, and the particularities of that war will blur with time, "With those marking their objections in the heat of the moment growing eventually hoarse as everyone else simply marches on," David Wallace Wells, a columnist for *The New York Times Magazine* and author of *The Uninhabitable Earth*, reminds us.

The Netanyahu government has worked for years to erode the viability of a two-state solution. Before October 7, many

countries in the region seemed ready to acquiesce.

Hopeless as it may appear now, two-states remains the only path to long-term peace, one which offers justice to Palestinians and enduring security for Israel.

Gazans Protest

Even Palestinians in Gaza are telling Hamas that its time is up! Rare spontaneous demonstrations erupted in Gaza in early April 2025 after the Israel-Hamas ceasefire collapsed, prompting Israel to renew its attacks, telling Gazans who had just returned to their destroyed neighbourhoods to evacuate once more. At first, a few hundred people "took to the streets screaming" for an end to the fighting and were soon joined by thousands chanting "Hamas out!" and "We want to live!" said Akram Atallah in *Al Ayyam* (West Bank). Caught between Israel's military and Hamas' feared armed wing, the people have "no choice," and little left to lose. They are "hungry, broken, sad, with no end in sight to this long nightmare." Hamas can hardly be surprised that the populace is fed up. It has ruled since 2007 and brought only war, liberating nobody but "leaving Gaza in ruins," added Atallah.

The dissent offers a "rare sign of hope," said Nadav Eyal in *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Israel). The videos of Palestinians demanding the release of Hamas' remaining Israeli hostages undermine the arguments of Israeli hawks who claim there are "no innocents in Gaza." Israeli intelligence has found that Hamas falsified polls to conceal "considerable criticism of its rule, during the war and before it." Yes, there are "bloodthirsty fundamentalists" in Gaza,

but there are also ordinary people “pleading for a future for their children yearning for normalcy and freedom.”

There is no denying that many Gazans have been radicalized, said Hayim Leiter in *The Jerusalem Post*, but civilians are still the only ones who can “change their toxic culture.” That’s why it’s crucial for Israel to support this “uprising.” For months Israel’s critics have “drunk Hamas’ Kool-Aid” and portrayed us as the aggressor, the cause of the conflict.” Now is our chance to “demonstrate to the world that our goal has never been to eradicate our neighbours” but to “uproot the terrorists at our gates,” said Leiter.

October 7 was a “huge mistake that would not have happened if Palestinians had been united” behind the goal of establishing our own state. Israel’s renewed offensive was a “crushing blow to everyone in Gaza – except for Hamas,” said Gazan lawyer and activist Moumen Al-Natour in *The Washington Post*. It sees a resumed war as a chance “to further entrench itself.” This is a make-or-break moment. “With nothing left to lose,” many of us Gazans are using “what little power we have” to take a stand “against the group that has dictated every aspect of our lives for 18 years.” We want to live. That means “Hamas must go, the hostages taken from Israel must be released, and the war must then finally come to an end.”

When Hamas attacked Israel, most Gazans supported that “form of resistance,” a 26-year-old lawyer from Gaza who did not want to be identified told *The New York Times*. “But what we don’t

support is them continuing with this war when they have not accomplished any of the goals they set out to accomplish," the lawyer said. "This isn't resistance. This is insanity."

"I do not want to sacrifice my life, my home and house for anyone," Amen Abed, a resident of Jabaliya in Northern Gaza, said at the time of one of the prisoner releases.

"Who are you to impose this kind of life on me? My home has gone because someone's imprisonment will end after four months. Why?" he said. "What did I benefit from?"

While Hamas and even the Israeli hostages were in underground tunnels, he said, Gazans were above ground with no protection from Israel and U.S.-made bombs dropped over their heads.

"There is uncontrolled anger against Hamas," he said. "It threw the Palestinian people into the bottom of the well," concluded Abed.

Abdullah Shehab, who was staying at his sister's home in Gaza City since he was forced to leave his hometown of Jabaliya asked: "Have they stopped Israel from invading our cities? The only thing Hamas's weapons have done is given Israel a justification to continue the massacres."

Conceding defeat, Shehab said the least Hamas could do is take responsibility for "the catastrophic error" of the October 7 attack. However, he had little hope that Hamas would agree to

step aside.

“We’re trapped,” he said. “Honestly, the only real difference between Palestinian civilians and Israeli hostages is we’re above ground and they’re below.”

Abed, Shehab, and all other outspoken and protesting Palestinians, are to be applauded and commended for their honesty knowing that Hamas is watching and monitoring their every word and activity.

Hamas files and records seized by Israel’s military intelligence reveal that Yahya Sinwar has for years overseen the General Security Service, a secret police force in Gaza that conducted surveillance on everyday Palestinians and built files on young people, journalists and those who questioned the government, according to a trove of internal documents reviewed by *The New York Times*.

A 62-slide presentation of the GSS, delivered only weeks before the October 7 attack on Israel, reveals the degree to which the largely unknown unit penetrated the lives of Palestinians.

The documents show that Hamas leaders, despite claiming to represent the Palestinian people of Gaza, would not tolerate even a hint of dissent.

“We’re facing bombardment by the occupation and thuggery by the local authorities,” Ehab Fasfous, a journalist in Gaza who

appeared in the GSS files, told *The Times* in a phone interview from Gaza. Fasfous is labelled in one report as one of "the major haters of the Hamas movement."

Early in the war, he said he took pictures of security forces hitting people who were fighting over spots in line outside a bakery. The authorities confiscated his camera. Fasfous complained to a government official who told him to stop reporting and "destabilizing the internal front," Fasfous recalled.

"I told him I was reporting on the truth and the truth won't hurt him, but that fell on deaf ears," he said. "We can't have a life here as long as these criminals remain
in control."

Palestinian Resettlement Agency

Israel's decision to set up an agency to oversee the so-called voluntary departure of Palestinians from Gaza and the approval of 13 settlement outposts in the West Bank, has been justifiably condemned for violating international laws.

Israel's Security Cabinet has approved the establishment of a new directorate to coordinate the "voluntary relocation" of Palestinians from Gaza to third countries. WRONG. It should be termed "voluntary relocation from Gaza to Palestine."

I agree with Gokhan Ereli, Gulf Studies Coordinator at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Türkiye, who stated in an interview with *China Daily* in March 2025, "This might eventually be

portrayed politically as a question of personal choice, undermining Palestinian claims to the right of return and reshaping the historical narrative of displacement."

"The repercussions are significant. Such a shift weakens the feasibility of a two-state solution by reducing the demographic and territorial coherence essential for a sustainable Palestinian state."

He is right, based on the discussions of the proposed current Palestinian state made up of Gaza and the West Bank. Such a proposal is unlikely to succeed.

Offer Palestinians, Arab Israelis the option of moving to the Palestine I propose and exchanging their property in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel in Palestine on a par-a-per-su basis, with cash making up the difference in valuations of the properties to be exchanged. Deals will be made and people will move voluntarily, albeit reluctantly.

After the Six-Day War, the number of Palestinians living under Israeli control was approximately 1.6 million, nearly equal to the 1.5 million living outside the Jewish state. Of those living outside Israel, 644,200 reside in Jordan; 288,000 in Lebanon, 183,000 in Syria, 39,000 in Egypt, 194,000 in Kuwait, 59,000 in Saudi Arabia, 35,000 in Iraq, and 67,000 in other countries, bringing the total number to over three million.

A Palestinian homeland they should all look at seriously, and

establish is what I am proposing in chapter 13.

West Bank Annexation

Trump's re-election has emboldened Israeli leaders' push not only to increase the annexation of Gaza but also of the West Bank. His initial silence on Israel's activities in the West Bank have encouraged hardline ministers who openly dream of annexing the territory.

"Since Trump's election in November, we've started to hear more and more rhetoric about annexation in the West Bank, and seen more and more actions on the ground," said Mairav Zonszein, an analyst with the International Crisis Group.

A sentiment echoed by Sanam Vakil of the Britain-based think tank Chatham House. "There's no criticism, there's no condemnation of Israel's activities, and I think that gives it free rein and confidence to continue its expansionist agenda in the West Bank," Vakil said.

"What is clear is the deterioration in freedom and well-being in the West Bank since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel. The heightened repression feels partly opportunistic – a land grab – but it is also shaped by a determination that Israel will never again be vulnerable to massacres," Nicholas Kristof correctly observes in his *New York Tims International Editions* opinion piece on July 1, 2024. On September 3, 2025, Israel confirmed earlier expressed concerns by unveiling its plans to annex 82 percent of the West Bank.

The anger about land theft and settler violence is compounded by a growing economic crisis. Palestinian livelihoods have also been hurt by a sharp downturn in tourism, and by bans on labourers crossing into Israel. The World Bank estimates that more than 300,000 people in the West Bank have lost their jobs in Israel since October 7. Jobs that have been filled by Filipinos, Indians and Thais.

The Palestinian economy is largely governed by the 1994 Paris Protocol, which granted sole control over the territories' borders to Israel, and with it the right to collect import duties and value-added tax for the Palestinian Authority.

The Paris Protocol, like the 1993 and 1995 Oslo agreements, was meant to last five

years, until the creation of a Palestinian state. But the absence of a long-term peace deal means it is still governing all aspects of the Palestinian economy.

After October 7, Israel withheld funds earmarked for salary and expenses in Gaza. "Without these funds the Palestinian Authority struggles to pay the salaries of its civil servants and its running costs," said Taher al-Labadi, a researcher at the French Institute for the Near East.

Mohammad Mustafa, the Palestinian prime minister, bemoaned an "unprecedented financial crisis during which his government's deficit had soared to $7 billion, more than one-third of the

territories' gross domestic product.

The Palestinian Authority had to take out a $400 million loan in December 2023 to keep itself afloat. This brought the Palestinian banking system's overall public debt load to $2.5 billion and rising. In February 2024, Norway reportedly transferred to the Palestinian Authority about $115 million from Israel following a deal to release some of the frozen funds.

"By not allowing Palestinian workers into Israel and withholding Palestinian tax revenues, Ben Gvir and Smotrich aim to overthrow the Palestinian Authority because they view it as the enemy," said Israeli political analyst Michael Milshtein. "It's a way to collectively punish Palestinians whom they also see as enemies," he added.

Milshtein noted that before October 7, nearly one-third of West Bank income came from Palestinians who worked in Israel.

While the Palestinian Authority and most businesses are concerned about not having enough cash, banks in the West Bank worry about having too much cash because Palestinians who previously kept cash at home have deposited it in banks out of safety concerns, resulting in less spending. The surplus of cash is one of numerous strains in the financial system. Bankers and officials state that the cash idling in West Bank vaults, exceeding one billion dollars, "is not only depriving lenders of earnings and complicating transactions, but also increasingly a target for thieves," James Shotter points out in his July 30, 2024, piece in the

Financial Times, titled *Lenders worry over West Bank's rising cash piles.*

Palestinian officials claim this is a concerted effort to collapse the Palestinian banking system. "This is a much cheaper war than the one they have in Gaza – by killing our financial system, they will suffocate our economy, and then will bring our government down," says Yahya Shunnar, governor of the Palestinian Monetary Authority.

The architects of the Oslo accords intended the Israeli and Palestinian economies to be intertwined, says Ghassan Khatib, who negotiated on behalf of the PLO in the early 1990s. The Israeli shekel became the de facto currency of the Palestinian territories. And the Israelis agreed to collect custom duty on imports into the territories and to transfer the revenue to the PA to pay salaries. In 1994 the Palestinian Monetary Authority was established.

These agreements have left Smotrich, as Israel's finance minister since 2022, with immense control over the Palestinian economy.

"These were Israeli conditions and at the time, they made sense, because we were talking about a transitional period," noted Khatib. "In the eyes of the decision makers at that time, they had no other choice, and people were optimistic that Israeli leaders like Rabin and [Shimon] Peres were serious about historical compromise."

Smotrich has withheld – often for months at a time – the tax revenues Israel collects on behalf of the PA, releasing only partial amounts either to pay off the PA's debt to the Israel Electric Corp, or under intense pressure from the international community.

Over time, those arrears have amounted to billions of dollars, leaving the PA unable to pay salaries to civil servants, police officers and health care workers that make up the core of its limited government. On September 1, 2025, Palestinian schools did not open because teachers had not been paid.

"His plan is extremely effective – all Smotrich needs is time says Ghassan Khatib, who negotiated the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s. "If nobody interferes, the PA will no longer be able to pay salaries – that will be the beginning of the collapse, and he will achieve his objective of dismantling the Palestinian Authority."

On February 10, 2025, President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree that overhauled the payment system to families of Palestinians jailed or killed by Israel. Over the years, his administration had paid hundreds of millions of dollars to such families.

Israel condemned these payments, arguing that providing benefits to families of prisoners involved in deadly stabbings, shootings and suicide bombings against Israelis creates a financial incentive for terrorism. It has labelled the policy a "pay-for-slay" arrangement, in which Palestinians with longer sentences receive higher stipends, effectively rewarding

individuals for committing deadlier attacks, in Israel's view.

In 2018, Trump signed the Taylor Force Act, named in memory of Taylor Force, a U.S. Army veteran and graduate student who was murdered in Israel by a Palestinian terrorist in 2016 while visiting Israel as part of a study abroad program. The law terminated economic assistance that directly benefited the Palestinian Authority if it continued such payments.

Political analysts, me included, believe that Abbas's change in policy is an attempt to curry favour with Trump to secure much-needed foreign aid for the West Bank. However, such aid is unlikely to begin flowing as quickly as the Palestinian Authority anticipates due to the extensive legal process required to certify that Abbas's government is in compliance with the Taylor Force Act.

Palestinians were quick to criticize Abbas's decision, as many in the West Bank view those imprisoned in Israel as freedom fighters.

Before Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, Israeli airstrikes and military operations in the region were relatively rare. However, everything changed after October 7. In its operations in the West Bank, the Israeli military reported killing or detaining dozens of fighters, confiscating explosives and destroying command and control centers. The military stated that it carried out airstrikes "in situations where arrests cannot be made due to real risk to the forces."

Raids of the West Bank have become common place not only by armed drones, but also by bulldozers that have ripped up roads, which the Israeli military claims are intended to unearth buried explosives.

Cutting off water to the West Bank by damaging pipelines, diverting or seizing control of Palestinian water sources is another tool utilized by Israeli settlers to force Palestinians to relocate.

“When you restrict water supply in certain areas, people simply move where water is available, said Issa Qassis, chairman of the board of the Jerusalem Water Undertaking, which manages water in the West Bank. “So in a plan to move people to other lands, water is the best and fastest way,” he said.

“It’s the Gazification of the northern part of the West Bank,” said Nadav Weiman, the director of Breaking the Silence, an advocacy group made up of former Israeli soldiers who collect testimonies from soldiers involved in the raids in Jenin and Tulkarm.

Weiman stated that the overall military strategy being used in the West Bank is known as the *Dahiya doctrine*, a reference to Israel’s flattening of the Dahiya, neighbourhoods in southern Beirut, a Hezbollah stronghold, during its 34-day war in Lebanon in 2006. The tactic creates disproportionate damage to civilian infrastructure and aimed to instigate so much harm and destruction that civilians turn against armed groups in their areas, he explained.

“That kind of pressure wasn’t imposed on villages and towns in the West Bank until very recently,” he added.

On the morning of August 28, 2024, Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz posted on social media, “We must deal with the threat just as we deal with the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza.”

“We all have this sense that the pattern of Gaza, the modus operandi, is being applied in the West Bank, and it’s very worrisome,” said Allegra Pacheco, who leads a consortium of Western backed aid groups in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, existing settlements in the West Bank are being legalized by Israeli officials, and new ones are being encouraged, even though such settlements are viewed as illegal by the international community -- and the Israeli Supreme Court – one reason Netanyahu’s right-wing government wants to weaken the court, which led to the pre-October 7 protests.

During its nearly four years in office, the Netanyahu religious extremist government has approved 102 new settlements, almost doubling the 127 that existed in total before it assumed power, and 17 times the six approved in the previous decade, according to the Israeli NGO Peace Now. Among those being fast-tracked is the controversial E1 settlement that will cut the West Bank in two, extinguishing any lingering hopes of a contiguous Palestinian state.

Netanyahu decided in 2023 to ease the process for approving

new settlements, transferring authority from the Defence Minister Yoav Gallant to Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who believes Israel should annex the West Bank and rule it permanently – and is fast-tracking the annexation of the West Bank.

New guard posts are manned by Israeli soldiers, and new roads are patrolled by Israeli settlers, as the transfer of power from military to civilian authorities expedites in legalizing the takeover of land.

Since Israel occupied the West Bank, previously controlled by Jordan, in the 1967 Six Day War, the government has encouraged Jews to settle there, providing land, military protection, electricity, water, and roads, and has authorized the construction of thousands of new buildings in Jewish settlements, while making it extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain building permits.

Under the Oslo accords, Israel and the Palestinians agreed that the status of the Israeli settlements would be resolved through negotiation, a prospect that has grown dimmer with each new outpost. Settlement construction has continued under every government since 1967, and as of 2023, more than 130 settlements had been built with Israeli government permission. There are many more settlements in the West Bank – most of which have not been formally approved.

More than 500,000 Israeli settlers live in the region – not

counting the 200,000 in East Jerusalem – alongside more than 2.7 million Palestinians. Most of the settlements are home to religious Zionists who believe that the area is their biblical birthright. Many secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews have moved there for more affordable housing.

Dror Etkes, a field researcher with Kerem Navot, an Israeli monitoring group, estimated that since the Hamas-led attack on October 7 that started the war in Gaza, settlers have taken over more than 37,000 acres of land from Palestinians across the West Bank, displacing tens of thousands of residents.

The catalyst for these land seizures, said Etkes, was the October 7 attack which heightened Israeli security concerns in the West Bank that made it easier for settlers to take control of territory. “There is a linkage between violence and settler expansion,” he said. “They are taking revenge on the Palestinians by taking more and more land.”

These concerns have been exacerbated by the rise of new militant groups, an influx of weapons smuggled in by Iran, and polling, indicating a rise in support for Hamas.

Six Israelis were killed and dozens injured in a shooting in Jerusalem on September 8, 2025, by two Palestinian gunmen from villages near Ramallah in the West Bank. Hamas praised the attack as a “heroic operation” and “natural response” to Israeli aggression. The group called on the Palestinian public in the West Bank to “escalate confrontation” with Israeli forces and settlers.

The attack was the deadliest since two Palestinians opened fire at a train station in Jaffa in October 2024, killing seven people.

In November 2023, a month after the October 7 attack on Israel, two Palestinians killed three Israelis in Jerusalem.

Settler attacks against Palestinian villages have increased dramatically since October 7 according to U.N. data, with 11 killed and almost 700 injured in such attacks prior to the September 8 killing in Jerusalem.

The Israeli military mobilized thousands of reservist settlers to protect the settlements and imposed extensive restrictions on Palestinians, blocking exits from their communities and barring Palestinian workers from entering Israel or the settlements.

In 2024, the Israeli government designated a record 6,000 acres as eligible for settlement, signalling that Israel intends to deepen its hold on the West Bank. This aligns with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's goal, as he adamantly opposes a Palestinian state in the West Bank and has stated he will legalize additional settlements in response to any nation that recognizes a Palestinian state.

Smotrich, previously a settler leader before becoming finance minister, has been granted cabinet-level authority over settlement policies and vowed to double the settler population in the West Bank. In August 2025, Smotrich said a contentious new settlement on a tract of land east of Jerusalem, named E1,

that had been under consideration for more than two decades that is especially controversial because it is one of the last geographic links between the major West Bank cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem, would be annexed.

The two cities are 22 kilometres apart. But once the E1 settlement is completed, it will destroy the possibility of a direct land route and will force Palestinians travelling between the cities to take a wide detour, passing through multiple checkpoints, a process that adds hours to the journey.

“This reality finally buries the idea of a Palestinian state, because there is nothing to recognize and no one to recognize,” Smotrich said during a ceremony on August 14, 2025. “Anyone in the world who tries today to recognize a Palestinian state will receive an answer from us on the ground.”

More than 150 countries have formally recognized an independent Palestinian state, though not necessarily within the West Bank. What exactly are they recognizing and where?

The recognition of a Palestinian state “is empty symbolism at best, and at worst, a distraction from a lack of action to stop Israel’s war,” said Mustafa Barghouti, leader of the Palestinian National Initiative and member of the central council of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in his September 23, 2025, opinion in *The New York Times International Edition*. “Simply recognizing a Palestinian state and producing a document with recommendations will do nothing to change anything. Instead,

action is needed."

"A new paradigm is needed to address and support the people struggling for their freedom, as was done to support the struggle of South Africans against apartheid in their country," Barghouti argues, echoing the apartheid argument of many Palestinian supporters. However, the apartheid argument is baseless fake fact and has no merit when it comes to Palestinians. White settlement in South Africa began with Dutch colonization in 1652, followed by British colonization in the 19th century, much like the Dutch and British colonization of Native Americans.

Apartheid is the racial segregation of whites from blacks that lasted from 1948 to 1994.

On the other hand, Palestinian Arabs and Jews have historical and biblical ties living together in Palestine for more than three centuries – joined by Zionists in the 19th century and Jews expelled from Arab countries in the 20th century.

Major General Yehuda Fox, the head of Israel's Central Command, which oversees the West Bank, has noted that since Smotrich took office, the efforts to limit settlement construction has diminished "to the point where it has disappeared."

The settlement expansion plan "buries the idea of a Palestinian state," noted Smotrich.

The violent expansion of settlements on the West Bank included the beating and arrest in March 2025 of Oscar-winning

documentary *No Other Land* filmmaker Hamdan Ballel by Israeli West Bank settlers and military.

Ballal described his feelings about the arrest in an opinion piece in *The New York Times International Edition* on April 28, 2025, titled: *My Oscar didn't protect me from violence*.

"On March 2, I won an Academy Award for best documentary for a film I co-directed, *No Other Land*. It's hard to put into words how that moment felt. It was one of the most incredible moments of my life.

"Three weeks later, I was brutally attacked in my home and arrested. In an instant, it was as if the Oscars had never happened, as if the award didn't mean anything."

Ballal comes from Susiya, a small village on the southern edge of the West Bank. Only a few dozen families. "Our main livelihood is shepherding. Our life is simple. Our homes are simple. The main thing that steals our time is the near-daily violence and harassment of the settlers and the Israeli Army enforcing the occupation. Los Angeles and the Oscars were of an entirely different world from the one I know: I was struck by the enormous buildings, the rushing cars, the wealth all around me.

And suddenly there we were, me and my three other co-directors, on one of the world's most important stages, accepting the award."

Their stories, their communities and voices were in the spotlight. The Palestinian struggle and suffering were on display, and the world was watching - and supporting them. “For years, we have been desperately trying to make our names and our struggle known. Now we had succeeded beyond anything any of us could have ever imagined,” said Ballal.

“When they called our names and the name of our movie flashed on the screen, I lost myself. I couldn't feel my hands. I knew there were people all around me, but I couldn't see them. I walked to the stage, following my feet, but my mind was completely blank.

“We made our movie in order to bring attention to the situation where I live, to try to bring change to our communities, but when I was attacked, I realized that we were still trapped in the same grinding loop of violence and subjugation.”

March 24 was a typical Ramadan evening. The sun was setting as Ballal’s family sat down to break their fast. Then his neighbour called: Settlers were attacking. Ballal ran to document the moment, but when he saw the crowd grow, he worried about his family and quickly returned home. “Soon I saw a settler and two soldiers coming down the hill toward me. I shouted to my wife to keep our three young children — 7,5 and 1½-years old inside, with the door closed. “I told her not to open the door, no matter what she heard.“ I recognized the men coming toward us. They met me outside the door of my home and started beating and cursing me, mocking me as the ‘Oscar-winning filmmaker.’ I felt guns bashing my ribs.”

Someone punched him in the head from behind. He fell to the ground and was kicked and spat on. “I felt immense pain and fear.

“I could hear my wife and kids screaming and crying, calling for me and telling the men to go away. It was the worst moment of my life. My wife and I both thought I would be killed. We feared what would happen to my family if I died.”

It is difficult for Ballal to write about that moment. After he was beaten, he was handcuffed, blindfolded and thrown into an army jeep. For hours he lay blindfolded on the ground on what he later learned was an army base, “fearing that I would be held for a long time and beaten again and again.” He was released the next day.

“The attack on me and my community was brutal. It received large amounts of press coverage, but it is not unique in any way. Just a few days later, dozens of settlers, many of them masked, attacked Jinba, a village nearby. Five people were hospitalized, and more than 20 were arrested. Later the army raided the village and ransacked homes, the mosque and the school. In Susiya alone, from the beginning of the year to the March 24 attack, local activists recorded more than 45 incidents with settlers or soldiers. Across our region, Masafer Yatta, that number is much higher.”

Ballal wants us to know their land does not know only violence. There are dozens of small, pastoral Palestinian villages that make

up the region. The landscape there is beautiful and wide. “Year after year, we plant the land and graze our sheep in the fields. Our mornings start with a cup of tea drunk at sunrise while the flocks enjoy the dew that is still fresh on the grass. The day continues with tending the land, caring for the animals, milking the sheep and goats and preparing the food and goods from our labour. The whole family and the whole village are involved in this daily work together, helping and supporting one another.”

But with this near-daily violence, they feel on the precipice of losing everything. “When we are unable to shepherd and farm because of constantly encroaching settlements and ever more aggressive settlers and soldiers, we lose our income, our source of food, our traditions and our way of life. Fear is a constant, from morning to night. Our energies are consumed by keeping ourselves and our children safe.”

In Masafer Yatta their lives are suffocated by aggression. They all fear that their village is the next to be dismantled, their people expelled.

On the day of the attack, alongside the fear, Ballal felt something else. “I didn't expect heartbreak. My heart was broken from the disappointment. From the sense of failure. From the powerlessness. Three weeks earlier, on the Oscar stage, I had a taste of power and possibility. But even though our movie received global recognition, I felt I had failed — we had failed -- in our attempt to make life better here. To convince the world that something needed to change.”

His life is still at the mercy of the settlers and the occupation. His community is still suffering from unending violence. Firebombings, cars set ablaze, evictions from Palestinian towns, endless attacks and beatings. “Our movie won an Oscar, but our lives are no better than before.”

There is no law to turn to and no government that will protect West Bank Palestinians, no international law and no international bodies that are pushing to stop this violence. And yet, despite all this and despite what Ballal has been through, and his community has experienced, there are still some bits of hope that remain from what he saw and felt at the Oscars and over the year presenting the movie around the world.

“The press attention that the attack in Susiya received because of our Oscar victory was unlike anything we experienced before. The messages and voices of support around the world have been overwhelming. I know that there are thousands and thousands of people who now know my name and my story, who know my community's name and our story and who stand with us and support us. Don't turn away now.”

Basel Adra, Ballel’s co-director, witnessed the arrest. “We came back from the Oscars and every day since there is an attack on us,” Andra said. “This might be their revenge on us for making the movie. It feels like a punishment.”

No Other Land chronicles the struggle by residents of the Masafer Yatta area to stop the Israeli military from demolishing

their villages. Adra and Ballel, both from Masafer Yatta, made the joint Palestinian Israeli production with Israeli directors Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor.

If Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers can cooperate in making an Oscar winning documentary, they can, against all odds and Cancel Culture, come up with a liveable and workable two-state solution.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong abruptly cancelled a scheduled talk by Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the U.S. Jewish Anti-Defamation League, who was to speak on antisemitism and online hate speech. HKU withdrew the invitation after more than 1,000 people signed an online petition accusing Greenblatt of having a "one-sided pro-Israel bias" and spreading divisive views.

There is a two-state solution. To reach and conclude one, however, the subject must be openly explored, especially at university, college and high school campuses-- at open political forums – peacefully.

There is no more time or room for cancel culture. Trying to shut-out-and-down different points of view about a one-state or two-state solution, is not a solution.

Iran Igniting Unrest

Iran was not only funding and arming Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, but it was also engaging in arming and operating a shadow war with Israel in the West Bank. It was operating a clandestine

smuggling route across the Middle East, utilizing intelligence operatives, militants, criminal gangs, and Bedouins to deliver weapons to Palestinians in the West Bank. Iran tapped into a well-established smuggling route in Jordan, which shares a porous 300-mile border with Israel. In 2023, a Jordanian lawmaker was indicted in Amman, Jordan, after being caught in 2022 trying to smuggle more than 200 weapons into the West Bank.

For years Iran has been trying to turn the West Bank into the next flashpoint between Israel and Iran. Refugee camps in the West Bank have been hotbeds of militancy for years, well before the war in Gaza, as fighters resisted ever-increasing Israeli settlement activity and the failure of the peace process to produce a Palestinian state. After October 7, Hamas urged Palestinians in the West Bank to join its uprising against Israel, a call that was heeded by many.

The weapons included handguns, rifles, anti-tank missiles, and rocket-propelled grenades, which fly fast and low to the ground, creating challenges for Israel when defending civilian and military targets from close-range fire.

“The Iranians wanted to flood the West Bank with weapons, and they were using criminal networks in Jordan, in the West Bank, and in Israel, primarily Bedouin, to move and sell the products,” said Matthew Levitt, director of the counterterrorism program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a research organization, and the author of a study on the smuggling route.

Fatah, the Palestinian faction that controls the Palestinian Authority and much of the West Bank, accused Iran in early April 2024 of trying to “exploit” Palestinians for its own purposes by spreading chaos in the territory. Fatah stated it would not allow “our sacred cause and the blood of our people to be exploited” by Iran.

In his July 1, 2024 opinion piece in *The New York Times,* Nicholas Kristof expressed that Israel is once again acting shortsightedly against its own security interests, and “paraphrasing what former Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban said of Palestinians, that the Israeli right never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity.”

I agree with Kristof’s conclusion that it is in the interests of both the United States and Israel to create a Palestinian state, but not on the West Bank and Gaza, with pre-1967 War border. Egypt lost Gaza and Jordan lost the West Bank -- not Palestinians. The Palestinians lost both in 1948 to Egypt and Jordan, not Israel.

Greater Israel

“Greater Israel” has been proposed and debated for decades by Israeli far-right Zionists. Its boundaries are vague but include annexing Gaza, the West Bank, and land from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. More extreme proposals extend the map to include parts of Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye.

In an interview on August 12, 2025, Netanyahu declared he was on a “historic and spiritual mission” and felt “very much”

connected to this expansionist vision of Israel.

The remarks triggered a chorus of condemnation from across the Arab world. Saudi Arabia led the outcry. Its foreign ministry denounced Israel's "expansionist ideas."

Talk of a Greater Israel that included Saudi territory "will only further diminish the likelihood of Riyadh joining the Israeli normalization camp," said Giorgio Cafiero, founder of Gulf State Analytics, a Washington-based risk consultancy. "Statements of this nature, especially when made by senior Israeli officials, are likely to reinforce and deepen threat perceptions of Israel among an increasing number of Saudis."

I agree with Andreas Krieg, associate professor of defence studies at King's College London, who described Netanyahu's remarks as reflecting "an ideological expansionist vision that is increasingly influential within Israel's governing coalition."

While not official policy, he said that the remarks "signal intent" to entrench Israeli control from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, "effectively eliminating the possibility of a viable Palestinian state" – in Gaza and the West Bank.

Israel was focused on creating "irreversible facts" on the ground through settlement expansion, Palestinian displacement and political fracturing, Krieg said, arguing that the possible outcome would be permanent Israeli military control over parts of Gaza and the West Bank, and "formalized" buffer zones in Southern

Lebanon and Syria “under the pretext of security.”

Krieg predicted that Israel would deliberately keep its neighbours in “a state of permanent limbo,” exploiting fragmentation in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.” Such a strategy, he added, risked cementing Israel’s image as “a rogue state akin to Iran: isolationist, ideologically driven, and destabilizing.”

God Given Land

“We were given this land by God,” said Shira Chernoble, 75, who moved from New Mexico to the West Bank and works as a massage therapist and spiritual counsellor. “I believe in the Torah. It is not just a book of then. It is a book of now.”

It is not only Jewish Zionists who believe that the West Bank -- Judea and Samaria – was granted to Israel by God; Evangelical Christian leaders in America, who played a significant role in electing President Trump, are also urging him to recognize Israel’s claim to the West Bank based on a promise God made to the Jews in the Bible.

Prominent evangelical supporters of Trump are employing a multi-faceted strategy to pressure the president. This includes making appearances in Israel, petitioning the White House, pushing their ideas at key evangelical conferences, and building congressional support.

Some of America’s leading evangelicals, including Ralph Reed, Tony Perkins, and Mario Bramnick, visited Israel in March 2025 to

publicly endorse Israel's sovereignty over the West Bank. "I literally feel God is giving Israel a blank check," remarked Bramnick, the president of the Latino Coalition for Israel.

These evangelical leaders are part of a movement known as Christian Zionism and believe that the land was promised to the Jews in the Bible. They refer to the West Bank by its biblical names, Judea and Samaria.

"We Christians are calling on our beloved President Trump and his team to aggressively remove all barriers to Israel's sovereignty over all the land, including Judea and Samaria," proclaimed Terri Copeland Pearsons, an influential pastor, during her remarks at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Texas on February 27, 2025.

Event organizers advanced a resolution sponsored by the American Christian Leaders for Israel that rejects "all efforts" to pressure Israel into relinquishing West Bank territory. The group identifies itself as a network of approximately 3,000 Christian leaders "representing tens of millions of American Christians" who advocate for "biblical truth" and steadfast support for Israel.

Those urging Trump to endorse Israel's annexation of the West Bank hope this declaration will put an end to any further discussions about a future Palestinian state in that region.

Representative Claudia Tenney, a Republican of New York, who identifies as Presbyterian, sent a similar letter to Trump

alongside five other members of the congressional “Friends of Judea and Samaria Caucus.” The letter called on his administration to “recognize Israel’s right” to assert sovereignty over the territory, stating that doing so would be crucial to defending “the Judeo-Christian heritage on which our nation was founded.”

Representative Brian Mast, the Florida Republican who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has directed his staff to refer to the territory as Judea and Samaria, according to an internal committee memo first reported by *Axios* in February 2025.

When asked in February 2025, about his stand on Israel’s annexation of the West Bank Trump said that “people do like the idea.”

However, in a *Time Magazine* interview a few days after his October 2025, 20-point Gaza Peace Plan took effect, he drew a rare red line and warned Israel that it “would lose all of its support from the U.S.” if the annexation proceeds.

“It won’t happen,” Trump noted. “It won’t happen because I gave my word to the Arab countries. Israel would lose all its support from the United States if that happened.”

On October 22, 2025, while U.S. Vice President JD Vance was in Israel, Israeli lawmakers advanced two bills in the Knesset paving the way for annexation. “If it was a political stunt, then it was a very stupid one and I personally take some insult to it,” Vance

said. “The West Bank is not going to be annexed by Israel. The policy of the Trump administration is that the West Bank will not be annexed by Israel, that will continue to be our policy.”

About 80 percent of white evangelical Christians supported President Trump in the 2024 election, according to a voter survey by the *Associated Press*. And the Christian vote more broadly was pivotal to his victory, research from Arizona Christian University showed, with Christians making up more than 70 percent of voters, more than half of whom voted for Trump.

“The current administration is very aware that white evangelical Christians voted in large numbers and are deeply motivated to support Israel,” said David Katibah, who leads communications and Christian engagement at Telos. This group in Washington, formed by two Christian Americans in 2009 – one evangelical and the other of Palestinian descent – aims to resolve the Israeli Palestinian conflict through education and “peacemaker” training.

Trump has appointed evangelical Christian supporters of Israel to key positions in his administration, including the tele-evangelist Paula White-Cain, who serves as a senior adviser to the newly established White House Faith Office, and is outspoken about her support for Israel on religious grounds, and former governor of Arkansas and Baptist minister Mike Huckabee, who has long aligned with Israeli settlers, as Ambassador to Israel.

In 2017, Huckabee participated in a ceremony in a West Bank settlement and told CNN that he believes “Israel has title deed to

Judea and Samaria," adding that "there is no such thing as a West Bank or "an occupation."

The American evangelical community is not monolithic or in unanimous agreement regarding annexation. Increasingly, younger evangelicals are embracing "a more expansive view" that emphasizes mutual flourishing, justice, and human rights for both sides, Katibah said.

A 2021 survey commissioned by the University of North Carolina at Pembroke revealed a sharp shift in attitudes among younger evangelicals between 2018 and 2021, with support dropping from 75 percent to less than 35 percent, accompanied by a rising desire to see U.S. policy reflect a Palestinian perspective.

A Palestinian and Arab perspective Trump acknowledged after meeting Arab leaders on September 23, 2025, on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly.

"I will not allow Israel to annex the West Bank. Nope, I will not allow it. It's not going to happen," Trump said.

Arab and Muslim countries warned Trump during their meeting about the grave consequences of any annexation of the West Bank, a message the president "understands very well," according to Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhar Al-Saud.

To stave off annexation in 2020, the United Arab Emirates normalized relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords,

Trump's signature foreign policy achievement during his first term. The UAE said any move towards annexation was a "red line" that would end the pursuit of regional integration under the Accords. There is little upside for Israel to now formally annex the West Bank which it has subjected to military occupation since 1967. Israel has already taken steps that amount to a de facto annexation. Formal annexation "would be like registering the birth of a child that has already been born," said Ibrahim Dalalsha, head of the Ramallah-based Horizon think-tank.

Amir Avivi, founder of Israel's Defence and Security Forum, a hawkish think-tank that has worked on models for annexation, said in 2025 that he expected Israel would embark on annexation within the next two years – but only in coordination with the U.S.

"If at some point, Trump says that for U.S. interests it's more important to normalize relations with the Arab world first, this is what will happen," he said. "It doesn't matter how much pressure the right-wing parties put on Netanyahu. The only pressure he will fear is from President Trump."

Lost Hope

The religious overtones and language in the calls to date for a two-state solution ring hollow and have lost all meaning and hope. Repeating the two-state solution mantra has allowed politicians to avoid confronting the reality that partition of Israel into two states to include Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank is unattainable.

An opinion best expressed by Zakaria Zubeidi, who in the early 2000s inspired Palestinians – and terrified Israelis – by leading the Fatah affiliate Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade during the second intifada, that lasted five years and killed roughly 1,000 Israelis.

He drew international attention in 2007, when, as Israeli and Palestinian leadership tried to restore calm, Israel offered an amnesty to hundreds of militants, including Zubeidi, on condition they give up their arms.

Zubeidi accepted, telling interviewers at the time that the intifada had failed. He shifted his focus to a theatre he founded with an Israeli actor and Swedish activist. The Freedom Theatre in Jenin organized drama workshops for young people in the city – a program that continues.

His goal was still to end the Israeli occupation, he said. But his involvement in the theatre reflected an evolving approach to achieving that goal. His aim was not to replace or renounce armed Palestinian activity, but to provide it with an intellectual and cultural ballast.

“The media said Zakaria moved from armed struggle to cultural struggle,” Zubeidi said, referring to himself in the third person. “But its not about being one thing or another,” he added. “How did I open the theatre door? I broke it with my rifle.”

Accusing him of breaking the terms of his amnesty, Israel

rearrested him in 2019, setting the stage for his most memorable exploits yet. As he awaited trial in 2021, he escaped prison through a tunnel that a group of fellow inmates had dug from their cell's bathroom. Though all six escapees were rearrested within days, and Zubeidi was convicted over the jailbreak, their quest for freedom captivated and galvanized Palestinians, enshrining Zubeidi's cult status. Until Israel's bombardment devastated the territory, murals commemorating the escape could be found on walls across Gaza.

He was freed in January 2025, during a prisoner swap for Israeli hostages, welcomed home as a hero by hundreds of cheering Palestinians.

After his release, he became emblematic of a sense of hopelessness that imbues Palestinian life. In an August 2025 interview with *The New York Tims International Editions*, he said he felt that his life as a militant, a theatre leader and a prisoner had ultimately proved futile. None of it had helped forge a Palestinian state, he said, and it may never do so.

"We have to reconsider our tools," he said. "We founded a theatre, and we tried cultural resistance – what did that do?" he asked. "We tried the rifle, we tried shooting. There's no solution."

His hometown in Jenin in the West Bank was destroyed and depopulated by Israeli raids. His 21-year-old son, also a militant, had been killed in an Israeli strike. On every front, Palestinian strategies seemed to be failing.

“But what is the solution?” Zubeidi asked. “I’m asking that question myself.” “There is no peaceful solution and there is no military solution,” he added. “Why? Because the Israelis don’t want to give us anything.”

Tareq Baconi, the author of *Hamas Contained* and president of the board of al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Network, said in an article in the April 2, 2024 edition of *The New York Times International Edition*, that the two-state solution is an unjust, impossible fantasy: “There will be neither peace nor justice while Palestinians are subjugated behind walls and under Israeli domination,” he pointed out. Such concerns notwithstanding, the time is long overdue to move beyond an illusory Palestinian state to a realistic achievable state.

Palestinian Solution

Recognition of a Palestinian state by a majority of U.N. countries at the General Assembly in early August and its annual meeting in September 2025, is commendable, as it affirms Palestinian political independence. However, it did so – again – without a geographic boundary acceptable to all concerned. A Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank is, and always has been, a non-starter.

The August *New York Declaration*, which laid out steps to a resolution to the Gaza War and the unification of Gaza and the West bank, including East Jerusalem in a Palestinian state, is just another repeated unrealistic illusory dream.

According to the declaration, Palestinians are expected to reject violence, commit to a demilitarized state, maintain a security system beneficial to "all parties," hold elections and develop "good governance, transparency" and "financial sustainability" alongside "service provision, business climate and development." Israel, is called upon to obey basic international rules, publicly embrace the two-state solution and withdraw its troops from Gaza.

Palestinians, and all member states of the U.N., must stop wasting time on meetings and resolutions on establishing a Palestinian state that Israel will not tolerate. To keep doing so is like building in a volcano, hoping it will never erupt again.

Zinaida Miller, a professor of law and international affairs and director of the Center for Global Law and Justice at the Northwestern University, asks legitimate questions in an article on August 9-10, 2025, in *The New York Times International Edition*. "The states endorsing the New York Declaration and announcing plans for recognition face two immediate tests. First, will they enforce international law regarding Israel's most egregious violations on the ground, in both Gaza and the West Bank?"

"If they cannot effectively save the lives under the gravest threat today, then what hope can they offer for the future?" Questions to which we know the answers. The U.N. has no enforcement mechanism so it cannot enforce any of its toothless resolutions.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres rightfully called the two-state solution “farther than ever before.” The only hope that can be offered in the future is a Palestinian state in an alternative geographical location. Not Gaza and the West Bank.

There must be a paradigm shift, a sea change of thinking when it comes to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Right of Return

The British Mandate, created in 1923 to govern Palestine, established borders across the province of Palestine, from Saudi Arabia, Transjordan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine, as discussed in earlier chapters.

By 1923, the Zionist movement had a much clearer understanding of how to get the new state off the ground after the Second World War for Jews to return to their historic homeland. A crucial factor in this was that the British had already dismantled the Palestinian leadership and its defence capabilities when they suppressed the 1936 Revolt, sometimes with the help of the *Hagana*, thus providing the Zionist leadership ample time and space to plan their next moves.

Once the threat of a Nazi invasion into Palestine was removed in 1942, the Zionist leaders became more focused and realized that the sole obstacle standing in their way of successfully returning to Zion was the British presence, not Palestinian resistance.

As the Second World War ended, the Jewish leadership in

Palestine embarked on a campaign to expel the British from the country. Simultaneously, they continued to formulate their plans for the Palestine population.

Ben-Gurion wrote to his son in 1937, expressing his conviction that the removal of Arabs was the only course of action available to Zionism for a Jewish homeland. “The Arabs will have to go, but one needs an opportune moment for making it happen, such as a war.” The moment arrived in 1948. Ben-Gurion, the founder of the State of Israel, its first prime minister, is the man who master-minded the collective dispossession of Palestinians.

Palestinians have a right of return to their homeland. To do so they need a new leader, who like Ben-Gurion can build a Palestinian homeland – a state in the territory of historic Palestine, not in Gaza and the West Bank – but other part of the dessert to the sea – the Red Sea.

The time has come for Palestinians to also return to a Palestinian homeland.



Chapter Ten

Second & Third "River to The Sea" Wars 1967 & 1973

There never was a good war or a bad peace
– Benjamin Franklin –

Six Day War

In the mid-1960s, the U.S. was engrossed in its war in Vietnam. For months, China had been encouraging the Soviet Union to intensify its involvement in the Middle East, which would compel the U.S. to shift its focus to the Middle East, thus, hopefully, reduce its bombing of North Vietnam and seek a peaceful settlement.

On May 12, 1967, the Soviet Ambassador in Cairo provided the Egyptian government with fake intelligence about Israeli troop movements along the Egyptian border. Two days later, Egyptian troops and artillery paraded through the streets of Cairo, military units were sent across the Suez Canal into Sinai, and the country was placed on a war footing.

On May 17, the Egyptian leader, Gen. Abdel Nasser demanded the withdrawal of U.N. troops from the border zone. He also dispatched torpedo boats and submarines into the Gulf of Aqaba and closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping.

France was then Israel's arms supplier. When Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban went to France to seek political support for

Israel to defend itself, President Charles de Gaulle cautioned him against embarking on a war. The French leader's position was that the four world powers -- Britain, France, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. -- must be left to resolve the dispute, and France would influence the Soviet Union. However, Moscow opposed intervention and nine days after their meeting, de Gaulle halted the emergency airlifts to Israel, while Britain and the U.S. remained supportive. British Prime Minister Harold Wilson said Britain would not allow the blockade of the Straits of Tiran to remain in force. Likewise, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson said that the straits should be opened by force, if necessary, but burdened by the Vietnam War, he was not inclined to act without the support of Congress and the United Nations.

Sound familiar? It should, except for the support of the United Nations. America and Britain were bombing the Houthis in Yemen from 2004 to 2025 to stop them from attacking foreign ships and kidnapping their crews as an expression of their solidarity and support for Hamas in Gaza in its war with Israel.

In the meantime, the Arab world grew increasingly impatient, and Iraq, Kuwait and Algeria sent troops to Jordan and Egypt, and King Hussein of Jordan signed, under pressure from Syria and Egypt, a mutual defence agreement with Nasser, and an Egyptian general was assigned as the joint commander of the Jordanian forces.

In Israel, agitation for military engagement increased. However, Eban persuaded the Cabinet not to act, garnering support from

Europe and the United Nations. However, by June 4, it was acknowledged that it was pointless to delay any further, especially since the Western powers had abandoned the 1957 agreement to keep the Straits of Tiran open.

On the morning of June 5, Israel began to defend itself against another *River to the Sea* campaign. Israeli planes flew low across Egypt, avoiding radar detection, and discovered that most Egyptian planes were on the ground as Israeli intelligence had predicted. In approximately 500 sorties Israeli aircraft destroyed 309 out of Egypt's 340 planes.

In response, Jordan and Syria conducted air strikes on Israeli targets. Israel retaliated and destroyed nearly the entire Jordanian and Syrian air forces.

By the end of the second day of the war, Israeli officials were convinced that Israel had won. Israeli planes attacked Egyptian bases, and Israeli ground forces crossed the border in northern Sinai. Having eliminated the Egyptian air force, the Israeli army continued its onslaught under the cover of air support. Israeli tanks outmanoeuvred the Egyptians, and Israeli planes attacked convoys of retreating tanks and trucks. On June 7, Israeli paratroopers descended on Sharm el-Sheikh, which overlooks the Straits of Tiran; the Egyptian fortress there was abandoned. By dusk, Israeli forces had reached Rumani, 10 miles from the Suez Canal; the next day, Israeli troops reached the waterway.

When Nasser learned that the Egyptian air force had been

destroyed, he contacted Hussein to coordinate their next steps. Alleging that American and British planes had participated in the attack on Egypt, on June 5, Hussein shelled Tel Aviv, other towns and kibbutzim. He then sent an army unit into Jerusalem's demilitarized zone to secure a position from where it could shell West Jerusalem. In response, Israel moved into the West Bank, seizing the mountain ridge and road connecting Jerusalem and Ramallah.

Israel continued to fight for control of other important roads and routes across the West Bank, seizing the roads that ran southwest from Jerusalem to Latrun, north to Nablus and Jenin, and south through Bethlehem and Hebron. Israeli forces then cut off the main road from Jerusalem and hit Jordanian reinforcements and Palestinian refugee camps near Jericho. It has been reported that approximately 100,000 Palestinian civilians were ordered to move eastward across the Jordan River, though some have since returned.

Since 1948, the Old City of Jerusalem has been in Jordanian hands, but Hussein's attack on Israel provided an opportunity for Israel to seize Jerusalem. On June 7, a battle for supremacy took place which lasted for nearly two days. Israeli troops broke through St. Stephen's Gate, advanced along the Via Dolorosa, and eventually took control of Jerusalem.

Syria waged a vigorous anti-Israel campaign, fiercely fighting, and remaining undefeated for three days. From the Golan Heights, Syria had been shelling Israeli villages in the Galilee since the

country's founding. On June 8, plans were approved to initiate an attack against the Syrian forces, and two days later, the Israeli army gained control of the Golan Heights. This marked the end of the war.

Israel officially annexed the Golan Heights in 1981. It also took control of the Old City and 28 Arab villages in the West Bank, formerly held by Jordan, Sinai, and Gaza, which were previously held by Egypt. According to a 1967 census, nearly a million Arabs lived in these territories – 595,000 on the West Bank and 389,700 in Gaza – Arab population had grown to more than two million in Gaza and the West Bank, respectively, when the Gaza War began in October 2023. Wars have facilitated Israel's geographic expansion but the same can't be said for the growth of the Arab population within its borders.

Palestinian Arab Israelis

From 1948, ninety percent of Palestinian Arabs living in Israel were under military governance, organized into three regional councils – Northern, Central, and Southern commands. Between 1949 and 1950, the Military Government was formalized, establishing a government structure that lasted 18 years.

Arabs who remained in Israel faced strict restrictions on their movements and activities which they generally obeyed. During Ottoman rule and the British Mandate, they had been subjected to similar constraints. Instead of rebelling against Israeli rule, they adapted to their status as a subjugated people. However, their children understood they have been denied the right to

equal treatment in the Jewish state. Nonetheless, they enjoyed in Israel more educational and political rights than they could expect in any Arab states.

Palestinian Arab judges have ruled against Israelis, including the sentencing of a former prime minister to jail for corruption. Palestinian Arab doctors and nurses treated Israeli victims of the October 7, 2023, massacre, and Arab Palestinians rescued victims of the attack, with some being taken hostage alongside their Jewish Israeli counterparts.

Land for Peace

The Israeli national unity government led by Levi Eshkol was prepared to relinquish large areas of the occupied territories captured during the Six-Day War in exchange for peace. On June 19, 1967, the Israeli Cabinet agreed on a four-point resolution stating that Israel was willing to withdraw to the international border with Egypt in exchange for a peace treaty. However, such an agreement was contingent upon allowing Israel freedom of movement in the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal. This resolution also stated that Israel was prepared to withdraw to the international border with Syria if the Golan Heights were demilitarized. No mention was made of the West Bank or Gaza Strip. These issues were to be addressed at a later stage. Despite Israel's flexibility on these territories, the Arab states were unwilling to engage in negotiations. In fact they resolved at the first meeting of Arab nations after the war, held at the Khartoum Conference from August 19 to September 1, 1967, that there should be no peace, negotiation, or recognition of the Jewish

state.

In fact, the Arab defeat fomented widespread resentment against Israel. The loss of the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the continued presence of Israeli troops along the east bank of the Suez Canal provoked outrage among Arabs at all levels.

Throughout 1968, Egypt carried out bombardments against Israeli positions along the canal; the following year, it announced a policy of constant military activity along the canal. This war of attrition between Israel and Egypt posed a serious problem for the Jewish state – Israel could not afford to sustain constant casualties along its border. In response to this Egyptian initiative, Israel embarked on a policy of sustained retaliation.

During this period of intermittent clashes between Israel and Egypt, both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were building up their military support and infrastructure for their respective client states -- Israel and Egypt.

Yom Kippur War

Another *River to the Sea* campaign that came to be known as the Yom Kippur War, was a surprise joint Arab assault on Israel in 1973. It inflicted severe losses on Israel, with some asserting, it exposed the first cracks in its ostensible invincibility.

In early 1973, Israel became aware of increased Egyptian military activity, putting the country on alert. Israeli intelligence had received a reliable tip that Egypt was ready to attack any day --

from Nasser's son-in-law. Yet by late September the Israeli political establishment was divided about whether further military movements signified that war was imminent.

On Yom Kippur, October 6, 1973, Israeli intelligence became aware that Egypt and Syria were preparing to attack the country. Although the Israeli air force was ready to launch airstrikes, Defence Minister Moshe Dayan and Prime Minister, Golda Meir, concluded that Israel should not strike first, as that would make it difficult for the U.S. to aid.

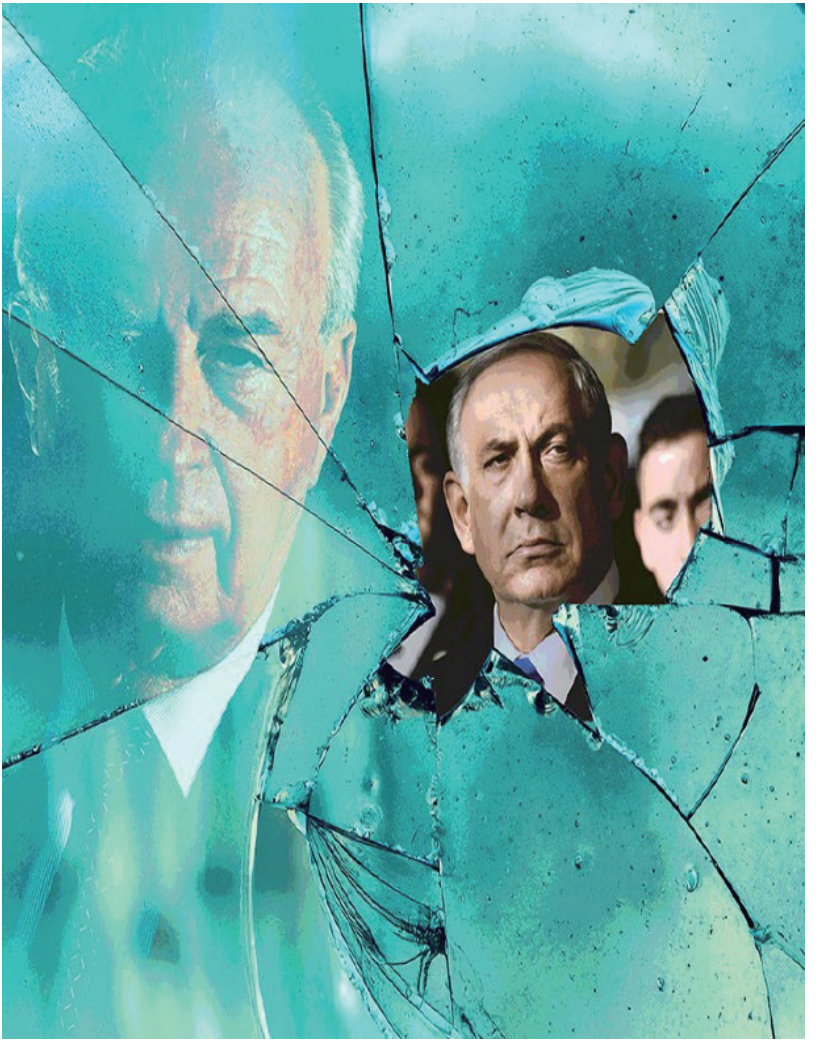
By 2.00 p.m. the Arab offensive began, resulting in considerable loss of life and property for Israel. In the first month, 2,500 Israelis were killed.

In the end, Syria and Egypt were defeated.

Israeli troops had penetrated Syria, and on the Suez front the Israeli army established a superior position. Consequently, the ceasefire that commenced at the end of October was unstable, and the U.S. was concerned that the war would resume. Eager to safeguard American interests in the Middle East and diminish Soviet influence in the region, the U.S. was committed to establishing peace. This led to a series of peace initiatives at Camp David and Oslo, as discussed in Chapter 11. As in previous conflicts, Israel continuous to expand geographically.



“You’ve got to get up, you’ve got to get up, You’ve got to get up this morning.”
Irving Berlin



Chapter Eleven

Israeli Palestinian Authority Agreements and Iran Proxies
Neighborhood Bully
–Bob Dylan –

Palestinian Liberation Organizations
Fatah was founded in Kuwait in 1958-59 by Palestinian students, including Yasser Arafat. Other Palestinian resistance organizations established at the time included the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), headed by George Habash, and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), led by Nayif Hawatmeh.

Fatah evolved into the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) which was established in 1964 at a meeting of Palestinian Arabs in East Jerusalem. This body subsequently set up the Palestinian Liberation Army, whose aim was to eliminate Israel. This led to the resumption of fedayeen raids on Israel.

The PLO, supported by all Arab nations, initiated a war of liberation. In 1970, Palestinian freedom fighters took control of the Gaza Strip, however, through a series of searches and the demolition of refugee camps, PLO rule in Palestine came to an end in 1972.

After the Six-Day War, the PLO emerged as the main entity representing Palestinian interests. Arafat, as leader of Fatah,

became chairman of the executive committee of the Palestine National Council, effectively becoming the leader of the PLO. After the Six-Day War, the PLO headquarters were moved from Damascus to Amman. The so-called Cairo Agreement reached on November 3, 1969, granted the PLO the right to operate against Israel from Lebanon.

Various acts of terrorism supported by the PFLP and PDFLP occurred during 1971 to 1973. Fatah also set up its own terrorist group – the Black September Organization which was responsible for the assassination of Jordanian Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tal and the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972. Two years later in 1974, the Arabs held their seventh summit conference in Rabat which officially recognized the PLO as the sole representative body of the Palestinian people. Soon afterwards, on November 13, Yasser Arafat spoke at the U.N. on behalf of Palestinians worldwide.

The Palestinian Authority governing the West Bank is an entity controlled by the Fatah faction of the PLO. The PLO accepted the legitimacy of the Israeli state under the U.S.-mediated Oslo Peace Accords in 1993 and 1995.

The first Intifada, a Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation, began in December 1987, following an IDF tank transporter accidentally collided with a line of vans carrying Gaza day labourers, killing four. Rumours that the crash was deliberate acted as the catalyst to draw thousands of Arabs to the streets, burning tires and hurling Molotov cocktails. Incidentally, it

occurred almost 50 years after the original Arab Revolt, revealing numerous parallels.

In both instances, Palestinian leaders were caught by surprise by the spontaneity and endurance of what was a popular, grassroots rebellion. Like the Mufti, Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat scrambled to assert control over an eruption of rage that had sprung from below.

In *Palestine 1936*, Kessler points out that, akin to the Arab Revolt, the Intifada was marked by strikes, civil disobedience, and sabotage. Shops were closed, taxis ceased operations, the Jewish economy faced boycotts, and crops and forests were set ablaze. Again, there were acts of violence against civilians and soldiers, but this time the weapon of choice was not rifles, but stones. Arafat understood the power of imagery during the era of mass media.

“A paroxysm of wanton bloodshed would cast the Palestinians not as defiant victims of dispossession and occupation but as cruel, irrational terrorists,” Kessler astutely points out.

Over the Intifada’s first three years, some 60 Israelis were killed – “a painful blow, but just one-eighth the toll from the same span in 1930s,” Kessler reminds us.

The Israelis, like the Palestinian leadership, were shocked by the Intifada, which ultimately prompted them to enter discussions during the 1993 Oslo Accords with their former nemesis, Arafat.

The Accords established the Palestinian Authority, which was dominated from the outset by Arafat's Fatah faction, to begin exercising provisional self-government in Gaza and the West Bank. For the first time in memory, the promise of a conflict-ending deal appeared possible. However, like before, extremists scrambled to subvert any such settlement.

In Gaza, the Muslim Brotherhood had birthed a new group, the Islamic Resistance Movement, commonly known by its Arabic acronym *Hamas*. Its armed wing carried the name of the original anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, Islamist fighter-martyr of the mid-1930s: Izz al-Din al-Qassam. "The Qassam Brigade's signature contribution to the hope-filled Oslo years was the suicide bomber and the homespun Qassam rocket," Kessler sneers.

In 2000, the U.S. convened the Camp David Summit. Like previous peace attempts, the gulf between the Israelis and Palestinians proved unbridgeable. The collapse of the Oslo process was accompanied by a second, far bloodier Intifada – the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Civilians bore a heavier brunt than ever, accounting for two-thirds of the more than 1000 Israelis killed. The charred skeleton of a civilian bus became the macabre emblem of the four-years of violence. "Once again, memories of the earliest revolt remained close at hand," Kessler reminds us.

One morning in early March 2002, a sniper took aim at a checkpoint in *Wadi al Haramiya*, the *Valley of Thieves*, between Ramallah and Nablus in the West Bank. Armed only with a World War II-era Mauser rifle, he methodically brought down 10

Israelis, one by one. “He is one of the old rebels, for this is their style,” local elders proclaimed approvingly. “He is an old fighter who has stayed in hiding since 1939.” When the perpetrator was identified as a Fatah gunman, the elders still favoured the old story. “They needed heroes,” argued Sonia Nimr – an activist and academic who served time in an Israeli prison “and the only ones they could think of were those rebels of the 1936-1939 revolt.”

Within weeks, Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield, its largest military operation since the Six-Day War. Tanks besieged Arafat’s Ramallah headquarters. Work began on a West Bank security barrier that, in time, would stretch hundreds of miles. Troops imposed curfews, reoccupied Palestinian cities, and clashed with keffiyeh-clad militants in street battles reminiscent of their British forerunners’.

The two prior rebellions had brought Palestinians tangible gains: in the 1930s, the White Paper; in the 1980s and 1990s, peace talks and greater autonomy. This time, however, the devastation appeared pointless, almost nihilistic. Partisans of Hamas and Fatah came to see each other not as fellow countrymen but as sworn enemies to be destroyed. Of the approximately 5,000 Palestinians killed in the Second Intifada – a figure matching the most common estimate from the Great Revolt – perhaps 12 percent were victims of infighting. Despite the agony inflicted on Israelis, the biggest losers were, once again, the Palestinians.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada echoed the Great Arab Revolt.

The Second Intifada sputtered out in 2005, just as Israel withdrew from Gaza. Two years later, the Hamas-Fatah schism reached its nadir as the Islamists took over the enclave, forcibly executing and expelling Fatah members.

Subsequent years saw four major rounds of fighting with Israel, with airstrikes wreaking havoc in Gaza and rocket salvos sowing fear and destruction across Israel.

In the wars that broke out in May 2021 and October 2023, hostilities extended to a new 21st-century battlefield – social media!

When Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel united in a daylong strike in May 2021, their supporters reached for their own antilogs from bygone days. “Tomorrow a general strike is declared across historic Palestine,” a prominent Palestinian activist tweeted. “This is a historic moment. Last time this happened was on May 16, 1936. Exactly 85 years ago … A legacy of resistance.”

It is time to change the legacy. Time to stop fighting and start building a Palestinian state.

That is exactly what several U.S. presidents have attempted to do at Camp David, starting with Jimmy Carter, together with Israeli and Arab leaders, Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat, and in Oslo.

Camp David Agreement

In the Israeli election of May 17, 1977, Menachem Begin, the former leader of Irgun, and leader of the Likud bloc that won the largest number of elected members to the Knesset, breaking Labor's hold on the Jewish state. Adopting a new policy that some have labelled right-wing, Menachem Begin argued that Israel had the right to control Judea and Samaria – the West Bank. In his view, although U.N. Resolution 242 obliged Israel to withdraw from occupied territories, it did not specify that this should be done on all fronts. Therefore, any Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai would satisfy this requirement. Undeterred, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat addressed the Egyptian Parliament on November 9, 1977, declaring his willingness to go anywhere in search of peace.

Taking Sadat at his word, Begin invited him to visit Israel, which he did on November 19, addressing the Knesset the next day. Sadat demanded that Israeli forces leave all occupied territories and grant Palestinians the right to self-determination. Sadat urged the Israeli government to comply with these requests so that peace could be established in the Middle East. Considerable disagreements remained between Begin and Sadat.

Throughout 1978, the U.S. tried to bring the parties together. Eventually, a summit took place at Camp David from September 5 to 17. Sadat accepted a general outline for autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza in return for the Sinai Peninsula. Although the Camp David Agreement set a timeline of three months to finalize a peace treaty, it took until March 1979 for the differences

between the two countries to be resolved. On March 26, 1979, Begin, Sadat, and US. President Jimmy Carter signed a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt at the White House.

However, the relationship did not develop favourably. Arab nations had little desire to make concessions to the Jewish state. They demanded Egypt do the same. When the Israeli Ambassador to Egypt sought to establish a residence in Cairo, no one would lease him land for an embassy or home. He was also shunned by the diplomatic community. While many Israeli tour groups visited Egypt, few Egyptians travelled to Israel.

Although normal diplomatic relations were not fully established between Israel and Egypt, Israelis no longer feared attack from the Egyptian army.

In June 1981, just weeks before the general elections in Israel, the Israeli air force carried out an attack on a nuclear reactor in Iraq. Despite widespread international condemnation, Israelis felt a profound sense of relief that Iraq had been rendered incapable of producing a nuclear bomb. As a result, Begin and his Likud Party once again won the most seats, and Begin formed a government with several ultra-Orthodox parties -- a model his Likud successor, Benjamin Netanyahu, has adopted.

The Intifadas discussed earlier, which began in 1987, resulted in the deaths of over 50 Arabs and left hundreds wounded. As a result, one of the leading Arab members of the Knesset, Abdel Wahab Darawshe, left the Labor Party and founded the Arab

Democratic Party, which advocated for the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

Outside Israel, the Intifada was widely supported and on December 22, 1987, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution condemning Israeli actions in the occupied territories. Spurred by this action, the Arab states established a fund to support the Intifada.

Determined to find a solution to the Palestinian problem, the U.S. sent its Assistant Under Secretary of State, Richard Murphy, to the Middle East on February 5, 1988, with a plan for the region. According to the Murphy proposals, two delegations – one from Israel and the other comprising Jordanians and Palestinians – would discuss the possibilities of temporary autonomy for Palestinians. This would be accompanied by Israeli redeployment and municipal elections held by the Palestinians. Later an international conference would be convened to address the outcome of these deliberations and within three years, Palestinian autonomy would be established. On Murphy's departure, however, Hamas was founded, committing itself to Islamic rule over all of Palestine and the destruction of Israel.

Hamas

Operating as an independent body, Hamas instigated strikes, punished Palestinians who did not comply with its policies, and created a network to assist those in need.

In August 1988, Hamas published its covenant, which rejected the legitimacy of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Additionally, it rejected any compromise with the State of Israel, proclaiming that all of Palestine belonged to Muslims and declaring a holy war against Israel as well as against corrupt elements within Palestinian society. Another group, Islamic Jihad, that stemmed from the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip, similarly supported military action against the Jewish state. In Jordan, Sudan, and Southern Lebanon, other Iran-supported anti-Israel military groups, such as Hezbollah, also backed the Palestinian cause.

Within Israel, there was increasing sympathy for the plight of Palestinians in the occupied territories. In 1988, a human rights organization called B'Tselem, emerged to criticize breaches of human rights by the Israeli armed forces. Another human rights organization, Hotline: Center for the Defence of the Individual, was established to assist Palestinians who had been denied the right to leave the country. In April 1989, the Israeli police found two West Bank universities at private schools in East Jerusalem conducting a network of illegal activities. It led to the military ordering all schools in the university and the West Bank shut down along with those in the Gaza Strip as a form of collective punishment for the resistance to the occupation. These actions, said Professor Stanley Cohen of the Hebrew University, an expert in criminology, were an infringement of Jordanian law and a violation of the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Road to Oslo

The Madrid Conference, held at the end of October 1991 in Spain, for establishing a Palestinian state and achieving peace, was opened with U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Russian President Michail Gorbachev as the main speakers. Israel was represented by Yitzhak Shamir, while the Arab states were represented by their foreign ministers. Palestinians were represented by individuals from the occupied territories who formed a joint Jordanian Palestinian delegation. It was followed by another conference in December 1991 in Washington, which dealt with the procedures for future talks. Israel insisted that it was not willing to discuss territorial concessions and preferred to discuss Palestinian autonomy, a position that left the Palestinians dissatisfied.

Subsequent meetings between Israelis and Arabs took place in various cities to explore several issues in preparation for Oslo. The first of such meetings occurred in Moscow, followed by sessions in Ottawa, Vienna, and Brussels. The issues discussed focused on water sharing, economic cooperation, and the status of refugees.

Such collaborative efforts were interrupted by the Israeli elections, in which Labor won the most seats and formed a coalition government with Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister. In his inaugural speech, Rabin emphasized that the peace process would be reactivated and that the Palestinians would be partners with Israel in this pursuit. He proposed the continuation of peace talks based on the framework of the Madrid Conference. Aware of Palestinian suffering over previous decades, Rabin proposed a

form of Palestinian self-government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and ordered a freeze on all new construction of Jewish settlements in those areas.

These efforts to renew the peace process ignited anger among members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, who were staunchly opposed to any compromise. With the encouragement, financial, and military support of Iran, Hamas condemned the Israeli occupation while improving educational, welfare, and healthcare services for the Palestinian population – all while using civilians as human shields as the Intifada raged on.

Oslo Accords

Despite the suicide bombings, stabbings, and killings during the Intifada, secret talks between the PLO and Israel started on January 20, 1993, in a villa outside Oslo, and drew up by February 11, a draft declaration of principles defining the guidelines for a regional Marshall Plan. During their March 20-22 meetings, an accord appeared within reach. This was followed by another meeting on June 14. Two months later, the Oslo Accords were approved by both sides; and the PLO renounced terrorism, a signing ceremony took place at the White House on September 13, 1993. Yitzak Rabin and Yasser Arafat led their respective delegations. After the signing ceremony, Rabin reluctantly shook Arafat's hand.

In the following months, Israel and the PLO engaged in active negotiations for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza.

The self-government arrangements and the withdrawal plans agreed upon at Oslo provided a basis for the establishment of a Palestinian state. In Arafat's view, such self-governing institutions were vital to Palestine's future as a nation state.

However, Hamas and Islamic Jihad continued, just as in 1947, to persuade Palestinian Arabs to oppose a two-state solution. Israeli extremists were also poised to sabotage the Oslo Accords. In January 1994, Yehoshafat Harkabi, former head of Israeli military intelligence, told researchers at Ben Gurion University that the internal debate about Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank could have serious consequences. Despite being a supporter of the peace process, he feared the extremists would resort to violence.

Meanwhile, Rabin, it seems, had thought that an approach should be made to Syria for a peace agreement in exchange for the return of the Golan Heights. He was determined to continue with negotiations despite unremitting Palestinian bombings.

Rabin said that such acts of terrorism would not deter the Israeli government from seeking an agreement with the PLO. On May 3, he and Arafat met in Cairo to finalize a peace agreement. Just after midnight, Arafat added several territorial alterations to the maps that had previously been agreed upon. Rabin accepted the changes, and the accord was signed on May 4. Under this agreement, a Palestinian authority headed by Arafat was granted legislative, executive, and judicial powers as well as responsibility for security, education, health, and welfare while Israel retained control over foreign affairs and defence.

Then, several days later, Arafat declared in Johannesburg that Palestinians would not give up their *jihad* until Jerusalem was liberated. *Jihad*, he explained, did not mean holy war, but rather a sacred campaign. On May 13, Israeli troops and administrators left Jericho; four days later, they withdrew from the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian flag was raised over Jericho and Gaza City. During this period, a U.N. force took up positions between the Jewish and Arab sections of Hebron. Once Gaza and Jericho were transferred to the Palestinian Authority, Rabin and Peres engaged in peace discussions with Jordan. On July 24, Rabin and King Hussein signed a peace accord in Washington.

Despite these treaties, four Hamas kidnappers seized an Israeli soldier in October, and threatened to murder him unless two hundred Hamas prisoners, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, were released. Determined not to negotiate with Hamas, Rabin refused to comply and suspended the Egyptian Israeli negotiations. As Israeli commandos attempted to rescue the soldier, he was killed along with one of the commandos. As a result, discussions concerning the Palestinian Authority were suspended, but negotiations with Jordan continued, culminating in a visit by Rabin to Jordan on October 16. He and Hussein discussed border modifications that were to be part of the peace agreement. On October 19, another suicide bomber detonated a bomb on a bus in Ramat Gan, killing 22 people. Angered by this event, the leader of the opposition, Benjamin Netanyahu, condemned the peace process.

Following the Ramat Gan bombing, public support for Israel's

peace efforts began to decline. Still, Peres determined to persist with the peace process, went to Gaza on July 4 to meet Arafat and finalize Oslo II – the extension of Palestinian rule to the West Bank, following the withdrawal of Israeli troops. Under this scheme, the West Bank would eventually be ruled by Palestinian authorities. Several weeks later, six Israelis were killed in Tel Aviv. Despite this act of terrorism peace negotiations continued, and Israeli Palestinian committees discussed the withdrawal of Israeli troops, Palestinian rule, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and the territory to be handed over to the Palestinian Authority.

On September 22, Peres and Arafat went to an Egyptian resort to discuss the final aspects of Palestinian rule in the West Bank. The following week, Rabin flew to Washington, where he signed the Oslo II agreement on September 28, 1995.

Back in Israel, opposition parties denounced Rabin for signing Oslo II, calling him a traitor. As the Knesset debated the Oslo treaty in October, right-wing demonstrators at a rally in Jerusalem protested against the government. In their view, Oslo II was a betrayal of the biblical Land of Israel. The leader of Likud, Netanyahu, attacked Rabin for reaching this accord with the support of Arab Knesset members. Despite such heated political acrimony, Oslo II was narrowly approved by the Knesset.

On February 25, 1994, an Israeli gunman, Baruch Goldstein, opened fire on Palestinian Arabs inside the main mosque in Hebron, killing 25 people.

On November 4, 1995, another Israeli gunman, Yigal Amir, assassinated Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin at the end of a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

Both Goldstein and Amir were religious Jews who opposed the peace process. The suicide bombings by Hamas and Islamic Jihad continued relentlessly.

The assassination of Rabin and the ongoing bombings slowed the peace process. After the March 13 suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed 13 Israelis, followed by another suicide bombing the next day in Tel Aviv that killed 18 people, Peres told Arafat that the future of the peace process was at risk unless the Palestinian Authority was prepared to act against Hamas.

The Israeli election on May 29, 1996, marked the end of the Labor Party's rule. Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party won a majority of seats, and together with other parties opposed to the Oslo II agreement formed a coalition government that enabled him to become prime minister. Despite his electoral defeat, Peres continued to push forward with his peace plans. However, Netanyahu delayed completing the arrangements for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank, and other territories.

Israel's unilateral disengagement plan from Gaza, proposed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was adopted by the Israeli government in August 2005.

Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza, as well as from four

settlements in the northern West Bank. By September 12, 2005, Israel had completed its disengagement from the Gaza Strip, and ten days later the military withdrawal from the northern West Bank was completed.

For right-wing Israelis, Oslo was a betrayal of both their Zionist and religious claims to what they, and the Bible, call “Judea and Samaria.” The word Oslo became a rallying cry of the Israeli right for what it considered a historic misjudgement – the first whispers of an independent Palestine that includes the West Bank.

The standard bearer for Oslo’s demise is the far-right Israeli finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, a settler himself, who leads Religious Zionism, a political party that forms the anchor of Netanyahu’s coalition government.

“What Oslo represents for Smotrich is the threat of an independent Palestinian state,” says Dennis Ross, the former U.S. Middle East envoy and peace negotiator during the Oslo years. Now that Smotrich is in power, “he wants to remove even the vestige, the potential of that possibility.”

“The first goal, first and foremost, is to dismantle the Palestinian Authority,” says Ohad Tal, Smotrich’s right-hand man in the Knesset, and the party’s primary interlocutor with the White House. “The second is to apply Israeli sovereignty to Judea and Samaria.”

Palestinian institutions have been weakened to the point of collapse, says Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian Authority's ambassador to the U.K. "We are at a very existential moment," he said in September 2025. "Israel is destroying the entire apparatus of the Palestinian government and Authority." That is a necessary step for Smotrich's ambitions, even if the Palestinian Authority is deeply unpopular among Palestinians for its ineffectiveness and corruption, says Aaron David Miller, another veteran American Middle East negotiator.

"The PA is a contrivance, an easy target, but it's a threat because of it's international stature, because the U.N., the U.K. and others cling to it in forlorn hope that it will reform itself," he says. And if the west can convince Israel to withdraw from Gaza, "the PA will be the hook on which they will hang their hat."

"As colonial planners of the occupation, people like Smotrich certainly know how to use what remains of Oslo to their benefit," says Raja Khalidi, director of the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute. "And he cares about destroying it effectively, and he's doing that very well, in a sort of piecemeal way."

By banning Palestinian workers from Israel, throttling the transfer of tax revenues and weakening the banking system, Khalidi estimates Israel has as of October 2025, shrunk the Palestinian economy by a third since October 7, 2023.

Asked in early September 2025 what his goals are for the West Bank, Smotrich replied: "Maximum land with minimum Arabs."

A crucial allegation made by Palestinians against the Palestinian Authority was that Arafat and Fatah had received billions of dollars in aid from foreign nations and organizations but had never used the money to develop Palestinian society. Instead, these funds were alleged to have been used personally by Arafat. These assertions became increasingly troubling and led to a rise in support for Hamas.

In opposition to the Palestinian Authority, Hamas stated it did not recognize Israel's right to exist, nor did it accept the Oslo process or any other peace process with Israel, stating that it encouraged acts of terrorism.

In the January 2006 elections, candidates from Fatah and Hamas competed for seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Due to widespread dissatisfaction with Fatah, Hamas won a majority of seats and was able to appoint a prime minister as well as several cabinet posts. Ismail Haniyeh became prime minister.

A civil war between Fatah and Hamas broke out in 2006. The violence intensified and by January 2007, Haniyeh and Arafat's successor Mahmoud Abbas, met to discuss ways to stop the fighting but failed to reach a lasting agreement.

The Palestinian Legislative Council cancelled its first session due to the fighting.

In June 2007, full-scale fighting broke out between Fatah and Hamas, and Hamas gained control of the entire Gaza Strip,

establishing a separate Gaza government.

In response, Israel, the U.S. and other Western countries sought to strengthen Fatah and isolate Hamas. Although Fatah was defeated in Gaza, it retains control of the West Bank to this day.

While Fatah and Hamas were attempting to resolve their differences through violence, Israel was still pursuing a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

All peace efforts and discussions about the establishment of a Palestinian state by successive Israeli prime ministers and American presidents – failed – because of Hamas.

Hamas Death Knell

Hamas' heinous attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, put the Palestinian issue front and center on the international political agenda – at the cost of destroying Gaza – and thwarted a diplomatic normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia that would have sidelined Hamas. However, it left room for Israel and Saudi Arabia to normalize diplomatic relations, and create the state of Palestine, without Hamas.

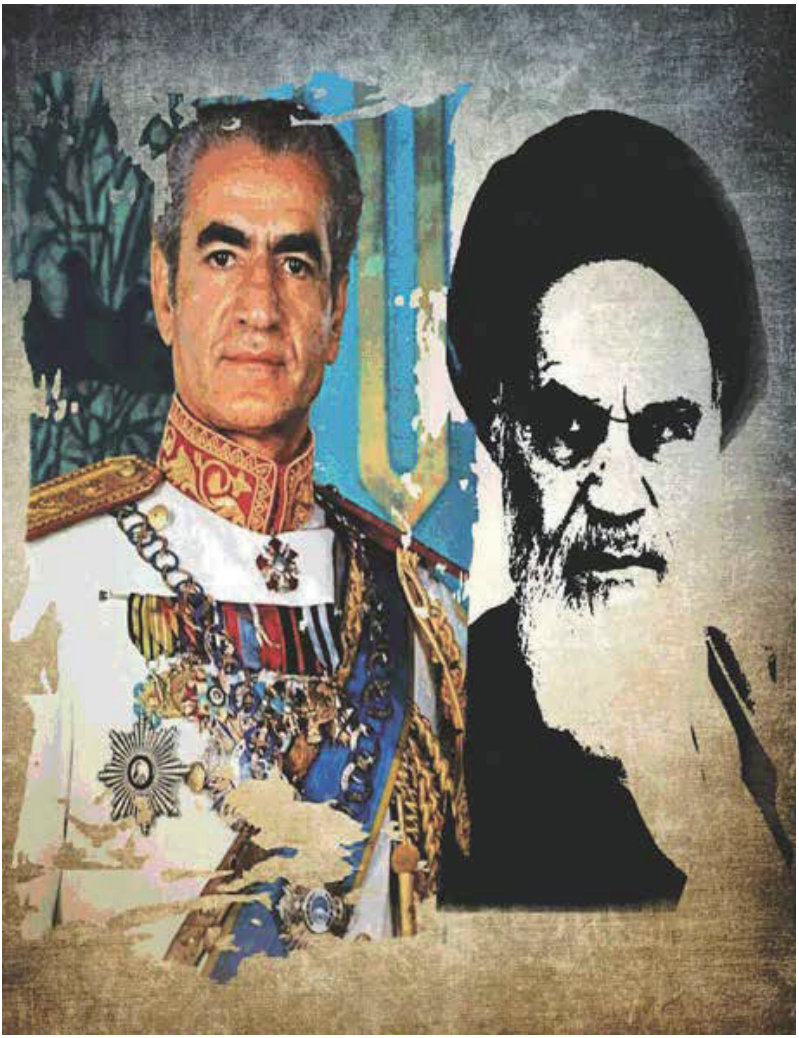
The Gaza War that followed October 7, 2023, decapitated Hamas' leadership and sidelined Hamas militarily, but did not eliminate it as a political ideology, with many surviving disciples and thousands of children growing up with hatred toward Israel, preparing and waiting to join the next attack.

Watching the Israeli military expose and destroy the hundreds of miles of sophisticated Hamas tunnels in Gaza, I couldn't resist during a visit to Vietnam in September 2024, to going again to visit the Cu Chi Tunnels that the North Vietnamese built while fighting the Americans and South Vietnamese during the Vietnam War and reflect on the Gaza tunnel network.

The Viet Cong and the Vietnamese won their war against America, thanks in no small part to their brilliant and creative tunnel network, which has been studied by Hamas. Nevertheless, in Gaza, Hamas lost its war with Israel despite its hundreds of miles of sophisticated tunnels because, unlike Vietnam, which built tunnels for offensive purposes in forests to attack Americans, not defensive, focusing on urban areas with human shields. This approach not only brought death and destruction, including the killing of innocent civilians, women, and children, but also triggered the death of Hamas leadership and military defeat.

Ceasefires and negotiations did not save all the Israeli hostages or Hamas. The time is long overdue to stop diplomatic talks that conclude with ceasefires and temporary solutions. Such talks only buy time for adversaries to rearm themselves between wars.

The time is ripe for comprehensive talks for a final solution of the Palestinian problem -- and the establishment of the State of Palestinian.



Chapter Twelve

Persia-Iran – Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthi Jihad

The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor
is the mind of the oppressed
-- Steve [Stephen Bantu] Biko --

Persia-Iran

For many centuries, oil seepages escaping from the fissures in porous limestone across Persia and Caucus Mountains, were used for cleaning camels, caulking boats, and binding bricks. They were also known as the "eternal pillars of fire," worshiped by the Zoroastrians, resulting from flammable gas associated with petroleum deposits – pointing to considerable oil reserves.

Persia has a national identity that dates to the ancient empire of Cyrus the Great and Darius I, which, by the fifth century B.C. extended from India to present day Greece and Libya. Later, the Parthian Empire emerged from the region now known as Iran and became the formidable eastern rival to the Roman Empire. Persia became a major crossroads for trade and conquest between Asia and the West. Waves of armies and entire peoples passed through and, in some cases, settled there. Alexander the Great swept in from the West, while Genghis Khan and the Mongols came from the East. By the end of the 18th-century, an avaricious dynasty known as the Qajars succeeded in winning control of the country that had fragmented into principalities ruled by competing warlords and tribal confederacies.

The Qajar shahs ruled for a century and a half. In the 19th-century the country found itself subject to new foreign pressures – the diplomatic and commercial rivalry between Russia and Britain for dominance over Persia. The competition turned Persia into a major issue in Great Power diplomacy. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, described Persia as one of "the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the domination of the world."

Beginning in the 1860s, Russia embarked on a relentless expansion drive and annexation in Central Asia. To Britain, Russia's expansion posed a direct threat to India and its routes. Any resources put into bolstering Persia against the Russian advance were, a British diplomat stated in 1871, "a sort of premium on the insurance of India." In response to Russia's aggressive expansion, the British sought ways to maintain Persia's integrity, aiming to establish it as a buffer between Russia and India. Russia was seeking to establish a naval presence in the Persian Gulf, given that Persia's economy was already integrated with that of Russia.

The Shah, Muzaffar al-Din was, "merely an elderly child," in the words of Hardinge, the British minister in Teheran, and "the Persian monarchy itself was an old, mismanaged estate, ready to be knocked down at once to whichever foreign power bid highest or threatened most loudly its degenerate and defenceless rulers." Hardinge feared that the foreign power would most likely be Russia, as the "Shah and his ministers were in a state of complete vassalage to Russia, owing to their own reckless

extravagance and folly." A British oil concession would help to restore the balance against Russia.

The American adage "money talks and bullshit walks" did the trick. On May 28, 1901, Shah Muzzafar al-Din signed the historic oil concession agreement.

The Shah's government was in a state of advanced decay, and the foreign oil concessions became a major political grievance. Conservative religious opponents of the Shah's regime took the lead in attacking despotism. They joined forces with merchants and groups seeking liberal reforms. In July 1906, the government attempted to arrest a prominent preacher, who had blamed the people's misery on "the great luxury of monarchs, some clerics, and the foreigners."

Riots and strikes erupted in Tehran, with thousands seeking refuge in the gardens of the British legation. This turmoil marked the end of the Shah's regime.

A new constitution was established alongside the formation of a Majlis, or Parliament, which put the issue of oil concessions on the top of its agenda. However, the new political system proved weak and ineffective outside Tehran.

Meanwhile, tensions between Britain and Russia eased. In 1907, as part of the Anglo-Russian Convention, the two countries reached an agreement to partition Persia into their respective spheres of influence. Russia because it had been weakened by

the devastating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the turmoil of the 1905 revolution. The British, in addition to their long-standing fears of “spontaneous infiltration” of Russian influence towards India, were now increasingly concerned about German penetration into the Middle East. The immediate reaction to the division of the country into British and Russian spheres of influence was to provide “a great impetus” to the “already existing anti-foreign sentiment.”

The partition of Persia was one of the first steps that led to the formation of the Triple Entente between Britain, Russia, and France, which, seven years later, would be at war with Germany, the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires. A few years later, the three countries signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement which divided the Ottoman empire, giving Russia control of Constantinople and other parts of Turkey to ensure its access to Black Sea ports.

Oil was eventually discovered in Persia, just two days shy of seven years after the shah had signed the concession agreement. Financial and political disputes among oil companies and between local, national, and international players led to setbacks as, “Of course Baksheesh is the root of it all” – referring to bribery and corruption.

Anglo-Persian Oil Company

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company quickly emerged as a significant entity. By the end of 1910, it employed 2,500 people. However, its operations in Persia were complex and problematic due to cultural clashes. “I have spent a fortnight upon Oil Company business,

mediating between Englishmen who cannot always say what they mean and Persians who do not always mean what they say. The English idea of an agreement is a document in English which will stand attack by lawyers in a Court of Justice: the Persian idea is a declaration of general intentions on both sides, with a substantial sum in cash annually or in a lump sum," said Arnold Wilson, the acting British consul in the region, who became the de facto adviser to Anglo-Persian on local affairs.

Oil production in Persia was minimally disturbed during the war, except for early in 1915, when local tribesmen, incited by German agents and the Turks, damaged the pipeline from the oilfields to the Abadan refinery. It took five months to repair the damage. Despite issues with the quality of Abadan's refined products and wartime shortage of equipment, a major industrial enterprise was taking root in Persia, fuelled by military demand. Oil production in Persia grew more than tenfold between 1912 and 1918 – from 1,600 barrels per day to 18,000. By late 1916, Anglo-Persian Oil Company was meeting a fifth of the British Navy's total oil requirements. The company, which had often teetered on the brink of bankruptcy during its first decade and a half, with the British government as its largest shareholder, began to generate substantial profits.

Nationalism and Rise of Shah Reza Pahlavi

During the 1930s, various forms of global political pressure were exerted on oil companies. Governments imposed import quotas, set prices, and placed restrictions on the import and export of goods and foreign exchange. They forced companies to blend

surplus crop alcohol into motor fuel, and to use other petroleum substitutes.

In Persia, towards the end of the Great Depression, Shah Reza Pahlavi became infuriated upon discovering that, as one observer put it, “oil is not gold in these days.” The shah’s country had become an oil state with petroleum royalties from Anglo-Persian accounting for two-thirds of its export earnings and a significant portion of government revenue. But, with the Depression, the royalties from Anglo-Persian plummeted to the lowest level since 1917. Appalled and outraged, the shah blamed the company and decided to take matters into his own hands. At a Cabinet meeting on November 16, 1932, to the surprise of everyone, he abruptly announced that he was unilaterally cancelling Anglo-Persian’s concession. It was a thunderbolt that no one truly believed the shah would dare deliver. His action threatened the very existence of Anglo-Persian.

The shah’s announcement, though unexpected, was the culmination of four years of negotiation and tension between Persia and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company dating back to 1928. The Persians contended that the concession violated national sovereignty and demanded more money.

The main reason an agreement could not be reached lay in the nature of the deeply personal autocracy of the shah himself.

Reza Khan had used his leadership of the Cossack Brigade to establish himself as the unchallenged ruler of the country. He

was a tough, domineering, brutal, and blunt man, who, as noted by a British minister to Tehran, “does not waste time in exchanging the delicately phrased but perfectly futile compliments so dear to the Persian heart.” Reza Khan became war minister in 1921, and then prime minister in 1923. He toyed with the idea of declaring himself president but then decided against it. Instead, in 1925, he crowned himself Reza Shah Pahlavi, the founder of the new Pahlavi dynasty.

The shah then set out to modernize the country, albeit in an erratic and chaotic fashion. The shah’s minister of court, Abdul Husayn Timurtash said, that the shah’s greatest fault was his suspicion of everybody and everyone. “There was really nobody in the whole country whom His Majesty trusted and this was very much resented by those who had always stood faithfully by him.”

The Shah was contemptuous of his subjects; telling one visitor that the Persian people were “bigoted and ignorant.” He was also determined to consolidate the fractious country and centralize control in his own hands, which meant reducing all other competing centers of power. He began with the clerics, mullahs who led the traditionalists and religious fundamentalists strongly opposed to his efforts to create a modern, secular nation. In their eyes, the Shah was guilty of many sins; he had, after all, abolished the compulsory wearing of the veil by women. He invested in public health services and widened educational opportunities. He even once personally assaulted an ayatollah who questioned the appropriateness of the dress of female members of his family as they entered a shrine. The mullahs

were ultimately subdued into a sullen but still rebellious submission.

In the shah's opinion, Anglo-Persian was akin to the mullahs – an independent power center. He was intent on reducing its power and influence as well. Local press and politicians, at the urging of the Shah, attacked Anglo-Persian, criticizing and challenging everything from the validity of the original concession. The Shah was also angry with Anglo-Persian's majority shareholder, the British government, regarding various other issues. He was trying to assert Persian sovereignty over Bahrain, while Britain insisted on maintaining its protectorate over the island sheikhdom. He was also furious at the British for their diplomatic recognition of Iraq, which he regarded as a product of British imperialism.

Despite this, he relied on its royalty payments to fulfil his ambitions.

The shah's unilateral cancellation of the Anglo-Persian concession in November 1932 represented a direct challenge to the British government, whose military security had been linked by Churchill in 1914 to Persian oil. Britain could not passively accept the Shah's actions. The issue was submitted to the League of Nations where the matter was placed in abeyance, with both parties agreeing to seek a new arrangement.

By the end of April 1933, a new agreement was reached. The concession area was reduced by three-quarters. Persia was guaranteed a fixed royalty per ton, protecting it against oil price

fluctuations. Additionally, Persia would receive 20 percent of the company's worldwide profits that were distributed to shareholders above a certain minimum sum. In addition, a minimum annual payment of 750,000 pounds sterling, irrespective of other developments, was also guaranteed. The royalties for 1931 and 1932 were to be recalculated based on this new arrangement, and the "Persianization" of the workforce was set to be accelerated. Meanwhile, the duration of the concession was extended from 1961 to 1993. "I felt that we had been pretty well plucked," noted John Cadman who negotiated with the Shah on behalf of the oil company. Nevertheless, the essential position of Anglo-Persian had been preserved.

While Britain was focused on Anglo-Persian and Persia, America and Standard Oil shifted their attention to Saudi Arabia. On May 29, 1933, the final concession agreement between Saudi Arabia and Standard Oil of California was signed. This concession was valid for 60 years and covered 360,000 square miles.

In August 1941, just two months after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, British and Russian forces moved into Iran to protect the refinery at Abadan and the supply line from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union. Alarmed by rapid German advances in Russia and North Africa, the Allies feared a pincer movement that would converge in Iran. They deposed Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had shown friendliness and sympathy toward the Nazis, and replaced him with his son who was only 21 at the time. Reza Shah died in exile in 1944 in South Africa.

After Reza Shah's death, Mohammed Pahlavi would be dedicated to, and haunted by, the memory of his father. He would forever strive to prove himself worthy of Reza Shah, against whose standard he would be judged – by others and by himself. One day in 1948, the shah himself even admitted to a visitor, "My sister Ashraf asked me yesterday whether I was a man or a mouse." There was always the implication that he was weak, indecisive, and inadequate compared to his father. He was also perceived as an outsider.

At age six, he was entrusted to a French governess; at age twelve, he was sent off to school in Switzerland. His education and experiences fostered a certain distance from Iranian society. "It might, of course be," mused the American ambassador in 1950, "that he is a little too Westernized for an Oriental country."

He stood in stark contrast to MBS shaped instead by his upbringing, education, and the infusion of his country's tradition, religion, and culture.

The legitimacy of his dynasty was problematic; the role of the monarchy in Iran, remained an entirely unresolved question. He had to contend with chronic intervention by foreign powers, direct Soviet pressure on the country's territorial integrity, and a highly visible British economic presence. He was forced to struggle to assert his authority in a political system riven by every kind of division – class, regional, religious, and modern versus traditional. Ayatollahs, reformers, nationalists, republicans, and

military officers all sought to remake the political system.

Graft and corruption were a way of life. The British charge d'affaires summed up the rules of the game as they were played in the Majlis, Iran's parliament, with a straightforward maxim: "Deputies expect to be bribed." Out in the countryside lived a multitude of tribes and clans that resented their subordination to Teheran and the Pahlavis. Virtually no part of the shah's domain was immune to secessionist drives. And in the late 1940s, the nation was gripped by grinding poverty and suffering from economic collapse.

Only one thing united the country – hatred of foreigners -- particularly the British. The English were regarded as almost supernatural devils, controlling and manipulating the entire nation. Every Iranian politician, regardless of where he stood on the political spectrum, felt compelled to accuse his enemies and opponents of being British agents. Even droughts, crop failures, and locust plagues were blamed on the insidious designs of those cunning Englishmen. Yet the detestation focused on the largest industrial employer in Iran, the major source of the nation's foreign earnings, and the all-too-tangible symbol of the intrusion of the modern foreign world – the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

Part of the animosity toward Anglo- Iranian was fuelled by the dispute over oil revenues. Between 1945 and 1950, Anglo-Iranian recorded a profit of $250,000,000, compared to Iran's $90,000,000 in royalties. The British government received more in taxes from Anglo-Iranian than Iran did in royalties. To exacerbate

matters, a substantial portion the company's dividends went to its majority shareholder, the British government, and it was rumoured that Anglo-Iranian sold oil to the British Navy at a substantial discount.

It was convenient to have a foreign scapegoat like Anglo-Iranian when so much was amiss at home.

Not much has really changed politically in Iran today; the British adversary has simply been replaced by America and Israel.

The Cold War

The rise of the Cold War after World War II, combined with the growing concerns about the security of Persian Gulf oil, brought Iran to the forefront of American foreign policy. Soviet troops withdrew from northern Iran in 1946, but by 1949, Washington was apprehensive that Iran had fallen into such a deep state of economic and political decay that it would become easy prey for the Soviet Union. There had been border clashes between the Soviet and Iranian troops.

American pressure compelled Anglo-Iranian to negotiate with the Iranians a Supplemental Agreement to the revised 1933 concession. The new proposal provided for a sufficient hike in royalties, as well as a substantial lump-sum payment.

Despite reaching an agreement between the Iranian government and Anglo-Iranian, the government, fearful of the Parliament's opposition, delayed submitting the agreement to the Majlis for

almost a year – until June 1950. The Parliament's oil committee responded furiously, denouncing the new agreement called for the cancellation of the concession, and demanded the nationalization of Anglo-Iranian.

Pro-British politicians were assassinated, and in June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. It intensified the Cold War. With the Korean War underway, Iranian oil took on a new urgency; it accounted for 40 percent of total Middle East production, and Anglo-Iranian's refinery at Abadan was the primary source of aviation fuel in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Washington urged and pressured the British government to present an offer that the Iranian government could accept as soon as possible. However, the Brits resisted and bid their time. Finally, when Anglo-Iranian came up with a 50-50 deal, it was no longer sufficient. The entire opposition in Iran now focused on the infamous Anglo-Iranian. The leader of this opposition was the elderly firebrand, Mohammed Mossadegh, who was the chairman of the oil committee in parliament. "The source of all the misfortunes of this tortured nation is only the oil company," declared Mossadegh. All the deputies in parliament were calling for the nationalization of the industry and ousting of Anglo-Iranian. Prime Minister Razmara, in a speech in parliament in March 1951, came out against nationalization. Four days later, as he was about to enter Teheran's central mosque, he was assassinated. A week and a half later, the minister of education was also murdered.

The Majlis proceeded to pass a resolution nationalizing the oil industry. Then, on April 28, 1951, they chose Mohammed Mossadegh, by now the foremost opponent of Anglo-Iranian, as the new prime minister, granting him the widely popular mandate to execute the nationalization law. The Shah signed the law which went into effect on May 1st.

A large sign reading *Iranian National Oil Company* was affixed to one of the office buildings. On October 4, 1951, the oil executives and their families left Iran for Basra, in Iraq.

"Old Mossy"

American and British officials who dealt with the seventy-year-old, frail, and bald Mossadegh, took to calling him "Old Mossy." For two years, he had skilfully outwitted the American and British governments, foreign oil companies, the Shah, and domestic rivals. A cosmopolitan lawyer educated in France and Switzerland; he was fiercely nationalistic and anti-foreigner.

Mossadegh was an aristocrat with extensive land holdings, including a personal 150-family village. Yet, he assumed the mantle of reform, republicanism, and rabble-rousing, appealing to and mobilizing the urban masses. As one of the first professors at the Persian School of Political Science, he became deeply involved in the constitutional revolution of 1906, which remained the guiding principle for the rest of his career. Old Mossy was both unpretentious and eccentric, frequently clothed in pyjamas, receiving his Iranian and foreign guests in his bedroom, stretched out on his bed.

Before nationalization, oil exports had generated two-thirds of the country's foreign exchange and half of government revenues. With no oil revenues for two years, inflation became rampant, and the economy was falling apart. The country was much worse off than before nationalization. Law and order were collapsing; the chief of police in Tehran was kidnaped and murdered.

In the early months of 1953, Old Mossy tried to bolster his weakening domestic position by taking more power in his own hands – extending martial law, governing by decree, seizing control of military appointments, intimidating and silencing opposition, abolishing the upper house of parliament and dissolving the lower, and carrying out a Soviet-style plebiscite that gave him a 99 percent victory. Many nationalists and reformers, who had once supported him, were antagonized by his efforts to monopolize power and his increasing reliance on "mobocracy." The religious fundamentalists also turned against him as he sought to extend his power.

Mossadegh rejected all proposals put forth by the Americans and British. By the end of the Truman Administration both the Americans and the British had given up on Old Mossy. In late 1952, the British raised with the Americans the possibility of working together to bring about a change in the Iranian government – a coup. The American response was postponed until the Eisenhower Administration had taken over. A go-ahead was given with the support of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother Allen, the new head of the CIA.

In Washington, at a sombre meeting of the National Security Council, Dulles predicted that Iran would soon be a dictatorship under Mossadegh, which would be followed by a communist takeover. “Not only would the free world be deprived of the enormous assets represented by Iranian oil production and reserves,” Dulles said, “but the Russians would secure these assets and thus henceforth be free of any anxiety about their petroleum resources. Worse still … if Iran succumbed to the Communists there was little doubt that in short order the other areas of the Middle East, with some 60 percent of the world’s oil reserves, would fall into Communist control.”

“Was there any feasible course of action to save the situation?” asked President Eisenhower. Indeed, there was.

Operation Ajax, orchestrated by the CIA and MI6, unfolded in mid-August 1953. Initially, it failed when the Shah issued an order dismissing Mossadegh, but the delivery of this order was delayed for three days during which time Mossadegh was tipped off and issued his own counter-order dismissing the shah.

General Fazlollah Zahedi, loyal to the shah, took the lead in challenging Mossadegh. He held a press conference where he handed out Photostats of the shah’s order dismissing Mossadegh. A small pro-shah demonstration rapidly grew into a vast, shouting crowd that surged from the bazaars to the city center proclaiming its disdain for Mossadegh and its support for the shah. Images of the shah suddenly appeared plastered everywhere. Cars turned on their headlights in a show of support

for him. Although street fights broke out, the momentum was clearly with the pro-Shah forces. The shah's dismissal of Mossadegh and the appointment of Zahedi as his successor had become widely known. Key military elements rallied to the shah, and soldiers and police dispatched to quell the pro-shah demonstrators instead joined their ranks. Mossadegh fled over the back wall of his garden, and Tehran now belonged to the shah's supporters.

By the end of August, the s hah was back on his throne, his new prime minister was in power, and Mossadegh was under arrest.

Iranian oil could now be brought back into production and back onto the world market. Anglo-Iranian could not take the lead out of fear it would reignite the nationalist sentiments. Washington stepped in to facilitate an oil settlement. However, the major American oil companies were far from enthusiastic about becoming involved in Iran. The four Aramco partners had more than enough petroleum in Saudi Arabia to meet their needs for the foreseeable future and did not want to upset the Saudis, who might express their displeasure toward the oil companies.

International Consortium

A consortium of foreign oil companies emerged under the Anglo-Iranian umbrella. Anglo-Iranian was the dominant player with 40 percent of the consortium. Shell had 14 percent, and each of the five major American partners (Jersey, Socony, Texaco, Standard of California and Gulf) had eight percent, while France's CFP held six percent.

All parties acknowledged that the oil assets belonged, in principle, to Iran. Under the new deal, Iran's National Iranian Oil Company would own the country's oil resources and facilities. But in practice it could not tell the consortium what to do. The consortium would, as a contract agent, manage the Iranian industry and buy all the output, with each company in the consortium disposing of its share of the oil through its own independent marketing system.

With the establishment of the Iranian consortium the U.S. was now *the* major player in the oil, and volatile politics of the Middle East.

The global battle of production intensified the long-standing rivalry between the two key oil producing countries in the Middle East – Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. An Iran whose shah was already swelling with grand ambition, and a Saudi Arabia that had no intention of acknowledging Iranian leadership in petroleum production, or anything else for that matter.

Delusions of Grandeur

The shah, now firmly ensconced on the Peacock Throne of Iran, with swelling oil revenues, became an assertive monarch with global delusional aspirations. This was best exemplified in October 1971, when Persepolis, the capital of the ancient Persian Empire, was brought back to dazzling life. Three huge tents and 59 smaller ones were erected on the desolate site. The occasion was what *Time* magazine called "one of the biggest bashes in all history," put on by the Shah to celebrate the founding of the

Persian Empire twenty-five hundred years earlier.

The visual pictures of the shah, his behaviour, Persia and Iran, were descriptively portrayed by Daniel Yergin in *The Prize*, and here.

The assembled dignitaries included the president of the Soviet Union, the vice president of the United States, Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, twenty kings and sheikhs, five queens, twenty-one princes and princesses, fourteen other presidents, three other vice-presidents, three premiers, and two foreign ministers.

During the ceremonies, the shah publicly communed with the ghost of the king Cyrus the Great, the empire's founder, and promised to continue the tradition and works of that monarch, now dead for some twenty-five centuries. The jewelled and medal-bedecked guests were transported by buses to the hill above Persepolis for a stunning *son et lumiere* under the stars which dramatically depicted, strangely enough, Alexander's destruction of Persepolis.

Maxims of Paris catered the event. The menus were crafted and served by 165 chefs, bakers, and waiters, all flown in from Paris. To accompany the meals, 25,000 bottles of wine were also imported from France. Since the whole affair had such a strong French influence, France's Georges Pompidou was notable by his absence. "If I did go," he explained privately beforehand, "they would probably make me the head waiter." The cost of the pageantry and celebrations was estimated to be between 100

million and 200 million US. dollars. When questioned about such extravagance, the Shah could not contain his irritation. “So what are people complaining about?” he asked. “That we are giving a couple of banquets for some 50 Heads of State? We can hardly offer them bread and radishes, can we? Thank heavens, the Imperial Court of Iran can still afford to pay for Maxim’s services.” The goal of the shah’s grand celebration at Persepolis was to firmly establish himself in the line of Cyrus the Great, the Appointed One of God.

Oil Price Hikes

Oil ministers of the petroleum exporting countries convened in Tehran in late December 1973 to discuss the official price of oil amid the feverish and irrational bidding on spot markets.

By far the most aggressive and outspoken country was Iran. Here finally was the opportunity for the shah to secure the revenues he deemed necessary to finance his grand ambitions. His position was accepted by the ministers gathered and the new price was set at $11.65 a barrel.

This price rise was rich with historic significance. Posted prices had risen from $1.80 in 1970 to $2.18 in 1971, then $2.90 in mid-1973, and to $5.12 in October 1973 – now escalating to $11.65. As a “reference point,” the new posted price was applied to a specific Saudi crude, Arabian Light.

The shah had embraced a new role; he was now to be the moralist for world oil. “Really oil is almost a noble product,” he

declared. “We were almost careless to use oil for heating houses or even generating electricity, when this can so easily be done with coal. Why finish this noble product in, say, 30 years’ time when thousands of billions of tons of coals remain in the ground.” It was also the shah’s inclination to position himself as a moralist for world civilization. He offered words of advice to the industrial nations. “They will have to realize that the era of their terrific progress and even more terrific income and wealth based on cheap oil is finished. They will have to find new sources of energy. Eventually, they will have to tighten their belts; eventually all those children of well-to-do families who have plenty to eat at every meal, who have their cars, and who act almost as terrorists and throw bombs here and there, they will have to rethink all these aspects of the advanced industrial world. And they will have to work harder…. Your young boys and young girls who receive so much money from their fathers will also have to think that they must earn their living somehow.” His haughty demeanour, widespread shortages and soaring prices, would cost him dearly just a few years later when he desperately needed friends.

In the meantime, the pressing issue for everyone -- oil executives and consumers alike -- was what the future held, the same question in the ongoing conflict between the two largest producers in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

It was not a new rivalry. In the 1960s, the two countries competed over which could produce the most oil. Now, the two nations struggled over pricing and status.

For the shah, the December 1973 price increase had marked a significant victory, and very much a personal one. From then on, he recognized his opportunity – the prospect of seemingly endless revenues, as if provided by divine intervention, to realize his ambitions of creating what he termed Iran's Great Civilization, while simultaneously addressing Iran's mounting economic problems.

Empress Fareena and Shah Cyrus Karma

That time, I had several Iranian friends, clients and business associates, some of whom invited me to Iran, including Ambassador Zahedi, Iran's ambassador to the U.S., on behalf of Empress Fareena, the wife of the shah. The detail of the circumstances surrounding the invitation and my meeting with the Queen are discussed in *Custom Maid Spin for New World Disorder*. Nonetheless, I'll summarize here the background to our meeting and the subject of the conversations I had with the Queen and a Los Angeles City Councilman, which proved to be quite prophetic. I was introduced to Ambassador Zahedi by President Jimmy Carter at a Rostropovich Concert at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in March 1977, a couple of years before my meeting with the queen in Los Angeles in 1979.

In LA, I had bet Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky on local races, the outcomes of which we disagreed on. The winner would select the restaurant where the loser would host dinner for the victor and our wives. I ended up hosting a dinner for Zev for a bet I lost.

Zev decided we should dine at Chasen's, a very popular and

expensive Beverly Hills restaurant that had started out as a chili joint. When my wife, Gail, and I pulled up to the valet, we noticed several security agents intently observing our arrival. On the way to our booth, where Zev and his wife, Barbara, were already seated, I noticed Hollywood celebrities and politicians in the private dining room, which had a glass wall for all to see when the curtain was not drawn. Gregory Peck, Farrah Fawcett, and Mayor Tom Bradley, who was over six feet tall and hard to miss were among them. “What’s going on back there?” I asked Zev as we were seated.

“The Empress Farina from Iran received an honorary doctor’s degree from U.S.C. and she and the Iranian government are hosting a thank you dinner,” Zev replied. “Look at those mountains of caviar,” Gail exclaimed. Gail loved caviar. “Let’s see if we can get in,” she said to Barbara as she grabbed her arm. “The mayor knows you, maybe he’ll invite us,” Gail wishfully uttered as they headed toward the party.

They returned dejected after the mayor’s security personnel, whom Barbara knew, turned them away, letting them know they would inform the mayor of our presence. Just as we were getting ready to order, the mayor approached our table with Ambassador Zahedi to introduce him to us.

I reminded the ambassador that we had been introduced by President Jimmy Carter during the 1977 Rostropovich concert in the presidential box at the Kennedy Center. At which point he insisted “You, your wife, and guests come meet my Queen and

join us for dinner!" After we were introduced to Her Majesty, Gail headed straight to the caviar table, and we followed her.

Here we were amid mounds of caviar, crabs, lobster, and bottomless glasses of champagne and vodka, with the wife of the new world megalomaniac moralist. The man who lectured America and the industrialized nations it led whenever he raised oil prices in the seventies.

Zev was a history professor before running for public office. History, especially that of the Middle East, was a subject we bantered about over the years. "Do you understand why he would celebrate a decimated empire instead of a new one?" I asked Zev, referring to the Persepolis Maxim's catered celebration, where Alexander the Great defeated the Persian Empire and sacked the city.

"Not really. Doesn't make much political sense. Maybe he is King Cyrus reincarnated?" was all Zev could say as I headed to the head table to join Her Majesty.

Prophetic.

Somehow the fact that I had sped in my Aston Martin to get to dinner on time came up when the queen said: "One of the only things my husband likes in life," repeating what she had said in the mid-1970s, "is flying, driving, driving boats – speed!"

The shah applied his passion for speed to his entire country to hurl Iran into the 21st-century. In doing so, he ignored the

agitation and disorientation that such rapidity caused, as well as the resentment and unhappiness among the many who did not share his obsession with modernity. Iran, the shah proclaimed, would become the world's fifth largest industrial power; it would be a new West Germany, a second Japan. "Iran will be one of the *serious* countries in the world," he boasted. "Everything you can dream of can be achieved here."

Cut off from reality by the huge infusion of oil money, the shah became consumed by his ambitions and dreams. He also began to believe all the imperial trappings. "The day has passed when the big industrial countries can get away with political and economic pressure tactics," he told the United States ambassador. "I want you to know that the Shah will not yield to foreign pressure on oil prices." Moreover, Iran's more limited oil reserves, limited at least when compared to Saudi Arabia, argued for going for higher prices sooner rather than later. For, when "later" arrived, Iran's oil reserves might be exhausted. Finally, there was the shah's pride. All the humiliations of the past could now be laid to rest, all the jibes turned around.

"There are some people who thought – and perhaps some who still think – that I am a toy in the Americans' hands," he stated in 1975. "Why would I accept to be a toy? There are reasons for our power which will make us stronger, so why would we be content to be someone else's catspaw?"

U.S, Iranian Missteps

The U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers charged with

managing relations with Iran not only missed the first signs of the Islamic Revolution at the time; they had suppressed reports it was coming. Scott Anderson, in his book *King of Kings: The Iranian Revolution: A Story of Hubris, Delusion and Catastrophic Miscalculation*, details U.S. State Department diplomatic incompetence.

Anderson's account of the Iranian revolution "masterly illustrates the stubborn American blindness that hastened the Shah's demise and helped the mullahs prevail," noted Mark Bowden, the author of *Guests of the Ayatollah*, who reviewed Anderson's book for *The New York Times*. An "obliviousness" that "became wilful, an ignorance to be maintained and defended," Anderson wrote.

The fall of the shah, according to Anderson, "brought an abrupt end to one of the most important economic and military alliances the United States had established anywhere in the world." And the "radically altered Middle Eastern chessboard created by the revolution has led directly to some of America's greatest missteps in the region over the past four decades."

Propped up by a succession of presidents -- given license by Richard Nixon to purchase unlimited quantity of American arms, feted in both Washington and Teheran by Carter -- the shah was an American creation first and last. His story is a sad chapter in the long history of misguided, self-defeating meddling in the internal affairs of less powerful nations – Cuba, Nicaragua and Vietnam already by 1978, and Iraq and Afghanistan still to come. Foreign victims paid the heaviest price, but the wounds to

America have been deep and lasting as Bowden correctly points out.

The rush by American military officers and contractors to fatten themselves became what Anderson calls a “stampede.” The courting was so aggressive that the State Department tried to slow it down, banning the Pentagon from making sales pitches to Teheran. It didn’t work. When a State Department official asked an admiral to stop sales pitches for aircraft Iran didn’t need because it lacked pilots to fly them and mechanics to maintain them, the admiral replied, “Well, that may be the embassy policy, but it is not the U.S. Navy’s policy. The Navy’s policy is to sell these planes.”

The warnings of Michael Metrinko, a pugnacious political officer at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, about the potential fall of the Shah and the rise of the mullah’s was silenced and sidelined.

With all sensible, independent voices silenced, deliberate misinformation, conspiracy theory and superstition rushed into the vacuum. The most compelling voice in the haboob was the angry fundamentalist ranting of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini. His sermons moved hand-to-hand under Savak’s nose on cassette tapes, diligently collected by the C.I.A., but did not seem to have been transcribed and listened to. By early 1979, the storm incited by those sermons blew away the Peacock Throne, along with American influence and any hope for popular rule. Instead, it would shape the repressive and bloody theocratic regime of the Supreme Leader and his mullahs.

When Anderson asked Metrinko how he was able to foresee what so many of his colleagues missed, he said: “Because the guys in the political section of the embassy who were supposed to keep watch for this kind of stuff were lousy at their jobs. Is that overly harsh? I think it’s deserved.”

Another reminder of President Eisenhower’s message to Americans, alerting and warning of America’s “Military Industrial Congress” – amended to “Complex.” It’s a warning to keep in mind when it comes to America’s arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and UAE; more importantly, the overdue need to establish a viable, realistic two-state solution and creation of a Palestinian state.

A Palestinian state living in neighbourly peace with Israel will end the “stampede” of arms sales to the region. The ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict and illusory state in Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem, in contrast, ensures future arms sales – and wars.

Saudi Concerns

In December 1973, the Saudis had not agreed with, or approved of, the shah’s scale of oil price increases. It was significantly dangerous for their long-term interest. To make matters worse, the Saudis lost control of OPEC, and its decision- making role in oil matters, which were central to the kingdom’s existence.

The Saudis also had another concern: the shah and his ambitions. Further oil price hikes would provide Iran with additional funds to buy weapons and enhance its military power, thereby shifting the

strategic balance and encouraging the Shah to claim hegemony over the Gulf.

Why, the Saudis wondered, were the Americans so obsessed with the Shah?

In August 1975, the U.S. ambassador to Riyadh reported to Washington that Saudi oil minister Zaki Yamani, had said that "the talk of eternal friendship between Iran and the United States was nauseating to him and other Saudis. They knew the shah was a megalomaniac, that he was highly unstable mentally, and that if we didn't recognize this there must be something wrong with our powers of observation." Yamani also warned America that "If the shah departs from the stage, we could also have a violent, anti-American regime in Tehran."

The American commitment to stable oil prices put it on a collision course with Iran; after all, the shah was the most vocal and influential advocate for higher prices. When President Gerald Ford criticized the rising prices, the shah retorted: "No one can dictate to us. No one can wave a finger at us, because we will wave a finger back."

Iran, no less than Saudi Arabia, was politically, economically, and militarily tied to the U.S.

The Nixon administration's policy in the early 1970s, giving Iran a free hand to purchase as many American non-nuclear weapons as it wished, was part of the "twin pillars strategy" established

for regional security in the wake of the British withdrawal from the Gulf. Iran and Saudi Arabia were the pillars, but of the two, Iran, as one American official put it, was the “Big Pillar.” By the mid-1970s, Iran accounted for half of all American overseas arms sales.

The shah expressed concern when Jimmy Carter became president in 1977, as two of Carter’s key policies prioritized human rights and restrictions on arms sales. Despite these policies, the Carter Administration maintained the pro-Shah stance of its predecessors. As Gary Sick, a Middle Eastern affairs officer on the National Security Council of the Carter administration, later noted, “The United States had no visible strategic alternative to a close relationship with Iran.” The shah’s change of perspective regarding high oil prices made it easier for Washington to deal with Iran. By the time Carter took office, the shah was having second thoughts about the merits of higher oil prices.

The freneticism and euphoria surrounding the influx of Petrodollars, along with the oil boom itself, were wrecking the fabric of Iranian economy and society. The rural population was migrating from the countryside to already-overcrowded towns and cities; agricultural output was declining, food imports and inflation were rising, and its impacts were becoming evident: chaos, waste, inflation, corruption, and escalating political and social tensions. All these intensified opposition to the regime and alienated those who cared little about the Shah’s Great Civilization.

In this situation, the shah agreed with Carter, contradicting much of his previous rhetoric since 1973, and promised to urge other OPEC countries to “give Western nations a break.”

Iran had now joined Saudi Arabia in advocating for oil price moderation, thus concluding the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Battle with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

The animosity between the royal family and the fundamentalist Shia can be traced back to Reza Shah’s fierce battle for power with the Shiite clergy in the 1920s and 1930s and was part of the broader struggle between secular and religious forces. A savage editorial attack on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an elderly Shiite cleric living in exile in Iraq, by a Teheran newspaper on January 8, 1978, reignited the secular-religious struggle.

Ayatollah Khomeini’s religious rectitude and unyielding resistance made him the embodiment of opposition to the shah and his regime. Khomeini came from a family of religious educators. He pursued religious studies and by the 1930s and 40s, became a popular lecturer on Islamic philosophy and law, advocating for the concept of an Islamic Republic under strict clerical control. His animosity towards the shah was matched only by his disdain for the U.S. and Israel.

Khomeini was jailed multiple times due to his unyielding criticism of the shah, ultimately leading to his exile in Iraq. At Iran’s urging in October 1978, Iraq expelled him, and he and his entourage

relocated to France.

Over a two-week period in August 1978, half a dozen movie theatres across Iran were set on fire by fundamentalists opposed to “sinful” movies. In mid-August, in Abadan, the home of the great refinery, about 500 people were packed into a theatre when fundamentalists locked the doors and incinerated the trapped moviegoers. In early September, bloody demonstrations erupted in Tehran. From that point on, the Shah’s government began to crumble. By the end of October 1978, the Shah could only lament, “We are melting away daily like snow in water.”

Strikes paralyzed both the economy and the government, while students were out of control, and demonstrations and riots continued unabated.The impact of the strikes was immediate. Iran was the second-largest oil exporter after Saudi Arabia and by December 25, 1978, Christmas Day, Iranian oil exports had ceased.

In the words of Daniel Yergin in *The Prize*, “As events tumbled to their conclusion, the policy of the United States, Iran’s most important ally, was in confusion, disarray and shock.”

Throughout most of 1978, senior officials in the Carter administration were distracted by other momentous and demanding developments -- the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel, strategic arms negotiations with the Soviets, and normalization of relations with China. American policy was predicated on the belief that Iran was a reliable ally

and serve as a key pillar in the region. Out of deference to the Shah, and a desire not to anger him, American officials maintained their distance from various opponents of his regime, resulting in a lack of communication channels with the emerging opposition. There was no reporting in Washington regarding what the Ayatollah was saying.

To make matters worse, the Shah had cancer, which his French doctors diagnosed in 1974, but did not disclose to the Shah or his wife – leaving Washington unaware of the extent of his illness.

At midday on January 16, 1979, the Shah appeared at Teheran airport. “I am feeling tired and need a rest,” he said to a small group gathered there, maintaining the pathetic fiction that he was simply going on vacation. He then boarded his plane and left Teheran for the last time, taking with him a casket of Iranian oil among his luggage.

War Dog Ayatollah Ali Khameini

Ayatollah Khomeini was succeeded by Ayatollah Ali Khameini, who sought to avoid the shah’s fate and played a long-term survival game.

Iran's rulers are no strangers to war. Many top leaders, including the president, foreign minister and key military figures, are veterans of Iran's protracted war with Iraq in the 1980s, a brutal conflict that cost Iran billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives. Under Ayatollah Khamenei, who served as president from 1981 to 1988 and became Iran's supreme leader

in 1989, the lessons learned from that brutal conflict have become fundamental to the regime's worldview and national security policy.

Ayatollah Khamenei regarded Iran as locked in a struggle for survival against the U.S. and its allies, including Israel. The policies he had pursued in the decades since he came to power -- domestic repression, nuclear expansion and support for proxy militias Including Hamas and Hezbollah are all aimed at winning that contest. His distrust of Washington only deepened since Donald Trump's 2018 withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal that Tehran negotiated with the Obama administration.

Ayatollah Khamenei will not retreat, let alone surrender. He has accepted for the time being, a cease-fire with Israel -- but only because he is confident that Iran has held its ground in the face of U.S. and Israeli strikes. In the past, too, he has made concessions when necessary.

Tehran entered both the 2015 nuclear deal and subsequent nuclear negotiations with the U.S. to relieve economic pressure.

Ayatollah Khamenei was not interested in making compromises that could fundamentally change Iran's trajectory.

He was wary of even appearing open to compromise, which he believed the U.S. would interpret as weakness. "America is like a dog," he told his advisers in a meeting. "If you back off, it will lunge at you, but if you lunge at it, it will recoil and back off."

Iran's supreme leader had instead sought an equilibrium that can be summarized as "no war and no peace, He wanted neither confrontation nor normalization with the U.S. What he desired was for Washington to stop containing Iran, unshackle its economy, and allow Iran to embrace the status of a regional great power.

Ayatollah Khamenei believed that Iran could achieve this goal in time. If Tehran perseveres, he thought it can outlast Washington and Israel's appetite for a fight. His regime has built its military strategy on patience and endurance, reflecting its rulers' takeaways from the Iran-Iraq war. In 1980, Iraq launched a surprise strike, taking over thousands of square miles of southwestern Iran. Two years later, Iran was able to outmanoeuvre Iraq's better-armed military using guerrilla forces and so-called human wave attacks to recapture much of its lost territory. The lesson for Ayatollah Khamenei and his peers was that Iran can wear down better-equipped foes, even when the odds are stacked against it.

That lesson guided Iran's response to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Convinced that Iran was next on Washington's list, Ayatollah Khamenei charged General Qassem Soleimani who was killed by a U.S. drone strike in 2020 to take advantage of the chaos and brewing Iraqi insurgency by bogging the U. S. down in a quagmire.

General Soleimani proceeded to build a network of Iranian influence across Iraq, co-opting Iraqi politicians and mobilizing

Shia militias to attack U.S. forces. The strategy was effective; by 2011, the United States had withdrawn most of its troops after a prolonged and exhausting insurgency.

In following years, Iran has had ample time to prepare for an American or Israeli attack. Its deep burial of the Fordo enrichment site, for instance, may have spared the facility from destruction by U.S. bunker-busting bombs. A larger conflict would pose a significant threat, especially at a time when the Iranian economy is weak and its population restive. For now, Tehran has likely concluded that it can endure wartime economic hardship and that the population will rally around the flag, directing its anger at foreign attackers.

With this calculus in mind, Ayatollah Khamenei clearly felt compelled to respond to show that he was not defeated. He also sought to Illustrate that Washington cannot achieve its aims by force, be it regime change or dismantling Iran's nuclear program.
If the May 2026 cease-fire collapses and war resumes, Iran may choose to attack U.S. ships or bases in the Persian Gulf, and control access to the Strait of Hormuz. Doing so keeps the world on its edge, using uncertainty to disturb energy prices and global business.

Should Iran attack, its strikes would likely aim to force Israel and the United States to settle for a war of attrition. A prolonged conflict, Iran believes, will thwart U.S. and Israeli plans for a decisive victory and force them to compromise considering mounting costs and domestic backlash. Iran will not regard

President Trump's call for peace as a welcome diplomatic off-ramp.

Iranian Israeli Relations

Persia has been a major military and political power in the Middle East and Palestine since biblical times. It has fought not only against Jews, pagans -- today's infidels -- and Christians, but also against Arab, Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, Turkish, and non-Arian Persians. The changes in religion from Zoroastrianism to extreme Islam over the centuries, represent just another "interesting journey," in the words of Freddie Mercury, a Parsi, whom I wrote about in my first book, *Custom Maid Spin for New World Disorder*.

Persia-Iran has had a love-hate relationship with Canaanite -- Judea-Samaria-Israel, going back to pre-biblical times.

Returning to recent history, the shah and his regime were on good diplomatic and economic terms with Israel until the shah's departure.

The Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran changed, once again, the historical tradition. The political, military, and economic realities, not to mention religious factions, are not only related to Israel, the Jewish-Zionist state, but also Saudi Arabia and all the Sunni nations in the Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish Middle East. Iran, being Shia, has grudges that go way back to the assassination of Ali.

Assassination, by any means, whether by a single assassin, or an

army such as Hamas, Hezbollah, or Houthis, aims to eliminate your biblical enemy in Palestine. In today's world, that means Israel, which, for genetic and natural environmental reasons, I discuss in *Past Forward* is time to change traditional thinking and mindsets.

Loss of Syria

Iran's top-ranking general in Syria admits defeat and has contradicted the official line taken by Iran's leaders on the sudden downfall of their ally Bashar al-Assad, stating in a remarkably candid speech in Tehran that Iran had suffered a major defeat.

"I don't consider losing Syria something to be proud of," said General Esbati according to the recording of his speech, which Abdi Media, a Geneva- based news site focused on Iran, published. "We were defeated and defeated very badly. We took a very big blow and it's been very difficult."

General Esbati's speech, on December 31, 2004, at the Valiasr mosque, addressed rank and file of the military and constituents of the mosque, according to a public notice of the event, titled, "Answering questions about Syria's collapse."

The session started with General Esbati's telling the crowd he had left Syria on the last military plane to Tehran the night before Damascus fell to rebels. It ended with him answering questions from audience members. He offered a sobering assessment of Iran's military capabilities in its conflict with Israel and the United

States.

General Esbati revealed that Iran's relations with al-Assad had been strained for months leading up to the Syrian leader's overthrow. He stated that al-Assad had denied multiple requests for Iranian-backed militias to open a front against Israel from Syria, in the aftermath of the Hamas-led attack of Oct. 7, 2023.

Iran presented al-Assad with comprehensive military plans on how it could use its military resources in Syria to attack Israel, he noted. The general also accused Russia, considered a key ally, of misleading Iran by claiming that Russian jets were bombing Syrian rebels when they were dropping bombs on open fields. He also said that as Israel struck Iranian targets in Syria, Russia had “turned off radars," effectively facilitating these attacks.

For over a decade, Iran backed al-Assad by sending commanders and troops to help Syria fight against opposition rebels and the Islamic State terrorist group. Under al-Assad, Syria served as Iran's regional command centre, from which it supplied weapons and funds to its network of regional militias, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian militants in the West Bank. Iran also controlled airports and warehouses and operated missile and drone manufacturing bases in Syria.

General Esbati asserted in his speech that Iran would explore ways to recruit insurgents in whatever form Syria takes. “We can activate all the networks we have worked with over the years," he said. “We can activate the social layers that our guys lived

among for years; we can be active in social media, and we can form resistance cells." He added, "Now we can operate there as we do in other international arenas, and we have already started."

His comments have stunned Iranians, both for their unfiltered content and due to the speaker's stature. He is a top commander of Iran's Armed Forces, which includes both the military and the Revolutionary Guards Corps, with a history of prominent roles including commander in chief of the Armed Forces' cyber division. In Syria, he supervised Iran's military operations and coordinated closely with Syrian ministers and defence officials as well as with Russian generals who outranked even the commander in chief of the Quds Forces, General Ismail Ghaani, who oversees the network of regional militias backed by Iran.

Mehdi Rahmati, a prominent analyst in Tehran and expert on Syria, said in a telephone interview that General Esbati's speech was significant because it showed that some senior officials were parting from government propaganda and levelling with the public.

"Everyone is talking about the speech in meetings and wondering why he said these things, especially at a public forum," Rahmati said. "He very clearly laid out what happened to Iran and where it stands now. In a way it can be a warning for domestic politics."

General Esbati said the fall of the Assad regime was inevitable, given the rampant corruption, political oppression and economic

hardship the Syrian people had endured. He said al-Assad had ignored warnings to reform. Rahmati, the analyst, said that the comparison to Iran's situation at the start of the Israel-Iran 12-day war was hard to miss.

“We were defeated and defeated very badly. We took a very big blow and it's been very difficult."

Supreme Leader Khamenei, who has the final word on important state matters, has said in at least two speeches since al-Assad's fall that resistance was not dead in Syria, adding that Syria's youth would reclaim their country from the rebels. President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi have been more conciliatory, stating that they favour stability in Syria and diplomatic ties with the new government.

The tensions surrounding these competing views on Syria preoccupied officials enough that they embarked on a campaign of damage control with the public. Senior military commanders and pundits close to the government made speeches in mosques and community centers in several cities and held question-and-answer sessions with their audiences.

Trump Re-election – Change of Relations?

After Trump returned to office in January 2025, he revived his “maximum pressure” campaign of sanctions against Iran. In March 2025, he wrote to Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameini urging renewed nuclear talks while also warning of military action if diplomacy failed.

“I’m not in a rush” to use the military option, Trump said in early April 2025. “I think Iran wants to talk.”

He told reporters on April 18, 2025, “I’m for stopping Iran, very simply, from having a nuclear weapon. They can’t have a nuclear weapon. I want Iran to be great and prosperous and terrific.”

Iran was contemplating a response to President Trump's letter seeking nuclear negotiations. It was a closely held, urgent meeting. The country's president, along with the heads of the judiciary and Parliament gathered with Ayatollah Khamenei.

Khamenei had publicly and repeatedly banned engagement with Washington, calling it unwise and idiotic, but senior officials urged him in an unusual, coordinated effort, to change course.

The message to Khamenei was blunt. Negotiate with Washington, even directly, if necessary, because otherwise, the Islamic Republic's rule could be toppled.

The country was already grappling with an economy in shambles, a currency plummeting against the dollar, and shortages of gas, electricity, and water. The threat of war with the U.S. and Israel was extremely serious in the wake of Israel’s defeat of Hamas and Hezbollah, the officials warned. If Iran refused talks or if the negotiations failed, the officials informed Khamenei that military strikes on Iran's two main nuclear sites, Natanz and Fordow, would be inevitable.

Iran would then be forced to retaliate, risking a wider war, a scenario that could further damage the economy and spark domestic unrest, including protests and strikes, the officials cautioned. Fighting on two fronts posed an existential threat to the regime, they pointed out.

At the end of the hours long meeting, Khamenei relented. He granted his permission for talks, initially indirect through an intermediary, and then, if things proceeded well, direct talks between U.S. and Iranian negotiators.

On March 28, 2025, Iran sent a formal response to Trump's letter indicating its readiness for negotiations. Iran maintained that the negotiations were indirect, meaning each side would remain in separate rooms while Omani diplomats relayed messages back and forth.

The first round of talks took place in Oman. According to the U.S., the two sides did meet directly. As the discussions progressed, Iran’s previous position that it did not wish to meet Americans directly softened and it signalled major concessions. "Mr. Khamenei's, turnaround demonstrates his long-held core principle that 'preserving the regime is the most necessary of the necessities," said Hossei Mousavian, a former diplomat who served on Iran's nuclear negotiating team in the 2015 deal and is currently a visiting fellow at Princeton University.

Trump reaffirmed that he would take military action against Iran "if necessary, absolutely" should it fail to negotiate.

"I'm not asking for much -- they can't have a nuclear weapon" he said, adding, "I want them to thrive. I want Iran to be great."

The talks occurred against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world order. Iranian-backed militias in the region such as Hamas and Hezbollah, have been weakened by Israel, and Iran lost a key ally in Syria following President Bashar al-Assad's fall. Economic concerns were also part of the discussion with senior officials urging Khamenei to allow negotiations. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards Corps and conservative head of Parliament, warned Khamenei that a war coupled with a domestic economic collapse could quickly spiral out of control.

President Masoud Pezeshkian informed Khamenei that managing the country through its economic crises was not sustainable. The government announced new power cuts for Tehran in April 2025, which threatened production lines in factories.

A few months later, in early December 2025, after the main bazaar merchants, students, and citizens, took to the streets to protest the government’s incompetency and corruption that brought about the collapse of the Iranian rial,

President Pezeshkian, in a series of remarkably candid speeches said that Iran is facing insurmountable problems and that he is out of ideas to fix them.

“If someone can do something, by all means go for it,”

Pezeshkian told university students and academics. “I can’t do anything; don’t curse me.”

He has gone as far as to say that Iran’s problems are self-made – a result of corruption, factional infighting and decades of government spending practices that he described as “what crazy people do” – and not the fault of the U.S. or Israel. “The problem is us,” he has said at several meetings with government officials. The president in Iran can influence foreign and domestic policies, but the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenie, 86, in 2026, had the final say in all major state matters.

Patience Trump Style

Netanyahu was cautioned against striking Tehran while negotiations were ongoing, instructed to give the U.S. time to secure a nuclear deal. "I told him this would be inappropriate to do right now because we're very close to a solution,” Trump said at the White House. "Now, that could change at any moment. It could change with a phone call. But right now, I think they want to make a deal. And, if we can make a deal, (it would) save a lot of lives.”

He noted that an agreement could come together "over the following couple of weeks, if it happens.”

Rafael Mariano Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, described the continuing negotiations between Iran and the U.S. at the time as a good sign. Grossi said he was in near-daily communication with Iranian Foreign

Minister Abbas Araghchi, as well as speaking with Steve Witkoff, the US Middle East envoy. Addressing a weeklong seminar at the agency in Vienna in May 2025, Grossi characterized the meetings as an encouraging sign but, at the same time, noted that “we don’t know whether there’s going to be an agreement or not.” For the moment, “the jury is still out.”

Meanwhile, there is indication of a willingness to come to an agreement. And that, he thought by itself was “something possible.”

Iran and the U.S. held five rounds of talks in Muscat, Oman, and in Rome. The negotiations aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for lifting some of the economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. Trump has repeatedly threatened to unleash air strikes targeting Iran's nuclear program if a deal is not reached.

Trump has characterized Iran as having received a proposal from the U.S. to reach a deal; however, Iran has consistently denied receiving such a proposal. Iranian officials are increasingly warning that they could pursue a nuclear weapon using their stockpile of uranium.

Should a deal be reached, Iran may permit the U.N. atomic energy agency to include American inspectors in its teams during inspections, said Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Before Grossi's comments in Vienna, and while negotiations

between the U.S. and Iran were continuing, the head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, General Hossein Salami, issued a new warning to the U.S. "Our fingers on the trigger, we are in ambush and we are waiting….” "If they make a mistake, they will immediately receive responses that will make them completely forget their past."

Israel had earlier rejected a report in *The New York Times* that said Netanyahu had been threatening to disrupt the talks by targeting Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities. Citing sources briefed on the situation, *The New York Times* mentioned that Israeli officials were concerned that Trump was so eager to reach a deal with Iran that he might allow Tehran to keep its nuclear enrichment facilities, which is a red line for Israel.

Red, White and Blue Line

On May 12, 2025, an American Israeli dual citizen and Israeli soldier, Edan Alexan-der, was released from Hamas captivity in Gaza following direct U.S.-Hamas negotiations that bypassed Israel. The images surrounding his release resembled an American operation that just happened to take place in Israel.

U.S. hostage negotiator, Adam Boehler, who engaged in direct talks with Hamas in March, accompanied Alexander's mother on the flight from her home in America to Israel. It was U.S. envoy, Steve Witkoff, who handed her a phone to speak with her son at the moment of his release. Headlines highlighted President Trump's phone call with Alexander. The message was clear: It was Trump, not Netanyahu, who facilitated the release of Israel's

soldier from Gaza and that Trump left the Israeli prime minister appear in a more isolated, humiliated, and inept than ever before. This was not the Trump administration that Netanyahu had so eagerly anticipated.

On almost every significant strategic and geopolitical issue that mattered to Israel-- from seeking a new nuclear deal with Iran to establishing a cease-fire with the Houthis, from embracing the new Syrian regime, to negotiate directly with Hamas on hostage releases — Trump not only bypassed Israel but also moved in a direction very different from what Netanyahu would have chosen. The U.S. administration has sidelined Israel repeatedly. In so doing, Trump and his team have managed to expose Israel's policy of destruction and the shortcomings of its leader, whose lone success has been remaining in power through constant warfare.

This did not suggest a breakdown in relations between Trump and Netanyahu or that Israel has lost the United States as its most powerful ally, or that Trump will force Israel to end the war in Gaza. Indeed, in Gaza, the U.S. has largely left the Netanyahu coalition to its own devices.

When Netanyahu met with Trump in the Oval Office in February 2025, following the imposition of a cease-fire in Gaza on Netanyahu, he and his far-right coalition received Trump's “Gaza Riviera” idea which lent credence to the idea of mass displacement of Palestinians from Gaza. The Trump administration has since provided additional support and weapons.

A Narrow Window for A Nuclear Deal

After weeks of U.S. diplomatic overtures laced with military threats, the Trump administration and Iran finally began scoping out the potential for resolving the escalating crisis surrounding Tehran's nuclear program. US envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, held indirect talks in Oman in late spring to early summer 2025, which both described as constructive and so agreed to direct talks. It was proof enough that both Trump and Khamenei wanted to avert the risk of military confrontation. The challenge for both parties, however, was in overcoming deep-seated distrust and making Tehran confident to abandon nuclear enrichment.

While insisting that its program was for civilian purposes, Iran had reached a stage of enriching uranium to levels typically used for nuclear bombs – a path that puts it on a collision course with the U.S. and Israel. It had become a nuclear threshold state in 2025 with the capability to produce sufficient fissile material for multiple warheads within weeks.

Trump has insisted that he prefers a diplomatic solution and does not want the U.S. embroiled in Middle East wars. However, he had also repeatedly warned of military action if diplomacy failed. Israel also pushed for a military option after inflicting devastating blows on Iran and its proxies through waves of airstrikes in 2024 and the first six months of 2025.

U.S. hawks and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu urged Trump to pressure Iran to dismantle its entire nuclear program. That

demand was a red line for Khamenei. Yet, Iran should have recognized its weakened position, while Israel appeared emboldened and overconfident.

Tehran had the opportunity in June 2025 for an agreement but stubbornly spurned it. The economy then was strangled by sanctions, and the people, by and large, were disillusioned with the theocratic leadership.

At the first U.S.-Iran meeting, Iran was represented by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and the United States by the special envoy for the Middle East, Steve Witkoff. The goals of the initial meeting were modest -- to agree on a framework for negotiations and establish a timeline. The clock was ticking on Iran's nuclear program. Iran is now much closer to being able to produce a weapon than it was in 2018, when Trump withdrew from negotiations. After the break off, Trump imposed sanctions, Iran moved to abandon some of its obligations under the existing agreement that curbed its uranium enrichment levels at 3.5 percent. Iran subsequently advanced to 60 percent enrichment. And by early 2025 U.S. intelligence concluded that Iran was exploring a faster, albeit cruder, route to developing a weapon. The United Nations atomic agency, which monitors the nuclear sites, said, however, that it has not found evidence of weaponization.

Trump has repeatedly stated that the earlier deal was insufficient and he wanted a broader agreement. Khamenei, meanwhile, set some conditions and parameters for talks, according to three

Iranian officials. He has given the green light to discuss the nuclear program -- including strict monitoring mechanisms and a significant reduction in the enrichment of uranium. However, he said that Iran's missiles are part of the country's self-defence and are off-limits, the officials stated.

Mousavian, the former nuclear negotiator, indicated that Iran would never agree to demands by Washington and Israel to completely dismantle its nuclear program, adding that such a demand would be a "deal breaker." Iran is also open to discussing its regional policies and support for militant groups, the officials said and would indicate a willingness to use its influence to defuse regional tensions, including with the Houthis in Yemen.

Khamenei appointed several of his top advisers and confidants -- Kamal Kharazi on foreign policy, Ali Larijani on strategy, and Mohammad Forouzandeh on military matters to manage negotiations with Washington in close coordination with the foreign ministry, four Iranian officials noted.

Ali Vaez, the Iran director of the Crisis Group, an independent research organization, said that, with Trump, Iran has a unique opportunity for a lasting deal with the U.S. and the potential to resolve a nearly five-decade long diplomatic rift. Trump's influence over Israel and the Republican Party, which has traditionally opposed a deal with Iran, would lend more weight than any potential agreement.

"Time is too short, the stakes are too high, and the issues are too complicated for diplomacy to have a chance without the two key protagonists talking to each other," said Vaez.

There were, indeed, promising signs like the second round of nuclear talks with European powers in as many months, after Iran's reformist president, Masoud Pezeshkian, signalled a readiness to enter a new era of engagement. Described as "serious, frank, and constructive", Iran's discussions in Geneva on Monday with France, Britain, and Germany advanced the dialogue to resume talks and reach a deal over Tehran's controversial nuclear program.

This came ahead of Trump's return as U.S. president. He had in 2018, withdrawn the United States from a multi-party accord known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, sealed in 2015 promising Iran sanctions relief in exchange for guarantees that its nuclear program would remain peaceful. Iran, then, retorted by abandoning its commitments to limit enriching uranium to 60 per cent enduring over US$1 trillion in damage it has suffered.

In his debut speech at the U.N. General Assembly in September 2024, Pezeshkian signalled Iran's readiness to resume talks. Alongside Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Iran's new government has shown an openness to dialogue in exchange for sanctions relief. Iran's motivations for pursuing nuclear capabilities are complex, rooted in concerns over regime survival and regional influence. However, the economic, diplomatic, and security pressures are mounting. An examination of these

pressures reveals why Iran might be considering abandoning its nuclear ambitions.

The economic crisis sparked by sanctions has undermined Iran’s global and regional leverage. Oil exports are its financial lifeline, but maintaining production capacity would require an estimated US$300 billion to upgrade its aging infrastructure.

Compounding Iran's challenges is the rapid global transition away from fossil fuels. This shift towards carbon neutrality is driving down demand for fossil fuel. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, collectively known as OPEC+, have slashed output since 2022. Iran's oil-rich neighbours, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), are also investing heavily in renewable energy.

For oil-dependent Iran, the global energy transition presents a narrowing time frame and significant vulnerabilities. Sanctions relief tied to nuclear negotiations could provide a lifeline, enabling Iran to secure a share of dwindling fossil fuel revenues, revitalize the economy and allow it to diversify beyond oil. This urgency may motivate Tehran to negotiate earnestly. Hardliners who championed the nuclear program as a symbol of defiance are facing growing discontent.

Since 2018, Iran's diplomatic Isolation has deepened. While Russia and China maintain some support for Iran, they have also signalled an interest in avoiding a nuclear escalation in the Middle East.

This isolation limits Iran's bargaining power and increases its incentive to comply with international norms. Moreover, regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE have softened their stance on Iran, showing an openness to diplomatic engagement. On offer for Iran is an escape from isolation, enhanced standing and new economic opportunities.

Changes in Iran's politics also play a role. Pezeshkian's inauguration in 2024 signalled a shift in attitudes toward the West. Hardliners who championed the nuclear program as a symbol of defiance are facing growing discontent amid the economic hardship. An easing of economic strains could weaken hardliners grip on the nuclear issue and validate the new administration's conciliatory approach, building domestic support for de-escalation.

The limitations of the 2015 nuclear pact's limitations underscore the need for a more durable framework. The agreement failed partly because it relied on US-Iran negotiations. It allowed an easy U.S. withdrawal, undermining the agreement's longevity. A more inclusive pact could address regional security concerns, encouraging Iran to abandon its nuclear pursuits for guaranteed economic and security benefits.

The global focus on nuclear non-proliferation is heightening in light of developments in North Korea. The only binding multilateral commitment on disarmament is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. While approaches to this goal often diverge, treaty members are aligned on preventing

nuclear escalation.

This unified front offers a rare moment to press Iran into relinquishing its nuclear ambitions. Growing International Atomic Energy Agency pressure and indirect mediation through countries like Oman will also increase the likelihood of a non-nuclear commitment from Iran.

Some sceptics argue that Iran's call for dialogue is merely a tactic to relieve its economic pressures. But structural shifts suggest a deeper recalibration. Iran recognizing that Trump's return could bring back his "maximum pressure" strategy, worsening its economic situation.

The convergence of economic vulnerability, changing regional dynamics and a reform-minded administration presents a fleeting opportunity for a new nuclear deal. Recognizing these factors and crafting a pact that balances Iran's economic recovery with regional security is essential for sustainable denuclearization. By prioritizing incentives like sustainable aid and security assurances, the global community can tip the scales toward lasting peace.

As Khamenei weighed Iran's options, his prime goal was ensuring the republic's survival. According to a regime insider, avoiding war without yielding to Washington’s "maximalist" demands has been the desire. Yet for all the outward defiance, there was recognition that the republic has been at its most vulnerable since the 1980s war with Iraq -- its economy choked by sanctions,

its defences battered by chastening Israeli strikes. Israel claims to have destroyed much of Iran's air defences in strikes in October 2024, while Lebanese militant movement Hezbollah, which Tehran has considered a first line of defence against its enemy, has been severely degraded. The fall of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 robbed Iran of its only state ally in the region. At home, Tehran faced a far worse economic predicament than when Trump first imposed maximum pressure. The rial has plummeted since Trump returned to the White House, and annual inflation is hovered around 32 per cent.

The malaise is deepening as the chasm between the ageing, theocratic leadership and a youthful population has widened. Yet, the regime insider says Tehran still believes the costs that would come from a "limited confrontation" might be preferable to negotiating under maximum pressure. The Islamic Republic isn't gambling with its survival. Its pragmatism and instinct for self-preservation dictate resistance," the insider says. "The key question is whether the public will tolerate further economic hardship."

Iran's leaders have taken some measures to try to ease public disillusionment, including acknowledging that strictly enforcing the hijab law is no longer feasible. The depreciation of the rial has allowed the government to announce a 45 per cent minimum wage rise for millions of workers. Still, analysts and diplomats caution against overstating the regime's vulnerability. When Iran feels threatened, it typically seeks to ensure others pay a price and raises the stakes. After Trump imposed maximum pressure

in his first term, Iranian forces were blamed for sabotaging tankers in the Gulf and a missile and drone attack on Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure in 2019 that temporarily knocked out half of the kingdom's crude output. In 2024, Iran traded direct missile fire with Israel for the first time - although most of its projectiles were intercepted by Israel's defences, the US and its allies.

"Iran doesn't want war under any circumstances as there's a significant disparity between its capabilities and the US," the insider says. "However, if no other option remains, it will fight." Tehran has improved relations with Gulf rivals Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which backed Trump's first maximum pressure campaign, but have since sought to de-escalate tensions. However, the insider says that, in the event of a "major war, Iran would target U.S. bases in the region and oil facilities.

Iran has also long used its nuclear advances as a point of leverage with the US and as a warning to its foes not to push it too far. Negotiating a new accord to reverse its recent gains is likely to be far more complex, and Iran knows it has few other chips to play. Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed to produce only low-enriched uranium -- at a level that could be used for fuel or a nuclear power plant -- in return for sanctions relief. Its stockpile was limited to 300kg, meaning it contained a tiny fraction of what would be sufficient to run Iran's only nuclear plant. But in 2025, its stockpile, including highly enriched uranium, has swelled past 8,200kg – including 275kg enriched to 60 per cent by early February. It has installed thousands of advanced centrifuges and

developed expertise that cannot be reversed. Diplomacy might be difficult, but there was still hope a deal could be struck. Iran's diplomats have suggested that the top leader's directive on negotiations does not rule out the possibility of indirect talks, as has happened before. The E3 – Britain, France, and Germany -- meanwhile, have held talks with Iranian counterparts which Western diplomats describe as "exploratory" to gauge the appetite and potential contours for a deal. One option may be for Trump to negotiate a less ambitious deal that essentially can cap Iran's enrichment program, and “kick the can down the road".

But that may not be sufficient to contain Israel. Jacob Nagel, a former head of Israel's National Security Council under Netanyahu, states that the prime minister wants to prevent Iran from developing any nuclear program or facilities for the "next 100 years". "Israel can do whatever it needs. It's always better to do it with the US, but there are things we can do alone," Nagel explains. A senior Western diplomat warns that "a collision course seems inevitable.”

Hossein Mousavian, a former senior Iranian diplomat, at Princeton University in 2025, cautioned that a military attack is the one scenario that could drive Iran to weaponize. "The US entering a war with Iran would have consequences 10-t̛̛imes worse than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," he asserts. Yet, just as the U.S. struggles to understand the republic, the Western diplomat points out that the regime typically overestimates its position.

"I’m very pessimistic. If both sides were moving in the direction of confidence building, maybe, But they're just shouting," the diplomat says. "If Khamenei is playing a negotiating tactic,” he points out, “the question is who has the upper hand? It's not Khamenei."

China, Russia, Iran Nuclear Talks

Iran's powerful allies, Russia and China, have also urged Iran to resolve its nuclear standoff with the United States through negotiations. The three countries held two meetings in Beijing and Moscow to discuss Iran's nuclear program.

Washington ramped up the pressure on Tehran in response to the March 2024 trilateral nuclear talks among China, Iran, and Russia. China, meanwhile, continued to pursue multilateral negotiations on the nuclear issue, using them to reinforce its role as a key mediator in the Middle East and further expand its regional influence.

At the Beijing talks on March 14, 2024, the three nations reaffirmed their commitment to non-proliferation and jointly condemned "sanctions, pressure, or the threat of force.”

China’s foreign minister Wang Yi also proposed a five-point plan for the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue that included a commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear deal from which Trump had withdrawn the U.S. during his first term.

Tehran's positive response to the talks -- coming just days after Trump sought to engage Iran in bilateral nuclear negotiations -- was in stark contrast to Khamenei's swift rejection of the Washington proposal. Khamenei was firm that Tehran would not be coerced into negotiations after Trump announced he had written to Iran suggesting a restart to bilateral talks, followed by a declaration that the U.S. would have to "go in militarily" if the Iranians did not want to negotiate.

While Tehran's preference for Beijing's multilateral approach over Washington's bilateral outreach underscored its strategic positioning in an increasingly hostile diplomatic environment, it could and did, provoke an even harsher response from the U.S.

"Trump must be upset with Russia and China's strategic support for Iran ... It is highly possible Trump will impose some extra pressure on Tehran in the near future," said Middle East specialist Wen Shaobiao from Shanghai International Studies University.

Wen also noted that the U.S. would be very unlikely to return to multilateral talks "because Trump never believed multilateralism can solve problems.

Trump's approach to Iran mirrors the hardline stance of his first administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA, followed by the imposition of economic sanctions under the so-called maximum pressure strategy.

Yan Wei, deputy director at the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies at China's Northwest University, suggested that Beijing's deepening engagement in nuclear negotiations might further escalate tensions.

According to Yan, Beijing's involvement could potentially push Washington toward adopting a more aggressive stance on Tehran, rather than seeking a balanced diplomatic solution.

"Amid growing Sino-US rivalry across the globe, Washington might conduct a further rightward policy to Iran. Meanwhile, Beijing is conducting a more stable approach towards the Iranian nuclear issue," he said.

Analysts also noted that China's engagement with Iran and Russia regarding the nuclear issue aligns with its diplomatic strategy in the Middle East, which emphasizes active participation in regional politics after previously focusing on economic ties.

China's presence in the region has expanded significantly since the JCPOA was signed in 2015, with Beijing viewing the Middle East as a critical arena for its global ambitions.

In 2023, China brokered a landmark peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This was followed in 2024 by negotiations in Beijing that brought together 14 Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah.

"China's continued diplomacy in the Middle East would reflect its

own calculus in portraying itself as an active player in the region, said Clemens Chay, a research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute.

Chay noted that hosting the trilateral discussions also allowed Beijing to challenge what it perceives as coercive tactics by Washington. "China's calculus on hosting Iran's nuclear talks is also to seize the opportunity to denounce bullying narrative of America."

Since Trump was returned to office in January 2025, Iranian newspapers and pundits have expressed concern if the country's carefully cultivated alliance with Russia and China was at risk.

The Trump administration has engaged directly with Russian authorities over the Ukraine war and Iran. Trump has also pressured China to stop purchasing Iran's sanctioned oil and penalized Chinese refineries that buy oil from Iran.

Homayoun Falakshahi, who heads the crude oil team at Kpler, a commodity data analytics firm, noted that since January 2025, Iran has exported about 1.6 million barrels a day of crude oil, mostly to China, Iran's biggest oil customer and one of its few international supporters. His firm projects nearly half a million barrels a day decline in Iran's crude oil exports if the United States expands its sanctions on China.

On the other hand, an all-out war between the U.S.-Israel and the West, fighting Iran in a regional war, that neither Russia or

China will join militarily, can result in a new pro-Western government taking office in Tehran that will look less favourably towards China.

China, Iran, Russia and South Africa conducted naval drills off the African coast in January 2026, during the nuclear talks between the U.S. and Iran, tightening cooperation among four countries that have drawn Trump's ire.

The week-long "Will for Peace" exercises, led by China, were a demonstration of Bric's nations' "collective resolve to work together," Captain Nndwakhulu Thomas Thamaha, South Africa's joint task force commander, said at the opening ceremony.

Trumps Solution to the Iran Problem

President Trump said that he will "solve the Iran problem" and that "it's almost an easy one."

Almost.

What is "the Iran problem"? Trump seems to think it's Iran's efforts to obtain nuclear weapons, which he has said, "they can't have." Iran has enriched uranium to 60 percent purity, close to weapons grade and "might be able to enrich enough uranium for five fission weapons within about one week and enough for eight weapons in less than two weeks," according to the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, back in mid-April 2025. It would take additional time to make the parts needed to turn this fissile material into a bomb, but this could be done in small, secret

facilities.

Steve Witkoff, Trump's emissary, said that the administration's red line was “weaponization" of Iran's nuclear capabilities. Incredibly, that conceded more to Tehran than Barack Obama's 2015 nuclear deal, the one Trump correctly cancelled in his first term for being too weak. After meeting with Iran's foreign minister Witkoff appeared to walk back his original suggestion, posting on X that Iran must "eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponization program."

Tehran has been playing Western diplomats for fools for decades, including through Obama's much-ballyhooed Iran deal. That deal's nuclear restrictions, had they remained in place, would soon be expiring; mostly, what the deal accomplished was to expand Iran's regional power by lifting economic sanctions. Iran also has a richly documented record of cheating on its agreements, a fact that was exposed by Israel when it stole the regime's nuclear secrets from a warehouse in Iran in 2018.

If Witkoff really thinks there's any kind of inspection or verification process that will keep the regime in check, he's naïve. But the larger mistake is to think that the Iran problem is fundamentally about nuclear weapons. France and Britain also have nukes, but not many people lie awake at night worried about them. The Iranian regime is different not because it might acquire nuclear weapons. It's different because of its ideological character, geopolitical ambitions, raging anti-Americanism and antisemitism, as well as its long record of supporting terrorism,

which might dispose the regime to brandish or even use them.

That's what must change if the nuclear issue is to be fully resolved. This brings us to something else Trump has said of Iran: "I want them to be a rich, great nation" Good. The question is how.

There are two paths here. One is a reprise of some version of the sanctions- for-nukes deal that lay at the core of the 2015 agreement and that Iran says it wants. However, that deal is destined to fail because it does nothing to change the character of the regime.

The second path is more ambitious but also, potentially, more promising. It's what I previously referred to as normalization for normalization.

Here is what normalization would require from the United States: the resumption of full diplomatic ties between Tehran and Washington, including the reopening of embassies that have been shuttered for decades; the end to all U.S. economic sanctions, including secondary sanctions imposed on foreign companies doing business with Iran; direct, bilateral trade and investment; thousands of student visas for Iranians wishing to study in the United States; and the offer of U.S. arms sales to Iran, at least of a conventional nature.

And here is what normalization would require of the Iranian regime: it would have to start behaving like a normal country.

A normal country doesn't finance and arm terrorist groups that instigate regional wars and disrupt global commerce, like Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis. A normal country with the world's third-largest proven oil reserves but an otherwise collapsing economy wouldn't need to spend billions of dollars enriching uranium or producing plutonium. A normal country doesn't call for the elimination of other countries, even hostile ones. A normal country doesn't take foreign nationals' hostage as a routine part of its diplomacy. A normal country doesn't seek to assassinate former U.S. government officials or dissident exiles. A normal country doesn't execute people based on their sexual orientation. A normal country doesn't subject women to gang rape in prison to enforce a so-called modesty code.

If Iran truly wants to solve its pressing economic and strategic problems such as a cratering currency, energy shortages, widespread popular opposition, and the decimation of its regional allies -- all it must do is change its own behaviour.

If Trump desires his own Reagan Esque moment of "Tear down this wall," proposing normalization in an Oval Office address would be a good way to do it. Iran's leaders would almost surely brusquely reject it. However, the restless people of Iran would be inspired by it, and it would clarify the true nature of the crisis with the regime -- a crisis that's primarily about values, not weapons.

To give this rhetorical diplomacy some substance Trump took decisive action. He planned a comprehensive attack on Iran's

nuclear facilities in collaboration with Israel. As negotiators like Trump and Witkoff understand, an olive branch is much easier to accept when it is offered from the point of a sword.

In 2018, Donald Trump entered the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House with determination and sounded the death knell for what much of the world regarded a landmark achievement in global diplomacy.

To "prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon", Trump announced he would sign a memorandum that reimposed damaging sanctions on the Islamic Republic, marking the beginning of his so-called "maximum pressure" campaign.

In just 12 minutes, Trump dismantled Barack Obama's signature foreign policy achievement: a 2015 accord with Tehran that strictly limited Iran's nuclear activities and had the support of Europe, Russia, and China.

"If we do nothing, we know exactly what will happen in just a short period of time," Trump said. “The world's leading state sponsor of terror will be on the cusp of acquiring the world's most dangerous weapons."

Back in the White House, Trump faced the repercussions of his 2018 decision -- Iran shifted from compliance with the deal to aggressively ramping up its nuclear activities becoming locked in a collision course with the West that culminated in June 2025.

“There's space for diplomacy. But both sides have to have the political will and the urgency to meet the moment," says Kelsey Davenport, director for non-proliferation policy at the Arms Control Association. "Absent that, the escalatory kind of tit-for-tat will spiral out of control."

Prime Minister Netanyahu's far-right government, emboldened by a year in which it dealt Iran and its proxies a series of significant blows, urged the U.S. to support military action against the republic.

Even the E3 signatories to the 2015 accord – the UK, France, and Germany --adopted a confrontational stance towards Tehran.

They opposed Trump's initial decision to abandon the deal, referred to by its acronym, the JCPOA, and sought, in vain, to revive it with the Biden administration. However, they became increasingly frustrated by Iran's aggressive expansion of its nuclear activities and Tehran's intransigence under the leadership of Khamenei.

A critical juncture arose in the late summer of 2025, ahead of the expiration of key JCPOA clauses on October 18, 2025. The E3 did initiate the so-called "snapback process" which reinstated UN sanctions on Iran.

Western diplomats acknowledge that the snapback was a dangerous moment, potentially empowering hardliners in Iran, the US and Israel, thereby increasing the threat of military action.

Nonetheless, they felt they had little choice as there was no progress on the diplomatic front.

Iran has already warned that it would withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty if snapback were triggered. It has also raised the stakes by dramatically expanding its production of uranium enriched to 60 per cent, nearing weapons grade levels.

The U.S. intelligence community did not believe that Iran is actively building a nuclear weapon but acknowledges that it is well within Tehran's capability. Tehran can produce enough weapons-grade fission material for "six weapons or so in less than two weeks," said Davenport.

"So there is a real risk of Iran breaking out multiple bombs' worth of weapons-grade uranium, before those moves could be detected," she states. "Iran could produce a crude nuclear weapon in a matter of months."

The hope remains that Iran and the US can find a diplomatic off-ramp to ease the world's most significant proliferation crisis since North Korea conducted its first nuclear weapons tests two decades ago. The fear is that time is running out for a transactional and unpredictable American president to arrive at a political solution with an Iranian leader who distrusts and loathes the US.

"This is a game of chicken," says a regime insider. "It's like two drivers speeding towards each other; the winner is the one willing

to risk everything rather than veer off course out of fear."

When Masoud Pezeshkian won Iran's 2024 election as the reformist president he promised –seemingly with Khamenei's backing – to secure sanctions relief. Then, Trump, who had declared his desire to deal with Iran, regained the U.S. presidency in January 2025. Both raised hopes that diplomacy might be possible.

However, in February 2025, Trump signed an executive memo indicating he was prepared to play hardball with Iran. In it, he declared that Washington would restore maximum pressure sanctions to drive Iran's oil exports, their financial lifeline, to "zero". The memo stated that Iran should not only be denied a nuclear weapon but also its intercontinental ballistic missiles, and its "terrorist network" be neutralized, a reference to Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and other regional militants it backs.

The memo was viewed in Tehran as evidence that Trump wants to force Iran into submission. Iran's ballistic missile arsenal and its support for regional militant groups are key to its defence strategy and represent red lines for the regime.

Vali Nasr, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, says Trump's memo "essentially changed the dynamic in Iran."

Regime hardliners -- who opposed the JCPOA from the outset -- sought to exploit the pressure on Iran to undermine Pezeshkian

and his reformist allies.

The memo “put wind in the sails” of the hardliners, who immediately said. "Don't look at what he says, look at the text of what he signed," Nasr pointed out. “There's domestic pressure on the supreme leader... he already thinks the U.S. is out to squeeze them, and that it's after the Islamic republic itself.”

Yet Trump's messaging was characteristically capricious. Just hours after the memo was published, he posted on his social media site that he hoped to negotiate a "Verified nuclear peace agreement" with Iran, which would be followed by a "big Middle East Celebration" upon its signing.

Khamenei, who has long dismissed the possibility of negotiations under maximum pressure or the threat of war, slammed the door on talks, stating that Washington could not be trusted. He characterized negotiations as "neither wise, nor prudent, nor dignified."

In March 2025, Trump sent a letter to Khamenei reiterating his preference for an agreement. He was "not looking to hurt Iran,” he said soon after sending it, but held out the threat of military action: "There are two ways Iran can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal."

Pezeshkian noted that in his response to Trump, Khamenei ruled out direct negotiations but left the door open for indirect talks. A challenge for the regime lies in deciphering what kind of deal

might satisfy Trump: will he focus on a mutually acceptable agreement so he can claim to have resolved a global crisis, or will he push for Iran's complete capitulation?

The regime is already concerned about the influence of hawks in Trump’s administration, and Netanyahu, who believes Iran is at its weakest in decades and sees it as a window of opportunity to persuade Trump to dismantle the Iranian nuclear and missile programs.

There must be a "credible" military threat to force Khamenei to choose "between his nuclear program and his regime", says Mark Dubowitz, co-founder of the Foundation for Defence of Democracies, a Washington-based neoconservative think-tank.

Trump is generally considered averse to sending U.S. troops into combat, but Dubowitz believes Iran may be an exception.

In 2020, Trump shocked many by ordering the assassination of Iran's powerful commander Qassem Soleimani, pushing the foes to the brink of war. He has launched multiple strikes against Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen while warning Tehran of "dire" consequences for any attacks by the militants. Still, Dubowitz is uncertain about the direction Trump will take, pointing out that while there are hawks in the administration, there are also those aligned with the Maga movement who will caution against conflict with Iran. "It may be for Trump that the Islamic republic remains the exception in a way that he's seeking to exercise American power," says Dubowitz. "On the other hand, the risk is

that the Iranians offer him some deal short of dismantlement, sort of JCPOA-plus, and then Trump calls it the greatest deal ever negotiated."

Time Bomb Ticking

The talks between the U.S. and Iran at the Oman Embassy in Rome, and Muscat, faced well-earned mistrust among my peers. "We're at a fork in the road, heading toward a crisis," said, correctly, Sanam Vakil, the director of the Middle East and North Africa Program at Chatham House, a British think tank.

"It's hard to imagine that Israel would be happy with a nuclear program as advanced as Iran's without U.N. supervision," said Ali Vaez, Iran project director for the International Crisis Group. He believes the Iranians are sceptical about getting a deal with Trump. "I see signs that they are preparing for war," he said, including efforts to increase social cohesion, vowing not to enforce a strict law on the hijab, releasing some political prisoners and warning about protests. As they should be.

When Trump threatens Iran with "bombing the likes of which they have never seen before," it is important to remember that they have experienced serious earlier bombings by Israelis that took out most of their air defence systems after Iran's unsuccessful ballistic missile attack on Israel in 2024. They are bare bones from a military point of view, the smart political scientists, analysts, and military leaders know it, and they get it. There really is no upside for the regime not to negotiate. Not that there is one if they do, because like the Palestinians, they have boxed

themselves into a political and military corner and faced a battle they not only did not plan for but understood, one they wrapped in unnecessary religious self-destructive aluminium foil.

That is why the secular factions of parliament encouraged Khamenei to negotiate with Trump and America.

The Saudis helped to bring the parties together. MBS dispatched his brother, Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman, to Tehran, where he was received warmly by Iranian officials dressed in military regalia. He then hand-delivered a letter to Khamenei, a man whom MBS once derided as making “Hitler look good.”

The two countries had no diplomatic relations between 2016 and 2023, espousing open hostility. MBS has repeatedly threatened that if Iran obtains a nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia will as well.

What changed? Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have warmed over the decades. As importantly, Saudi Arabia is in the middle of an economic diversification program intended to transform the kingdom from an overly oil-dependent into a business, technology, and tourism hub. The prospect of Iranian drones and missiles flying over Saudi Arabia posed a serious threat to that plan.

In 2019, one of Saudi Arabia’s key oil installations was hit by a sophisticated Iran-backed attack. Saudi officials have lamented that the episode taught them the limitations of their U.S.

alliance, pushing them toward talks with Iran rather than continuing with the conflict.

Arab states Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and Bahrain have joined Saudi Arabia in welcoming the talks – as has China.

Wang Yi, China's foreign minister told his Iranian counterpart, Araghchi, who was invited to Beijing between his second and third meetings in Oman, that China supported Iran in its talks with the U.S.

"China has always been committed to a political and diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue and is opposed to resorting to force and illegal unilateral sanctions at every turn," said Wang. The two senior ministers were said to have held an "in-depth exchange of views" on the latest developments during the talks.

While the talks were taking place, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, called on Iran to explain the tunnels built around the nuclear site. "I've been raising this issue repeatedly, and will continue to do so," he said. Grossi, who was in Tehran while the nuclear talks were taking place, said all countries need to tell the IAEA of the purpose of the facilities around nuclear sites, but that Iran has a stance "unique in the world" that it does not need to notify the agency ahead of time.

"We're asking them what is this for? They are telling us it's none of your business," he said. Grossi went on to say that it "cannot

be excluded" that the tunnels would store undeclared materials.

If the U.S. agrees to anything short of total dismantlement of all equipment -- in other words, agrees to limits on how much uranium Iran can possess and how much enrichment it can perform – it exposes Trump to the critique that he is simply replicating key elements of the 2015 Obama nuclear agreement, which he called a "disaster" and from which he withdrew the U.S. in 2018.

An interesting development was the possibility of a joint venture between Iran and the U.S., one of Iran's neighbours in the Persian Gulf, or even Saudi Arabia? Such a partnership offered an extra layer of assurance that the program was peaceful.

President Trump gave the Iranians an opening to negotiate a nuclear deal acceptable to Israel, a nation Iran vows to eliminate from the face of the earth, and one also acceptable to America, Europe, and the world. He did so with Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister sitting next to him in the White House. Even though Netanyahu has pressed for Israeli military action which Trump has turned down, for now he was giving Iran a chance to accept and agree that it would not build nuclear bombs to destroy Israel, as it had proclaimed.

Besides, by the end of July 2025, the European signatories to the Iran nuclear agreement, had to indicate if they intended to reimpose punishing U.N. sanctions against Iran. The option to reinstate these sanctions, which were lifted under the 2015

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, expired on October 18, 2025, and were reimposed, bringing on the collapse of the Iranian currency and regime.

Iran is already under significant sanctions imposed by Trump when America backed-out of the Iran nuclear deal, and imposed U.S. and U.N. sanctions stemming from its ballistic missile program to its human rights record. Reimposition of these additional sanctions inflicted a new wave of damages on Iran's already fragile economy, that is barely underpinning the Ayatollahs.

Israel's military operation aimed at dismantling Iran's nuclear program, assertedly intended to annihilate Israel, appears inevitable. The methods should be politically correct, like how the Balfour Declaration was achieved, relying on 21st-century American lobbying in Beijing, Washington, London, Paris, Jeddah, and Moscow, rather than traditional approaches. Both Israel and the U.S. are committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Military Planning

Israel has long planned to attack Iranian nuclear facilities; rehearsing bombing runs and calculating the potential damage it could inflict with or without American help. Iran was barely standing militarily after its ballistic missile attack on Israel in 2024 failed to penetrate American and Israeli defences. Its key ally, Hezbollah in Lebanon, was decimated by Israel, and the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria eliminated a Hezbollah

supporter and a key arms route from Tehran.

At the behest of Netanyahu, senior Israeli military officials updated their American counterparts on a plan that would have combined an Israeli commando raid on underground nuclear sites with a bombing campaign involving American aircraft.

With the U.S. intensifying its efforts against the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, General Michael E. Kurilla, the head of the U.S. Central Command, and Michael Waltz, the national security adviser, both discussed how the U.S. could support an Israeli attack while moving military equipment to the Middle East.

Trump indicated he was open to U.S. support for Israeli military action. The U.S. has long accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with weapons and intelligence, as well as exercising a degree of control over the group. On March 17, 2025, as Trump warned the Houthis to cease their attacks on international shipping, he also called out Iran, asserting it was in control of the Houthis. “Every shot fired by the Houthis will be looked upon, from this point forward, as being a shot fired from the weapons and leadership of IRAN,” Trump wrote in a social media post, adding, “IRAN will be held responsible, and suffer the consequences, and those consequences will be dire!”

Netanyahu advocated for a combined airstrike-commando raid, larger in scope than what Israel executed in September 2024 in Syria.

During that operation, Israeli forces flew by helicopter into Syria

to destroy an underground bunker used for building missiles for Hezbollah. Israel employed airstrikes to eliminate guard posts and air defence systems before commandos rappelled to the ground. The teams of commandos, armed with explosives and small arms, infiltrated the underground facility, setting explosives to destroy key missile building equipment.

To be successful, Israeli officials wanted the U.S. to provide air cover and bombing support to protect the Israeli commandos. Additionally, any Israeli attack on nuclear sites would likely provoke an Iranian missile barrage against Israel necessitating U.S. assistance to repel it.

We all know Trump's stance on the Iran Nuclear Treaty. He abandoned it and orchestrated the U.S. withdrawal in 2018 during his first term. Does anyone genuinely believe he now desires a deal with the Iranians, or is he simply employing a more politically savvy approach ahead of midterm elections and allowing time for proper military planning?

Surely the Iranian leadership understands Trump's true feelings about the Iranian nuclear program, regardless of any agreement they may sign.

Reminds me of the Palestinian Arab and Muslim communities in Michigan supporting and voting for Trump in the 2024 election because of their opposition to the Biden-Harris administration's support of Israel in the Gaza War –only to be surprised when Trump continued to support Israel's war efforts. Did they really

think that the president who imposed the Muslim Ban and moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem during his first term would be more supportive of Palestinians than Harris? Oh, sorry! How could I forget? Of course! Trump wants to support Palestinians – to move out of Gaza -- so he can develop a "Riviera."

This serves as a recent example of misguided Palestinian Arab political judgment and strategy. The roots of such irrational behaviour are explored at the end of this book under the title *Past Forward*.

Moral Paralysis

A post on social media posed a question to Iranians: "Would you rather have a stranger kill your abusive father, or have him continue to live and abuse your family?"

While the question is hypothetical, the post struck Morteza Dehghani, a professor of psychology and computer science and the director of the Morality and Language Lab at the University of Southern California, as a painfully precise metaphor for the anguish Iranians are enduring following recent attacks from Israel and the United States.

Dehghani, like so many other Iranians, is caught in the devastating paradox of this moment: witnessing a hated internal oppressor — a regime in which people can be killed because of what they wear and what they believe — being attacked by a reviled external aggressor, a state engaged in a campaign of

devastating and indiscriminate violence against the population of Gaza!

Many, like Dehghani, have been gripped by a moral paralysis: a schadenfreude at the death of a brutal Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps commander curdling into grief for the innocent lives lost, and rage that a hostile foreign power would terrorize millions and kill hundreds in Iran to achieve its aim. Dehghani grew up in Iran during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war, a brutal conflict that landed a nation already scarred by a century of foreign intervention, most notably the 1953 C.I.A.-backed coup.

This formative experience has guided his 15-year career as a scholar of moral psychology, investigating how our most sacred values can paradoxically lead us to intractable conflict and hate.

The internal conflict is a fundamental clash of worldviews tied to our very identity. To understand the magnitude of this struggle, one must first understand the unique psychological power of what researchers call "moral" or "sacred" values. Research demonstrates that moral values aren't mere opinions.

They are deeply held beliefs that are profoundly intertwined with personal and collective identity. People feel outrage when these values are threatened or discarded by others.

The dilemma of the abusive father and the murderous stranger perfectly capture this clash between two competing moral

worldviews -- the moral value of self-determination battling the moral value of liberation. It is a conflict witnessed across a striking spectrum of reactions from Iranians since the attacks, in both personal conversations and on social media.

On one side lies the moral imperative to liberate oneself from the Islamic Republic. For some of the most seasoned dissidents -- those who have endured imprisonment, torture, and exile — the Israeli strikes evoke a dangerous yet fragile hope. They view the death of a high-ranking Revolutionary Guards commander not as a casualty of war, but as a righteous, albeit small, step toward salvation from an oppressive regime. From this perspective, any action that undermines the architects of their suffering is seen as a necessary catalyst for the long-awaited collapse of the Islamic Republic, a moral imperative that overrides all other considerations.

On the other side stands the moral value of self-determination. Many Iranians, share the dream of a free Iran, but cannot accept its potential birth through foreign invasion. For them, shaped by a century of foreign interference and the trauma of the Iran-Iraq war, the principle of "no foreign intervention" represents an inviolable boundary. They believe that liberation must come from within, and the notion of another country's military killing their fellow citizens -- even in the name of freedom -- is indefensible.

This dilemma has been a cornerstone of the Islamic Republic's propaganda for over 40 years. The regime has relentlessly conveyed a singular threat: without its rule, Iran will disintegrate like Syria and be divided by its enemies. This argument

purposefully transforms the desire for liberation into a gamble with national survival, amplifying the moral paralysis that sustains its grip on power.

This psychological dynamic underscores the futility of external calls for regime change, from actors such as the Israeli or U.S. governments. Such appeals immediately activate Iranians sacred value of national self-determination, which many consider paramount over liberation. It turns a potential ally into an extension of the "murderous stranger, inadvertently strengthening the regime's narrative that it is the sole defender of the nation, thereby deepening the paralysis that already afflicts the populace.

One must, then, return to the initial question of the abusive father and the murderous stranger. Its power is not as a logic puzzle demanding a solution, but as a cry of pain from a people caught in this very psychological trap.

The most humane response is not to try to solve the puzzle, but to acknowledge the shared agony of being forced to live through it in the first place.

Observers should not mistake Iranians' moral paralysis as proof that they are simply passive observers of the crisis gripping their country. For Iranians, acknowledging this shared agony is the only path forward — they need a psychological, not a political, shift. It requires seeing the fierce passion for a competing moral value not as intractable disagreement, but as its own expression

of their desperate love for the free Iran so many of them yearn to see.

President Pezeshkian appears to favour a liberalizing makeover, repairing relations with the West through a possible nuclear deal. He has spoken of "an opportunity to change our views on governance."

They seek an Islamic Republic that is more of a republic, where women are empowered and a younger generation no longer feels oppressed by a gerontocratic theological system.

Broken Promises

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, promised freedom when he came to power in the 1979 revolution that overthrew the shah seen as a pawn of the secular and decadent West. It was not to be. Tensions soon erupted between those who had fought for democracy and those who considered theocratic rule more important.

The Islamic Republic's first president, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, was impeached and ousted after a little more than a year in office for challenging the rule of the clerics. He fled to France. Thousands were executed as the government consolidated its power.

The Iran-Iraq war followed in 1980, when Iraq, backed by the U.S., attacked Iran. Fighting would go on for eight years, leaving an estimated 500,000 people dead, most of them on the Iranian side, before Ayatollah Khomeini drank from "the poison

chalice," as he put it, and accepted an end to the war.

The generation that fought in that war, now largely forgotten in the West, comprises much of the political and military elite in Iran today. They emerged from a war convinced of American treachery due to U.S. military support for Iraq, deeply aware of Iranian resilience, and viscerally dedicated to the revolution for which they had witnessed so many comrades fall.

"The war, in many cases, embedded a paranoid worldview, a sense of victimization that has led the elite to be unaware of how the world is evolving around them," Vakil noted.

All of this has shaped the *nazam*, or system. It is now thoroughly institutionalized. Change has proved difficult, and conflict has festered. In the decades since the revolution, the century-long Iranian quest for a workable compromise between clericalism and secularism -- one that acknowledges the country's profound Islamic faith while embracing its broader attraction to liberal values -- has endured. This was evident when more than two million people took to the streets in 2009 to protest what they perceived as a stolen election that returned President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power.

The vote had been preceded by weeks of vigorous televised presidential debates, watched by millions of people, and the rapid rise of Mir-Hossein Moussavi's liberalizing Green Movement. All that evaporated as the Revolutionary Guards and Basij militia brutally subdued protesters in the days after the

vote.

More recently, in 2022, a wave of protests erupted after a young woman, Mahsa Amini, died in the custody of Iran's morality police shortly after her arrest for failing to cover her hair with a hijab. The movement reflected deep frustration with the notion that aging clerics should dictate how women dress, leading to some changes. Many more women now go without hijabs; reprimands have become rarer and more lenient.

"The people of Iran are fed up with being pariahs. Some are more saddened by the cease-fire than the war itself," said Dherar Belhoul al-Falasi, a former member of the United Arab Emirates' Federal National Council who now heads a consultancy focused on management. “But we here in the Gulf are status quo powers that favour stability," he added.

Ongoing Warfare & Deceptive Propaganda

While American and Iranian officials negotiated for a truce, Israeli and Iranian military have continued to inflict much damage to each other. After the 12-day war, mysterious explosions and fires erupted daily in Iran, setting ablaze apartment complexes, oil refineries, factories and roads leading to airports and other major destinations. Authorities who spoke publicly blamed the fires and explosions on gas leaks, garbage fires, and old infrastructure. Iranian military officials believe they were acts of sabotage by Israeli agents in Iran.

Many Iranians also questioned the circumstances of the death in

mid-July 2005 of Brigadier General Gholamhossein Gheybparvar, deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards. According to state media, he died of complications from chemical weapons injuries sustained in Iran's 1980s war with Iraq.

The Iranian authorities were wary of publicly declaring their suspicions about Israel's potential involvement because, they said, Iran does not want to corner itself into having to retaliate against Israel.

"The Iranian government's long record of coverups and lack of transparency, along with its vague responses, have only deepened public fear and suspicions," said Omid Memarian, an Iran expert at DAWN, a Washington-based foreign policy research institute. "People are aware that the regime often downplays or denies Israeli attacks."

Mahdi Mohammadi, a conservative politician and senior adviser to Iran's head of Parliament, said the situation with Israel is far from predictable.

"If anyone thinks we are dealing with linear events that we can predict, they are naïve," Mohammadi said in one of his recorded speeches. "We are not even in a ceasefire now; we are in a fragile suspension, and any minute it can end, and we are back at war."

Meanwhile, Iran sends messages to Israeli mobile phones, warning Israelis to avoid bomb shelters because militants

planned to infiltrate and attack those inside.

Israel and Iran have transformed social media into a digital battlefield, employing deception and falsehoods to influence political outcomes. This information warfare involves actors from both sides flooding the Internet with manipulated or fabricated images and videos, aiming to demoralize and demonize the opponent.

“It’s certainly a new era of influence warfare,” said James J.F. Forest, a professor of security studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, who has written extensively on the subject. “There’s never really been a previous corollary in history where you had the ability to go to scale with this kind of propaganda.”

Going Nuclear

The conclusion that many, including myself, have reached is that Iran is determined to pursue nuclear capability with the enriched uranium it has procured.

Developing nuclear weapon capabilities appears to be Iran’s strategy for ensuring its security in a threatening world with North Korea serving as a model. Iran has defied demands to dismantle its nuclear program, and now, equipped with nuclear capabilities, it is perceived as largely impregnable.

“Certainly, North Korea doesn’t rue the day it acquired nuclear weapons,” said Christopher Hill, who led unsuccessful talks with

Pyongyang in 2007 and 2008 aimed at dismantling its nuclear program.

The allure of nuclear weapons, Hill noted, has intensified for America's allies in the Middle East and Asia. Since World War II, they have relied on the protective umbrella of U.S. security. But they now face a President Trump who views alliances as incompatible with his vision of "America First."

"I'd be very careful with the assumption that there is a U.S. nuclear umbrella," Hill, who served as ambassador to South Korea, Iraq, Poland and Serbia under Democratic and Republican administrations, cautioned. "Countries like Japan and South Korea are wondering whether they can rely on the U.S."

Saudi Arabia, an ally of the U.S. and arch-rival of Iran, watches Iran's nuclear ambitions with alarm. It would feel immense pressure to develop its own nuclear weapon, should Iran succeed in developing one. The U.S. has tried to reassure the Saudis by offering assistance in a civil nuclear program, but those negotiations were cut short by the October 7 attack by Hamas.

"The risks of Iran acquiring a small nuclear arsenal are now higher than they were before," said Robert J. Einhorn, an arms control expert who negotiated with Iran during the Obama administration. "We can assume there are a number of hardliners who are arguing that they should cross the nuclear threshold."
"Now the U.S. and Israel have basically demonstrated their

capabilities," said Jon Wolfsthal, a former senior director for arms control and non-proliferation on Barak Obama's National Security Council. "They shot their shots," he said, and they neither dismantled Iran's nuclear program nor toppled the regime.

Iran's pitiful performance in its conflict with Israel may motivate it to rapidly pursue nuclear weapons. "They have been attacked by two nuclear states," said Wolfsthal. "It's made getting a nuclear weapon seem more necessary from a security point of view."

Ellie Geranmayeh, an Iran expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank, agrees. "This is the great irony," she said. "Although Trump has sought to eliminate the nuclear threat from Iran, he has now made it far more likely that Iran becomes a nuclear state."

China-Iran Relationship

China has emerged as Iran's financial saviour amid sanctions and as a political adviser on navigating relations with the U.S. and Israel. While the U.S. and Israel call for regime change in Iran with Israel not ruling out a plan to assassinate Ayatollah Ali Khamenei -- and Trump stating on social media: "If the current Iranian regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn't there be a regime change???" Chinese analysts argue that regime change is unlikely. They believe the U.S.-Israeli assault has, in fact, reinforced unity within Iran.

"Following the recent strikes by Israel and the U.S., domestic sentiment in Iran has shifted towards stronger support for the

supreme leader, with calls to safeguard national sovereignty and security gaining prominence," said Sun Degang director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai. He noted that China can be expected to strengthen its "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Iran.

Iran has stepped up its diplomatic presence in Central Asia, signed yuan-denominated trade pacts, and boosted security cooperation and intelligence sharing with China. This diplomatic pivot is not built on centrifuges or surviving sanctions; rather, it is based on an enduring and deliberate reorientation toward the East. Since the U.S. unilaterally ruptured the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018, Tehran has gradually lost faith in Western guarantees.

Iran and China established diplomatic relations in 1971; however, substantive cooperation was limited during the Cold War. It was not until the 2000s – especially under former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad – that economic and energy ties grew significantly.

With the signing of the 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement between the two countries in 2021, Iran has found more than just a trade partner – it has found a strategic axis. Chinese firms are now involved in infrastructure projects across Iran, with the scope of cooperation including technology transfer, energy security, and even alternative methods of settling trade transactions.

Unlike Iran's past alignments with major powers, its relationship

with China is characterized not by subordination but by coordination. The China-Iran relationship can be described as “horizontal multipolarity,” in which shared goals, not ideological loyalty, drive cooperation. While the U.S. often attaches political conditions to engagement, China offers a model of non-interventionist strategic pragmatism.

The pivot eastward is not merely abstract but material. China has increased its imports of Iranian oil through discreet channels, even under the pressure of sanctions.

According to ship-tracking data from Vortexa, China imported over 1.8 million barrels per day of Iranian crude during the first 20 days of June 2025, despite U.S. sanctions. Meanwhile, Iran is expanding its role in China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

Jesse Marks, executive director of Rihla Research & Advisory, a Washington-based consultancy, said China would have to carefully evaluate its support for Tehran to maintain a balance between Iran and its Arab neighbours.

“China doesn’t want a diminished Iran – such a scenario could heighten the risk of regime collapse or internal instability,” he said. At the same time, Beijing cannot afford to be seen as underwriting a nuclear-armed Iran, especially given its growing ties with the Gulf and its broader non-proliferation interests.

China also needs to balance its ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries.

Iran's missile strikes on Israel's port city of Haifa, where China is a part-owner of the strategic port under the Belt and Road Initiative, highlighted China's political conundrum.

The Bayport Terminal in Haifa and the Tel Aviv light rail system – both built by Chinese firms – exemplify China-Israel cooperation.

Although the war in Gaza and attacks on Iran cooled diplomatic relations and sparked disputes between China and Israel, Israel's ambassador to China, Eli Belotserkovsky, called for closer socioeconomic ties between the two countries in an editorial he penned for *Xinhua* on January 30, 2026. At the time, science and technology cooperation at a civilian level between the two countries continued.

"I have a feeling that we have a lot of common ground and plenty of opportunities for cooperation in sectors such as energy and agriculture," said Yaroslav Efimov, head of science and technology at PLANETech, an Israeli non-profit innovation community specializing in climate-change technologies and part of the Israel Institute.

Efimov was in China on a five-day trip in late January 2026 to promote the technological development of Israel and its innovative system.

Pan Guang, a Chinese scholar of Jewish and Middle East studies, said Iran might seek Chinese weapons considering its escalating

tensions with Israel, drawing lessons from Pakistan's May 2025 conflict with India.

"Iran used to buy Russian weapons, but after the India-Pakistan conflict, it found that Chinese weapons are not worse and may even be more advanced than Russian ones," Pan said.

In its border clash with India, Pakistan deployed a highly integrated air combat system featuring Chinese-made fighter jets, long-range missiles, and armed drones. The imported J-10C fighter jets from China reportedly shot down French- made Indian jets, prompting significant attention to the performance of the Chinese weapons in real combat.

Tehran is reportedly considering acquiring Chinese jets from Pakistan, which would require Chinese approval.

China has already sold Iran its most advanced exported technology to integrate into the country's air-defence system. Media reports in September 2025, quoted Abolfazl Zohrevand, a member of the Iranian parliament's National Security Committee, suggested that Iran received Chinese made HQ-9B long-range surface-to-air missiles, with an operational range of 300km and a speed of more than Mach 4, as well as Russia's more advanced S-400 "in significant numbers" in July 2025, making it more challenging for Israeli and U.S. planes, missiles and drones to penetrate Iranian air defences.

China is highly unlikely to intervene directly in any Iranian crisis, or

U.S. intervention, even though Chinese interests will be hurt and erode Beijing's influence in the Middle East. It is more likely to maintain a low profile even though it has more to lose with regime change.

Young Iranians vent their frustrations less with rage than with biting irony, lampooning Beijing's neutrality. Accusations of Beijing's mercantilism abound: "Every move by Beijing comes with a price tag," is the most common refrain. A refrain that Chinese people should be asking themselves is, "Will Iran give a copy of the bomb or the bomb itself to Muslim separatists in Xinxiang?"

Regime Change or Collapse

Long before Israel's attack and America's bombing, Iran resembled a zombie regime, ideologically dead but still repressive, much like the late-stage Soviet Union. Despite the country's vast human capital and resources, Tehran's theocrats preside over an economically isolated, socially repressive police state – elbow deep in corruption and repression yet ruling from the moral pedestal of an Islamist theocracy.

The regime's enduring slogans, "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" – never "Long Live Iran" – have long made clear that its priority has always been opposing others, not uplifting its own people.

"We're all in shock. None of us expected that within six or seven days, we'd reach this point," said Peyman, a 44-year-old business

executive. He is no fan of Trump or Netanyahu – “not at all” – but he nonetheless finds himself blaming his own government for the war and its heavy toll.

“The feeling I have is a feeling of 40 years of hatred toward this foolish government,” he said, lamenting the money that had been spent to develop Fordo, a uranium enrichment site that the U.S. bombed. “All these years of slogans and chest beatings, saying we have a strong defence system and that no enemy could ever attack our soil.

“That’s not even counting how much the value of our currency has dropped, how much of our human capital has fled the country, how much chaos has been created,” he added. “The psychological, financial and cultural toll on the country is immense.”

Before the Iran-Israel war, the regime most likely had the support of less than 20 percent of society but has maintained a highly organized repressive apparatus willing to kill en masse. By contrast, the regime’s far more numerous opponents are unarmed, unorganized, and unwilling to die en masse. The state venerates martyrdom; the larger society aspires to separate mosque from state. This disparity has enabled the regime to brutally quash nationwide uprisings.

Populations are more likely to rally behind existential wars than elective ones. Since its inception, the Islamic Republic of Iran has waged a war of choice against Israel – not one of necessity.

The U.S. national intelligence director Tulsi Gabbard, told officials in late October 2025, before the annual security conference put on by the International Institute for Security Studies in Manama, Bahrain, that: “For decades, our foreign policy has been trapped in a counterproductive and endless cycle of regime change or nation building.” A former Congresswoman, and U.S. Army National Guard veteran, added, “It was a one-size fits-all approach, of toppling regimes, trying to impose our system of governance on others, intervene in conflicts that were barely understood and walk away with more enemies than allies.” The results, she added, “Trillions spent, countless lives lost, and in many cases, the creation of greater security threats.”

Gabbard suggested U.S. policy goal change was questionable in light of its announced and proactive activities at the time to change and remove the Venezuelan government of President Nicolas Maduro Moro.

According to one study, since World War II, fewer than a quarter of authoritarian collapses have led to the establishment of democracy – with those brought about by foreign intervention or violence being even less likely to succeed.

“The Islamic Republic is a rotten tooth waiting to be plucked, like the Soviet Union in its latter years,” noted Karim Sadjudpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. Khamenei is in the most difficult situation he has ever faced.”

The U.S. should refrain from direct intervention in Iran's domestic politics, but it should still encourage the idea of change within the country. Ultimately the decision regarding what kind of change is best for Iran rests with its people.

The U.S. and much of the world stand to gain from a post-Islamic Republic of Iran that is governed by national interest rather than revolutionary dogma. As Henry Kissinger once observed, "There are few nations in the world with which the United States has less reason to quarrel or more compatible interests than Iran."

"Iran's leaders are in a tough position. On the one hand, they think about relaxing some restrictions to keep the people unified, but on the other, they worry if they relax them it could lead to the regime's collapse," says Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a former vice president and member of the reformist camp that is loyal to the Islamic republic but seeks change from within. "There's a 20-year gap between the people's demands and the system. It's very difficult to merge those two forces overnight."

Separately, President Masoud Pezeshkian in July 2025, told a meeting of reformists that his government was prepared to talk to the opposition, saying the country's problems "need dialogue not confrontation."

But there is growing impatience within the system, amid concerns that time is running out to ensure its survival, says Saeed Laylaz, an analyst from the reformist group.

A “neo-nationalistic” hardline generation committed to defending the Islamic republic with a widespread sense of national pride and defiance is seemingly in the making.

“The revolutionary leadership has recognized that when the going gets tough, you have to dive deep into the nationalistic rhetoric to bring people together,” said Ali Ansari, the founding director of the Institute for Iranian Studies at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland. “They want to use the war as a way of encouraging national solidarity – something they haven’t had for many years.

“When the dust settles and people start to ask questions, they will see that there’s still no water, still no gas, still no electricity,” Ansari said. “Everything depends on the country having an economic renaissance – and it can’t do it.”

In my 2007 book *Custom Maid Knowledge for New World Disorder*, I devoted a subsection to “Failed Theocracies, Islamic or Otherwise,” where I said “Theocracies, Islamic or otherwise, are not divine. They are man-made. Some are just better spun than others,” and added “Thailand is an example of a Buddhist theocratic failure.”

I devoted several pages to Iran and wrote “There is a civil uprising well under way behind closed doors and under chadors (head-to-toe robes). Iran’s teenagers are rebelling in the best traditions of *We the Apathetic Maids* – by embracing sex, drugs,

and rock 'n' roll – even with the threat of persecution and whipping."

"Most authoritarian regimes survive not because they are change-proof, but because they learn to mutate," Burcu Ozcelik, a senior research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute correctly reminds us in her September 1, 2025, Opinion in the *Financial Times* titled *Iran's new nationalism won't give its leaders legitimacy*.

Ayatollah's Toll and Fall

The Iranian regime that wrought havoc across the Middle East is now committing large scale atrocities against its own people. Peaceful protestors demanding change. The protests started on December 28, 2025, in Tehran, when the Iranian rial plunged to an all-time low against the U.S. dollar and unleashed a wave of anger across the country. Within hours, shopkeepers in Tehran's bazaars – the historic heart of Iran's economy – whose merchants played a central role in the 1979 revolution, organized a strike, shuttered their shops, and took to the streets. Soon they were joined by students at universities and citizenry at large.

The protests spread to all 31 of the country's provinces. The protestors core grievances remain the same: government mismanagement, corruption and repression; and include explicit demands for the ouster of the Islamic Republic.

Chants of "Death to Khamenei" and "Freedom, freedom," were common. Some made a broad denunciation of authoritarian rule

chanting “Death to the oppressor, whether king or supreme leader.”

For more than a decade – in 2009, 2019, 2021 and 2022 – Iranians have taken to the streets against their theocratic rulers. In all those movements, security forces prevailed with brutal crackdowns.

A brutal crackdown the likes of which were never seen before, with a brutal massacre of more than 40,000 peaceful demonstrators; traumatic gunshot injuries sustained by thousands more, arrest and detention of injured protestors from hospitals, and funeral services, as body bags pile up at morgues and hospitals, starting in December 2025 through January 2026, are a deadly testimonial and example of a political regime determined to stay in power no matter what toll its citizens have to pay, including their lives.

“This is not merely a violent protest crackdown,” said Raha Bahreini, a lawyer and an Iran researcher at Amnesty International. “It is a state-orchestrated massacre.”

For years, the balance of power in Iran has been quietly shifting from the Ayatollah to the Revolutionary Guards. They are not only a security behemoth. They control a media empire, large parts of the economy, oil exports, seaports, an intelligence agency, and an air force. “They have everything that it takes to assume power,” said Ali Vaez, the Iran project director for the International Crisis Group.

A military coup is a possibility. “While a military coup was unthinkable a few years ago,” said Afshon Ostovar, an Iran expert at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, and the author of *Vanguard of the Imam*, a history of the Revolutionary Guard, “it’s becoming increasingly likely now because of all the pressures building on the regime.”

Revolutionary Guard

In the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, its founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, did not trust the armed forces, known as Artesh, a Persian word for army. He was said to have muttered “Artesh has the Shah in its blood.”

So, Khomeini organized the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a parallel armed force, specifically for safeguarding the revolution. Khomeini, and his successors, are not only the religious and political leaders; they are also the commanders in chief of the armed forces.

The eight-year war that started when Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, turned the Guards into an elite fighting force, marrying Khomeini’s office to its power allowing it to expand into politics and business.

The IRGC were Khomeini’s most trusted defenders of the republic, internally and externally, as they built up a network of Shia Islamist militant proxies across the region. Their ability to withstand the onslaught was key to the regime’s survival.

Khamenei transformed Iran into the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. His regime supported, funded and trained the "Axis of Resistance network of mostly Shiite militias and terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Badr group in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas in Gaza. The October 7, 2023, massacre of Israelis was carried out by Hamas militants Iran had trained and armed.

In his speeches and rulings, he blamed any whiff of dissent or dysfunction at home on the U.S. which he called the "Great Satan," or on Israel, the "Zionist regime." To maintain control, he once admitted, "We need the United States as an enemy."

"We will be the ones to end this war," Amir Heydari, deputy commander of the guards' Khatam ul-Anbia headquarters, told state television in a rare wartime appearance by a top officer. "We will do so when we feel we have imposed the will of our nation on the enemy and taken revenge for our martyred leader and people."

Unless the street protests, foreign pressure, and the war that started on February 28, 2026, prompt defections at the top, the Islamic Republic establishment will likely survive. It is a regime that has ignored President Trump's warnings that the U.S. was "locked and loaded" if any peaceful protestors were killed. It is also the regime that launched a blitz of ballistic missiles and drones across the Middle East, after the U.S. and Israel launched their decapitating attacks on February 28, 2026.

The picture is further complicated by the generational divide inside the Revolutionary Guards, he said.

While the older group of Revolutionary Guards has gotten rich – with children in elite private schools, homes in foreign countries and luxury cars – the younger generation has yet to taste much of the wealth and wants to protect what it sees as its rightful reward.

“They know that if the regime goes, they will lose their meal ticket – and be first in line for retribution,” Ostovar believes.

Massacres of peaceful protestors hidden from the world because of a complete government-imposed shutdown of internet service, which is provided through fibre-optic cables and mobile phone towers. A complete blackout. Musk’s Starlink satellite internet service was the only service available to Iranians. Thousands more arrested and detained in unknown warehouses.

The head of Iran’s judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei, said protestors would have speedy trials and be executed “without the slightest leniency.”

Shot, beaten, or executed, peaceful demonstrators, young and old, were brutally and unnecessarily killed by a heartless, repressive, decaying, dying, regime that refused to acknowledge its corruption, economic and military mismanagement, and broken promises, that collectively should lead to its downfall and

demise.

A regime that ignored President Trump's warning that the U.S. was "locked and loaded" if any peaceful protestors were killed and sent an armada of warships to the Arabian Sea headed by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln.

Then the U.S. attacked Venezuela – like Iran, a member of an anti-American axis with China and Russia as partners – and seized its president, Nicolas Maduro, and his wife.

Events in Venezuela revealed three things: that Trump is unafraid to use military force to remove a leader he doesn't like; that he will seize tankers in international waters to choke off oil revenues; and that Russia and China, Venezuela's – and Iran's – allies are unable or unwilling to intervene.

Trump then doubles down on his threats toward Tehran. "If they start killing people like they have in the past, I think they are going to get hit very hard by the United States, he said on January 4, 2026, and ordered a second aircraft carrier group headed by the USS Gerald Ford to go to the Middle East.

Trump had showed with military operations in Iran and Venezuela in 2025 "that he means what he says."

Trump's rhetoric cruelly raises hopes for many Iranians of American deliverance without any real commitment to the cause, even as he dangles the prospect of diplomacy that would

provide the regime with a lifeline.

Trump is demanding Iran end its nuclear program, scale back its ballistic missile program, and end its support for militant groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Houthis, demands Iran is rejecting.

Weakened by conflict with Israel, the U.S., growing economic and infrastructure crisis, and failed foreign policies, the 86 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei faced a choice between radical change or collapse.

Buying time with the U.S. with protracted Iranian negotiations tactics was a good solution. However, the primary beneficiary of that time was Trump, who benefited with the luxury to send additional reinforcements with the aircraft carrier USS Gerald Ford, and its accompanying battle ships.

During the negotiations, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told a forum in Tehran that Iran had little trust in Washington and even doubted that the U.S. side was taking renewed talks seriously; and that Tehran had ruled out ever giving up uranium enrichment in its negotiations, insisting it won't be intimidated by the threat of war with the U.S.

"Why do we insist so much on the enrichment and refuse to give it up, even if a war is imposed on us? Because no one has the right to dictate our behaviour," he said.

"Their military deployment in the region does not scare us," Araghchi said referring to the arrival in the Arabian Sea of the

armada led by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, upholding Trump's message of "peace through strength."

"I believe the secret of the Islamic Republic of Iran's power lies in its ability to stand against bullying, domination and pressures from others," he added.

"They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not looking for one. Our atomic bomb is the power to say 'no' to the great powers."

Iran vowed to treat any attack as "all-out war." A senior Iranian official, speaking on condition of anonymity said: "This time we will treat any attack – limited, unlimited, surgical, kinetic, whatever they call it – as an all-out war against us, and will respond in the hardest way possible to settle this."

Trump's response? He threatens Iran with more military strikes "with great power, enthusiasm and purpose."

In the midst of the bellicose exchanges, Türkiye reported in early February 2026, that both the U.S. and Iran were seriously exploring diplomacy and flexible on a nuclear deal. Washington had insisted that Iran accept curbs on its ballistic missile program and support of regional proxies Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis. However, following the February talks, which Trump described as "very good," the president said a deal that only covered Iran's nuclear program could be "acceptable."

Iran's threats should be taken seriously, said Suzanne Maloney,

an Iran expert who directs the foreign policy program at the Brookings Institution. “No one can assume Iran won’t respond and probably respond as they did on their own streets, and make it as ugly and violent as possible,” she said. Trump, she added, “does not want to get into a protracted conflict with Iran.”

At the same time, she said, Trump has created a dilemma for himself. By vowing to act in support of the Iranian protestors against the regime, he has created expectations and put his credibility on the line.

“With his social media incitement to the Iranian protestors and his sending the armada into the region, there is almost an obligation to act,” Maloney pointed out – and he did.

A regional conflict that Arab states and Türkiye feared, and warned Trump not to attack Iran, because it will cause irreparable regional economic disruption.

Ellie Geranmayeh, the deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa program at the European Council on Foreign Relations said at the time, “The Islamic Republic of Iran is now facing an unprecedented bottom-up pressure, as well as a top-down pressure,” and added, “usually they’ve only had to confront one or the other. And they are masters of survival.”

Analysts say the pressure from the street and the elite has pushed the regime to breaking point. “The longer the event continues and becomes more extreme, the greater the chances

of dramatic changes within the regime," Dennis Citrinowicz, a former head of Iran research for Israel Defence Intelligence said in a social media post.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio cautioned that while Trump's preference was to reach a deal with Tehran, "that's very hard to do."

Trump, speaking at Fort Bragg in early February 2026, after a military ceremony, openly floated the possibility of changing the government of Iran, saying it "seems like that would be the best thing that could happen." He declined to share who he wanted to take over Iran, but said, "there are people."

A change of people, new leadership, either under the existing Islamic political structure, without regime change; or regime change -- and political transition, democratic or otherwise -- to new people – is necessary for peace and stability in the Middle East.

Unfortunately for Iranians demanding change, before the new people emerge, Iran will continue to be ruled by the same hard line Islamic regime headed by the ayatollah's second-eldest son, Mojtaba Khamenie, who lost his wife, son, mother, and was injured in the opening salvo of Operation Epic Fury that killed his father.

In defiance to Trump's call for Iran to "UNCONDITIONALLY SURRENDER," and allow him to pick the next leader, Iran

expressed its willingness to continue and perpetuate the existing Islamic Republic – and war. Khomenie is close to the IRGC and has long cultivated close ties with senior officers in the corps.

The overlap between the military and political elite is significant. Many senior political figures are veterans of the IRGC, including parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibal, who took on an increasingly prominent role at the
start of the war.

Iran's unique theocratic system, in place since the 1979 Islamic revolution, is based on the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih in Shia Islam which is used to justify clerical rule under a supreme leader.

Khomenie was constitutionally elected by the Assembly of Experts, a body of 88 clerics. Proponents believe he is ultimately chosen by God, and that all arms of the state, including the military, should serve the ideology. That gives him the strong support of the IRGC –and collectively they will remain on a vengeful warpath to avenge the death of Khomenie's family members and IRGC leadership.

Iran faces a new chapter. It is venturing long term into an unknown political landscape -- and leadership alternative -- to the continued hard line Islamic rule defended by the IRGC. Possible future scenarios, internal theocratic Islamic Republic regime change, much like Venezuela, acceptable to Trump; a disabled and crippled IRGC military dictatorship; constitutional

monarchy headed by Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi; a secular democratic republic that the Iranian masses have been demanding; a combination thereof; or a failed state, like Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, where the U.S. also attempted to bring about regime change, a likely possibility after Iran bombed Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in Iraq during its bombing blitz of the region.

Iran's population of 93 million is made up of roughly 60 percent Persians, 24 percent Azerbaijanis (Ayatollah Ali Khomeini's father was an Azeri), seven to ten percent Kurds, six percent Lurs, with additional small minorities of Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians and Jews, the majority of whom are glad to see the demise of Ayatollah Ali Khomeini – and applaud and support regime change.

The Kurds, with CIA support, are fighting in Iran for regime change. Rebaz Sharifi, a military commander with the Kurdistan Freedom Party, an Iranian separatist group based in Northern Iraq told the Telegraph at the start of Operation Epic Fury: "We are the only people that will be able to make the regime fall, because none of the other ethnic groups in Iran have weapons." Sharifi claimed the coalition of Iranian Kurdish groups had at least 10,000 fighters, with thousands more within Iran waiting to be activated. The latter, he said, were Iranian Kurds who previously crossed into Iraq, trained with separatist groups, then returned to Iran – over several years.

The IRGC are fighting the Kurds, resisting their inroads, not only

in Iran, but across the border in Iraq. The Kurds, who are among the world's largest stateless ethnic groups split across Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, have, like Palestinians, long called for statehood.

Paradigm Shift of Thinking

What I, as an American, thought about regime change in Iran was a question I was repeatedly bombarded with during the marriage ceremony of my partner Pauline's nephew, Bruce Taylor, to Amie Wood, on June 21, 2025, in Galashiels, Scotland. Early that morning, American B2 bombers had conducted bunker-buster strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Questions were posed to me again a few days later, on July 26, in Palermo, Italy, where I was attending the wedding of my Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus lawyers, Fatos Otcuoglu, and Aral Dogu.

A week of festivities was punctuated with peppered-inquiries about my views on Israel's 12- day war with Iran and the resolution to the Palestinian problem. My response "Read my upcoming book!" I would politely snap back, quickly apologizing to my Scottish, Turkish, and Italian interlocuters for my curt response.

I was cranky, courtesy of jet lag and restless nights. The Israel-Iran-Hamas wars weighed on my mind, keeping me awake as I channel-surfed for news on the rapidly evolving situation.

Enjoying a glass of wine and a Turkish cigar at a beach café in Palermo before returning to Hong Kong, staring across the

Mediterranean toward Israel and Gaza, taking time-out for a self-reflective peaceful evening, enjoying the summer breeze, I was thinking about the seizure of the Madleen, a U.K.-flagged civilian ship carrying humanitarian aid for Palestinians that was stopped by the Israeli Navy, about 200 kilometres off the Gaza coast.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition had organized the voyage, setting sail on June 1st, a few weeks earlier from where I was, Sicily. The vessel's 12 passengers included climate activist Greta Thunberg.

The interception sparked international condemnation – and more importantly, raised questions about whether Israel's actions complied with international law.

The Hind Rajab Foundation, a non-profit advocacy group had filed a complaint with the U.K. Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit, alleging several breaches of international humanitarian law, including forcible detention, obstruction of humanitarian relief and degrading treatment.

Naval blockades are not automatically illegal. Under the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea (1994), a blockade may be used in wartime, but only if five legal conditions are met:

- it must be formally declared and publicly notified;
- it must be effectively enforced in practice;
- it must be applied impartially to all ships;
- it must not block access to neutral ports or coastlines; and

- it must not stop the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians.

If one of these conditions is not met, the blockade may be considered illegal. A blockade that prevents the delivery of humanitarian aid could be in breach of international law.

Before heading to Scotland and Italy in late June 2025, I read a legal opinion that Shannon Bosch, an associate professor of law at Edith Cowan University had published in *The Conversation* and *South China Morning Post's This Week in Asia* on June 15, 2025, titled *Seizure of Madleen raises legal concerns over aid blockade*, sparking the lawyer in me to ponder the question, including Israel's legal defence.

I also pondered the 12-day Israel-Iran war, the ceasefire brokered by Trump, and his choice F-bomb about Israel and Iran's behaviour. As I dug my toes into the sand and listened to the waves of the Med gently lapping the shore a few feet away, and the O'Jays *Love Train* that came on after a few other 60s Motown hits. I couldn't help but wonder why Israelis and Palestinians can't go back to living in peace and harmony; dining, dancing and singing together like the celebrants at the two weddings I had just attended – the way they used to from 1950 to 1967 before the Six Day War. I envisioned how peaceful the Middle East could be with a Palestinian state, supported by Iran – not in Gaza and the West Bank – but other land in the former province of Palestine.

I was back in Scotland on February 25, 2026, for Bruce's sister

Hannah's wedding to Yhasin Ahmed on February 28, 2026. Waking up that morning to the news of America and Israel's bombing campaign across Iran, and killing of the Ayatollah, I was again faced with the same question and opinion of why America and Israel had attacked Iran. Again, all I could say was, "like I said at Bruce's wedding, read my upcoming book on the two-state solution," and adding, "Thank Allah, Buddha, and God that the Taylors have no more weddings. Two weddings and two wars with Iran are more than enough."

Enough fighting and wars! "Muslim Arabs must give up on the idea of turning Israel into Palestine. There is plenty of other suitable Palestinian land in the historical province to establish a Palestinian state and peace in the Middle East," I added as I briefly summarized the boundaries of my proposed Palestinian state in the next chapter.

The Koran Sura 2, verse 191 declares, "Drive them out from where they drove you out," commanding that all Muslim conquered lands such as Israel, which was conquered by Muslims in 637AD, must remain Muslim, I explained.

This explains why Palestinians, and Shia Muslims, led by Iran, have so far rejected a two-state solution. Their recognition or ceding of any Muslim land to the Jews is forbidden by Allah's command in the Koran. However, the times they "are a changing" Bob Dylan reminds us.

Sura 2, verse 191, is not limited to Israel. It applies to cities in

America, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and elsewhere around the world where Muslims reside.

The time is long overdue for Arab countries established in historical Palestine, bordering Saudi Arabia and Israel, to join Israel and Saudi Arabia in contributing some of their land to establish a new Palestinian state.

Iranians I spoke to in Los Angeles in April 2026, most memorably an Iranian Uber driver, mother of two university students, who migrated to the U.S. in 2014, were ecstatic about Epic Fury and the carnage it was doing to the Islamic regime.

“My family and friends back home are dancing and singing in their homes, chanting ‘Thank you President Trump and Uncle Bibi’!” the driver told me in response to my question how things were back home -- as we both burst out laughing.

“The loss of jobs and uncertainty of wildly fluctuating food prices is what concerns people most. One day a chicken costs $5 and the next day $50. Otherwise, it’s just life as usual. People going with the flow,” Hassan, an Iranian waiter at my favourite Iranian restaurant in L.A. told me when I asked him how things are back home.

Regime change can only be achieved by a popular uprising and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp laying down their arms. However, millions of Iranians teaming up to launch a revolution under the ongoing crackdown, or the IRGC surrendering to the

people is doubtful.

"Like a wounded animal, the Islamic republic is going after every perceived threat in the country with deadly force," said Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the New York-based Centre for Human Rights in Iran.

The Norway-based Hengaw rights group, which focuses on Kurdish-populated areas of western and northwestern Iran, stated that 300 people of Kurdish ethnicity had been arrested in the crackdown.

"A widespread wave of repression and mass arrests has unfolded across the country," it said, adding that "Kurdish cities have borne a disproportionate share of these crackdowns" and that detainees have included a "significant number of women and teenage girls."

Non-Muslim religious minorities have also faced pressure. Approximately 35 members of Iran's remaining Jewish community, estimated to be just 10,000 strong but recognized as an official minority by the republic, were summoned for questioning after the 12-day war in 2025, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency.

Mossad Spies

Reeling from the scope and scale of the Israeli strikes, Iran conducted an intensive manhunt for suspected infiltrators and spies, enlisting the public in the campaign. As authorities have

swept up hundreds of people, the government has sped up trials and executions of alleged spies and fast-tracked a law to broaden the use of the death penalty for anyone convicted of espionage.

Israel has a history of successfully infiltrating Iran to gather intelligence and carry out assassinations and sabotage.

Officials on both sides say that in the recent war, Israel flaunted its ability to build networks and launch widespread attacks from within Iran.

Iranian officials have recently reported several clues that they say point to operatives from Israel's foreign intelligence service, the Mossad, being aided on the ground.

They include evidence that Israeli missiles were assembled and deployed within the country, and the discovery of thousands of miniature attack drones in the capital, Tehran.

"It's clear the Mossad has a very wide network inside Iran — and probably 90 percent of them are locals," said Mohammad Ali Shabani, an Iran analyst who edits the independent regional news site *Amwaj* media. "The big question is: Who are they? Fingers are being pointed all over the place."

The Mossad released a rare video featuring its director, David Barnea, in which he praised a room full of agents, whose faces were blurred -- for their efforts regarding Iran.
"We will be there, like we've been here so far," he said.

Foreign agents seeking to recruit within Iran would not struggle to find discontented citizens among its population of about 90 million.

There are strong financial incentives for espionage, with Iran grappling with a severe economic crisis stemming from decades of Western sanctions and government mismanagement.

Since Israel attacked Iran on June 13, 2025, Iranian authorities have reported the discovery of more than 10,000 micro-drones in Tehran alone, *Fars* news agency reported.

These miniature drones, some operated by artificial intelligence, were allegedly used in some of the assassinations of scientists associated with the nuclear program, according to Iranian security officials cited by *Fars*.

To ignore this moment is to validate the regime's strategy: to suppress dissent at home while the world's attention is focused elsewhere, too distracted to intervene. This approach has long been central to the Islamic republic's survival. In 1988, after a severely weakened Iran reluctantly accepted a cease-fire with Iraq after eight brutal years of war, the regime ordered the executions of up to 5,000 political prisoners, most of whom had undergone trials and were already serving their prison sentences.

The casualty of the Islamic Republic's unchecked aggression will be Iranian civil society, which fundamentally opposes the

regime's domestic and foreign policies. If supported this civil society could one day serve as the foundation for a new, free Iran.

Iran War a China Play

I, like some political analysts, believe the war in Iran is not a war about Israel, or for Israel's sake. Israel is a beneficiary, a capable and willing partner, but it is not the reason America started the fight. America is playing a much bigger geopolitical game, about more than what happens in the Middle East. The subtext, that Israel exercises outsize influence or "drags Americans into wars they don't want" borders on the conspiratorial anti-Semitism.

The primary players in the Iran War are the U.S. and China, to determine whether the American-led global order survives the next 30 years, or whether China will displace it. America attacked Iran because of China.

China's official import figures often show little oil coming from Iran. This is because it is often rebranded as "Malaysian" or "Indonesian" to bypass sanctions. Tracking firms Kpler and Vortexa suggest that oil is China's largest import from Iran. The trade is thought to be worth over 30 billion pounds sterling a year and supplies about 15 percent of China's oil. But there is more – China also relies on Iran for plastics, chemicals, sulphur, metals and a variety of foodstuffs – most of which also moves through the Strait of Hormuz.

China has made plain its anger at the disruption of that trade, condemning the joint U.S.-Israeli military strikes on Iran, as a

“grave violation of international law.” Foreign Minister Wang Yi also issued a thinly veiled warning of Chinese intervention, stating: “China stands ready to work with Middle Eastern countries to implement the Global Security Initiative, and restore tranquillity to the people, and restore peace to the world.”

I agree with Haviv Retting Gur, *The Free Press* Middle East Analyst and host of the Ask Haviv Anything podcast, who said in an article on March 6, 2026, in the *Scottish Daily Mail*: “Specifically, the Iran war is about dismantling the most significant Chinese forward base outside of East Asia.” A March 2026 analysis in *The Diplomat* argues that Operation Epic Fury signal the end of China’s westward strategic march.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, for most of its history as an adversary of the U.S., was a regional headache and destabilizer. It funded terrorism, harassed shipping, threatened America’s allies, and kept the Middle East unpredictable. It was not in any direct sense a threat to American primacy on the global stage. It was Israel’s and the Gulf states’ problem, and only tangentially Washington’s. Squeezed by decades of American sanctions and increasingly isolated, Iran turned to China as its economic lifeline. The relationship deepened rapidly, with roughly 90 percent of Iran’s crude oil exports going to China, processed through Chinese refineries that operate beyond the reach of American sanctions enforcement. That oil revenue funds around a quarter of Iran’s budget, a huge portion of which is spent on its military forces and assets. Without Beijing, the regime cannot pay its security forces, cannot subsidize basic goods, and would soon

face the kind of internal collapse that its ideology has spent 40 years trying to prevent. “In other words,” said Retting Gur, “Iran became – has made itself – utterly dependent on China.”

China, however, was not being charitable; it was strategic. Iranian oil, sold cheap because Teheran had no other buyers, has helped Beijing build a strategic petroleum reserve exceeding a billion barrels, enough to sustain the Chinese economy for more than 100 days in the event of a naval blockade.

China’s single vulnerability is the American Navy’s ability to interdict its energy imports, especially at vulnerable choke points like the Malacca Straits. Iranian oil flowing outside American oversight, was a direct hedge against that vulnerability – as was Venezuela’s, another U.S. operation that was ultimately about containing China.

The energy relationship, however, was only part of the picture. China was also arming Iran with systems designed to threaten commercial and American military assets as part of an oil-for-weapons deal. Reports emerged in February 2026 of a near-finished deal to supply Iran with supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles capable of speeds exceeding Mach 3 and engineered to evade the Aegis defence systems deployed on American strike groups.

U.S. intelligence also suggests an active secret role for China in Iran, allowing companies to ship shoulder-fired missiles, known as MANPADS, capable of shooting down low flying aircraft,

chemicals, fuel, and components, that can be used in military production. In an opinion piece published by *Middle East Eye* on February 27, 2026, Nelson Wong, president of the Shanghai Centre for RimPac Strategic and International Studies, and an active member of the Valdai Discussion Club, a Moscow-based think tank, said: “China provided the economic and military oxygen that sustained Iran’s resistance to external pressure.” Wong’s opinion titled *Will China come to Iran’s rescue?* went on to say: “China is unlikely to dispatch troops or engage directly in any conflict, but to interpret this as passivity would be to misread the nature of 21st-century power competition.” He went on to add, “China’s support for Iran is real, multifaceted, and in some ways more sustainable than military intervention; it just operates on a different strategic wavelength.”

I can’t argue the point with Nelson, and agree, especially after Trump claims that American forces had intercepted a potentially lethal “gift from China” to Tehran. “We caught a ship yesterday that had some things on it, which wasn’t very nice, a gift from China,” he said. “I thought I had an understanding with President Xi Jinping, but that’s all right. That’s the way war goes,” he added.

The claim was first made by former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, in a social media post, saying it had “refused repeated orders to stop.” She added it was “another reminder that China is helping prop up Iran’s regime – a reality that can’t be ignored.”

The foreign ministry in Beijing denied the allegation. “To my knowledge, this is a foreign-flagged container ship. China opposes any malicious links and hype,” foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said.

Iran had switched from the GPS system to the Chinese BeiDou system, and was providing China with the port at Jask, as part of China’s ‘string of pearls’ base system in the Indian Ocean.

Just days before the U.S.-Israel air strikes on Iran, *Reuters* reported that Beijing was close to selling supersonic cruise missiles to Iran – a move that could significantly boost the Islamic Republic’s capacity to counter U.S. aircraft carriers. Citing six sources, Reuters said that the deal – involving the CM-302 export version of the PLA’s YJ-12 – was “near completion.” China’s foreign ministry said the report was “not true.”

The YJ-12, known as the “aircraft-carrier killer,” is part of the Yingji or Eagle Strike family of anti-ship missiles operated by the PLA. At four times the speed of sound the YJ-12/CM-302 is faster than any fielded U.S. anti-ship missile, as well as Russia’s Kh-31AD and India’s BrahMos-A, making it one of the world’s fastest anti-ship cruise missiles in service. If CM-302 missiles were deployed along the

Iranian coast, they would cover almost the entire Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and much of the Gulf of Oman.

Iran has become a Chinese forward base, a linchpin of Beijing's naval architecture; cyber efforts; an economic Belt and Road influence program – every element of Chinese power projection and empire building – positioned at the throat of the global oil supply, armed with weapons designed to penetrate American defences and kill American sailors and embedded in a strategic architecture whose explicit purpose is to constrain American military freedom in any future conflict with Taiwan.

That's when Iran stopped being Israel's problem and became America's.

A wake-up call as to why America is arming Taiwan with billion–dollar air-defence systems, other U.S. military hardware, and training.

Trump also told CNBC, that Tehran had "probably done a little bit of restocking" and implied that Beijing had been helping the efforts to replenish ammunition.

U.S. military leaders painted a picture of Chinese military threats spanning Taiwan and space as they briefed Congress in April 2026, on military readiness for the financial year 2027.

The People's Liberation Army "invasion rehearsals and live-fire exercises near Taiwan and around the region" had illustrated "the need for combat ready naval forces in the Indo-Pacific," according to James Kilby, vice-chief of naval operations.

The hearing took place during Trump's record-breaking $1.5 trillion defence budget request for 2027.

China's threats in space were also highlighted. "China continues to develop space control weapons to hold our satellites – and the services they provide to the Joint Force – at risk," said Shawn Bratton, Vice Chief of Space Operations of the U.S. Space Force.

"China is hard at work developing the space architecture to allow the People's Liberation Army to track, target, and strike our Joint Forces on Earth."

Taiwan Question

"The Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations," said Xi Jinping, as Trump and Xi opened a high-stakes summit in Beijing on May 14, 2026. "If mishandled, the two countries could face confrontation or even conflict, pushing the entire China-U.S. relationship into a highly dangerous situation."

Taiwan was one of the key topics in Trumps meeting with Xi. Taiwan unification, peacefully or militarily, is an "inevitability" Trump was told, as Xi repeated his warning a month earlier to visiting Taiwanese opposition leader Cheng Li-wun, chair of Taiwan's opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party.

"My visit was to demonstrate once more that by returning to the 1992 consensus and opposing Taiwan independence, the cross-strait situation can ease immediately, reopening the door to

peaceful exchange and dialogue," Cheng told *South China Morning Post's* Lawrence Chung after her visit to China.

Unlike the ruling Democratic Progressive Party that proposes independence, Cheng's KMT has long supported closer ties with the mainland but is divided over the defence budget and military spending requested by the DPP. Much of the special funding has been earmarked to buy U.S. weapons, following White House pressure for the island to take on more responsibility for its defence.

The Trump administration has turned Taiwan into a bargaining chip. Trump has deviated from traditional diplomatic practices, that require confirmation of both sides basic demands before a summit meeting, especially when it comes to Taiwan.

Chinese support of Iran came at a delicate moment. President Xi Jinping playing host to President Donald Trump in Beijing in May 2026, during the Iran War ceasefire, Operation Freedom, blockaded Strait of Hormuz, and trade war with the U.S. and Japan.

Beijing's calculated diplomacy demonstrates that strategic patience outweighs military entanglement. China was replacing Iranian government and military software with closed Chinese systems, hardening Iran against CIA and Mossad cyber operations. Joint naval exercises of China, Russia and Iran in the Strait of Hormuz were becoming regular events, building real-time operational familiarity among the three navies.

If China does invade Taiwan, as it repeatedly threatens to do if Taiwan does not merge with the motherland peacefully, a Chinese Iranian chokehold of the Strait of Hormuz stopping Taiwan, and its allies Japan, South Korea, and Australia, receiving their oil and gas, is of secondary importance to the U.S.

Taiwan makes 90-percent of the world's high-end computer chips. National security officials have warned executives at Apple, Advanced Micro Devices, and Qualcomm that China was making plans to take over Taiwan. A Chinese blockade of Taiwan, officials said, could choke the supply of computer chips made on the island and bring the U.S. tech industry to its knees. The tech industry has ignored these warnings and stubbornly refused to shift where it gets most of its chips, which power things like smartphones, laptops, and the giant data centres that run artificial intelligence, because of the 25 percent increase in cost in doing so. This inaction by Silicon Valley's most important companies has raised concern about the risk they are causing to the global economy. Those worries were drawn into focus when live-fire drills were conducted by the Chinese military in late 2025, and early 2026, in waters surrounding Taiwan.

"The single biggest threat to the world economy, the single biggest point of single failure, is that 97 percent of the high-end chips are made in Taiwan," the US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2026. "If that island were blockaded, that capacity were destroyed, it would be an economic apocalypse," he added.

A confidential report commissioned in 2022 by the Semiconductor Industry Association for its members, which includes the largest U.S. chip companies, said cutting the supply of chips from Taiwan would lead to the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression. U.S. economic output would plunge 11 percent, twice as much as the 2008 recession.

Jake Sullivan, President Biden's security adviser, ranked the U.S. reliance on Taiwan for semiconductors as one of America's greatest vulnerabilities. "We were saying: 'This is crazy. We must do something about it," Sullivan said in an interview.

Thankfully, TSMC, Taiwan's largest chipmaker, has agreed to invest more than $100 billion to manufacture its chips in several factories it is building in my home state of Arizona.

Systematic Financial Strain

The systematic change taking place geopolitically in early 2026, also showed signs of systemic strain in the financial markets. Richard Bookstaber, the author of *A Demon of Our Own Design*, which in 2007 warned of the 2008 financial crisis, predicted "This could be worse," in an opinion he wrote titled *I predicted the 2008 financial crisis; This could be worse*, on March 17, 2026, in *The New York Times International Edition*.

Every government, from Central Asia to sub-Saharan Africa to Latin America, is watching China leave its closest Middle Eastern ally to burn, just as it did with Venezuela. That is a blow to

Chinese soft power that no diplomatic offensive can easily repair. America, meanwhile, has demonstrated that it has both the will and the capability to act decisively when its core interests are threatened. It is an American success that will be felt for years, regardless of how regime change or compliance turns out. China's most important yearly political event, the "Two Sessions" – the annual meetings of the country's top legislature and political advisory board – started a few days after the U.S. and Israel bombed Iran, killing supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and top military and political leadership – as well as reiterating the objective of unifying Taiwan with the mainland by peaceful or other means as "a core" goal of Beijing.

The Strait of Hormuz shut down to all marine traffic during the annual meeting, except ships that pay in Chinese yuan instead of U.S. dollars, announce they are "Chinese owned" or with "Chinese crews," resulting in Trump cancelling his planned visit to Beijing scheduled for March 31 to April 2, 2026, unless China and other nations help reopen the Strait. "It's only appropriate that people who are the beneficiaries of the strait will help to make sure that nothing bad happens there," said Trump. "I think China should help, too, because China gets 90 percent of its oil from the strait," he pointed out. Trump also said that it had always bothered him that "we are protecting them" and "never asked for reimbursement." The U.S. have "all the oil we need for ourselves," he added. "China should be thanking us."

Meanwhile, the sixth-round of Sino-U.S. trade negotiations that were being held in Paris by the U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott

Bessent, Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, preparing the business agenda ahead of Trump's planned visit, ended with no definitive agreement, or signs of a falling out. Bessent said the discussions were "very good" and relations between the world's two leading economies were "stable." Greer also told reporters after the meetings that both sides had discussed what might be called a "U.S.-China board of trade" to achieve managed trade. The board, he added, would help to "identify what kind of things should we be importing from China, what kind of things should we be exporting to China, to really make sure that we can focus on areas of mutual benefit…That's what we expect the leaders to be talking about when they meet."

Managed trade could account for a big part of Trump's deliverables, ensuring that China buys more agricultural products and energy while protecting his "made in America" agenda.

Postponing Trump's visit to China avoided any embarrassments linked to the Iran war and gave both countries more time to reach agreements.

The headline explanation for postponing the Trump-Xi summit was straight forward but "only the surface layer," according to Denis Simon of the Quincy Institute, a Washington think tank.

"When you look closely at timing, signalling and bargaining context, this decision reflects a much more complex mix of geopolitics, leverage building and risk management," he said.

Simon added that Beijing was caught in a bind. Taking part in a summit with Trump would mean legitimizing Trump's actions in the Middle East, while rejecting them could destabilize the delicate relationship.

From Trump's perspective, leaving Washington during a war was politically risky as a "failed or unproductive China trip would be costly domestically," Simon said.

For Chinese strategist Shen Dingli, a Shanghai-based professor of international affairs, Trump's gambit represents his ambitious campaign towards a larger structural shift. Shen thinks that Beijing's deepening ties with Tehran were less about energy security than about counterbalancing Washington and advancing what he called China's broader strategic goal of integrating Taiwan with the mainland at the core.

"It is not because China depends on Iranian energy," he said, noting that the Hormuz blockade, while painful, might put greater pressure on Washington than Beijing over time. He said cooperation with the U.S. over the Hormuz crisis offered Beijing "no benefit unless it comes with tangible concessions, such as the U.S. abandoning Taiwan." Without such trade-off, he added, "don't expect China to cooperate" with Trump.

Trump told reporters on the presidential jet taking him back to Washington after his China trip, that he "talked a lot about Taiwan" with Xi throughout the trip. He also dismissed

suggestions of a rising risk of a U.S.-China conflict over the Taiwan Strait.

Trump noted that his Chinese counterpart “had a very strong feeling” against Taiwan independence.

“[Xi] does not want to see a fight for independence because that would be a very strong confrontation and I heard him out,” Trump said. “I’m not looking to have someone go independent,” adding that Taiwan should not expect a “blank check” from the U.S. military, making it clear the U.S. does not want a war over Taiwan either. “The last thing we need right now is a war that’s 9,500 miles away. I think that’s the last thing we need.”

Reports have suggested that Xi requested Trump to officially declare that the U.S. “opposes” Taiwan independence and halt or delay its arms sale to the island.

Beijing has repeatedly voiced its strong opposition to American arms sales to Taiwan, which Trump has pressed to ramp up defence spending. In December 2025, the Trump administration announced a weapons package valued at $14 billion for Taiwan, the largest ever.

Trump honoured Xi’s request and announced that the long-stalled $14 billion arms package was “in abeyance,” describing it as a “very good negotiating chip” in dealings with China, and that Taiwan “stole our chip industry.”

“In the view of Chinese people, Trump’s comments on the

Taiwan issue are a massive breakthrough," said Wang Wen, a former journalist for Chinese state media who is now a professor at Renmin University in Beijing.

Trump sidestepped a question from journalists about whether Washington would go to Taiwan's defence in the case of a cross-strait conflict. "I'm not going to say that. There's only one person that knows that. You know who it is? Me," Trump said, adding that Xi posed the same question, but he did not reply.

The U.S. has long adopted the principle of "strategic ambiguity" over the question of defending Taiwan in an armed conflict.

Xi's focus in his meetings with Trump was putting guard rails on bilateral relations through the framework of "constructive strategic stability." Taiwan being a primary influencing factor. Xi reassured Trump that his vision to "Make America Great Again" could co-exist with "China's great rejuvenation."

The White House said Trump and Xi agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open and that Iran could never have a nuclear weapon. The only way both goals can be achieved is for both parties to agree to bring about regime change.

In an age of great power rivalry, the "hegemon is inviting its main challenger to help extract it from the world's most combustible region," said Edward Luce in his opinion piece in the *Financial Times* of 18 March 2026, titled: *China is not going to bail the president*. "Read that again. Then ponder where China's

incentive lies. Why interrupt your enemy while he is making a mistake?" he asks.

Furthermore, the war has opened ways for China to increase its global economic influence.

High fossil fuel prices and volatile supplies have underscored the need for nations to hasten their shift to renewable power sources. This is a boon for Beijing. Chinese firms account for at least 70 percent of global manufacturing capacity for major green technologies. Since the war started, Beijing's exports of solar and battery products have surged, vindicating the government's long-term in clean energy supply chains.

China's stranglehold and weaponization of rare earths compounds America's disadvantage at the negotiating table. As the U.S. and Israeli militaries deplete their weapons stockpiles, America's dependence on rare earths gives Beijing fresh over-bearing leverage.

As the two competitors warily circle each other, the U.S. wants to reduce reliance on China but still depends on Chinese supply chains, minerals, batteries and industrial inputs. Meanwhile, China wants to preserve its export driven growth model, garner U.S. technology and maintain American dependence on Chinese production.

China wants the U.S. to invest more to counter domestic stagnation, circumvent tariffs, and blunt technological isolation,

while Chinese companies face suspicion and scrutiny in the U.S. To paraphrase Winston Churchill's quote about democracy in America, the U.S.-Sino relationship, is an enigma twisted in a conundrum.

"it's mutually assured disruption," said Craig Singleton, senior fellow with the Foundation for Defence of Democracies. "Both sides think they can manage the chaos and the risk is that neither can."

I agree with political scientist Li Cheng that the summit did little to change the overall structure of U.S.-China ties.

Former U.S. ambassador to China, Max Baucus, described the Trump-Xi summit as ushering in a new phase of "constructive stability," with both sides focused more on preventing crises rather than building trust or meaningfully resetting their relationship.

"Two big countries, two different systems, we really do not trust each other," the former ambassador said. "Constructive stability is more crisis prevention … Both sides want to stabilize the relationship, prevent it from getting any worse."

Noting that both sides framed bilateral ties as moving towards "constructive strategic stability," Baucus said the new language pointed to a holding pattern rather than the beginning of a durable thaw. The absence of confrontation or acrimony was itself seen as a modest success.

Baucus framed the broader relationship as entering a new phase of competitive global coexistence underpinned by deep economic interdependence and persistent suspicion.

“Can China and the U.S. transcend the Thucydides Trap and create a new paradigm for major power relations? Can they work together to address global challenges and inject more stability into the world? Can they focus on the well-being of both peoples and the future destiny of humanity to jointly create a bright future for bilateral relations?” Xi asked Trump.

Yes, I believe they can -- starting with the opening of the Straits of Hormuz, regime change in Iran and creating the Palestinian state where I propose. The question with the emerging G2 China-U.S. reality, is whether Washington can reinvent itself and accept the fact that China sees the U.S. as a weakened rival it wants to work with as a peer power. The Iran war can help stabilize U.S.-China relations and become the foundation cornerstone of their partnership as future global co-leaders. Their mutual dependence makes them both safer.

Another US-China scholar I respect and agree with is Dr. Evan Medeiros, the Cling family distinguished fellow in U.S.-China studies at Georgetown University. He said these summits tend to reaffirm the underlying power dynamics more than change them. “The Trump-Xi meeting …. Is the classic case of both sides using a summit to affirm current dynamics rather than change them. This U.S.-China summit did far to reflect – not change – the

existing power dynamics: a confident, strategically focused China that set the agenda and extracted a valuable framing concession (G2-ish), and a U.S. side that came for trade deals, got soft commitments on purchases that should have been pre-arranged."

"Then the U.S. left with atmospheric warmth rather than the structural change," he added.

On Taiwan, Medeiros said: "As Brookings Institution scholar John Culver argues, Xi sees the Taiwan issue as a crisis to be managed not an opportunity to be seized."

"Xi's recent purges of the People's Liberation Army strongly indicate he is not preparing for war now but is looking to buy time to find more loyal and capable military leaders."

There are many ways in which both countries can work together. Starting with low-cost housing, climate change, renewable power sources, and modernizing America's outmoded infrastructure.

The boards of trade and investment that both sides agreed to set up are very significant. With this institutional framework in place, bilateral economic and trade disputes can be brought under regular supervision and coordination.

Trump doesn't give a damn about Taiwan independence or democratization or, as Venezuela showed, about changing any element of a regime that doesn't stand in America's way. He's

interested in regime change in Iran only because it was, in its founding theology, unswervingly anti-American. Thus, it was not swayable from the Chinese orbit by any means. Trump doesn't need a democratic Iran; he just needs an Iran that is not anti-American and a global-geopolitical structural change that brings an end to the disorder and forever ongoing "anti-American" wars in the Middle East. He wants to bring about neighbourly peace.

Closure of Strait of Hormuz a Global Economic Catastrophe

The Persian Gulf is a global choke point for many vital commodities, besides oil and gas. It includes fertilizers that feed U.S. and E.U. farms, the sulphur needed for everything from batteries to metals – and conversely -- going the other way, the Indian rice and other grains that keep the region fed.

The Strait of Hormuz, just 24 miles wide, is the trade route that feeds vast parts of the global economy. More than 40,000 tankers and cargo vessels traverse these waters annually.

With the Gulf effectively closed during the war over threats from Iran, and its Houthi proxy in Yemen, "The global economy teetered on the brink of collapse, as key commodities shipped through the Strait of Hormuz came to a standstill," wrote the energy editor of *The Daily Telegraph* Jonathan Leake, on March 9, 2026, in a news report titled: *Hormuz crisis will hit at the shops as well as the pumps.* He added: "Manufacturers and all manner of production facilities worldwide scrambled to ensure they had enough supplies to keep their output of goods flowing, resulting in higher prices to consumers and inflation." Sulphur, for

example, Leake pointed out, is essential for producing sulphuric acid, probably the planet's most manufactured chemical. It's used for extracting metals such as copper and cobalt from their ores, producing fertilizers such as ammonium sulphate, refining petrol, making car tires and EV batteries. But sulphur itself also is manufactured, usually from oil and gas, and the Gulf's refineries are a key global source, producing around 18 million tons a year, or 21 percent of global supplies. The same holds true for fertilizers. The Persian Gulf has become the backbone of global trade, with up to half of global production transiting the Strait of Hormuz according to market analysts ING. The bank warned, in the first week of the war, of likely damage to global farm output – including in the U.S. "A prolonged disruption would tighten fertilizer availability in major import dependent regions such as Brazil, India, South Asia, and parts of the E.U."

Worryingly, it raised the prospect of a hit to U.S. food supplies if the war continued. "Rising nitrogen and phosphate prices would pressure farm margins and could reduce yield potential for nitrogen-intensive crops such as corn and wheat," it added.

A more obvious commodity pushed through the waterway is liquefied natural gas (LNG). According to the International Energy Agency, more than 110 billion cubic metres of LNG passed through the Strait of Hormuz in 2025. The ING report said about 93 percent of Qatar's and 96 percent of the UAE's LNG exports move through the Strait, representing almost one fifth of global LNG trade. "There are no alternative routes to bring these volumes to market," the report added ominously. Most of the

LNG goes to Asia, where many economies rely on it. Taiwan gets a third of its gas from Qatar, via the Strait of Hormuz. However, it is the surge in jet fuel prices that provide the greatest shock to air travellers – rising 150 percent in the second week of the war according to market analysts Vortexa.

“Europe faces significant risks to jet fuel supply, since the Middle East Gulf is the top supplier to Europe, providing 30 percent of Europe’s jet fuel seaborne supplies,” the report said. Something I personally experienced when I changed my ticket when traveling from Europe to the Middle East in mid-March 2026. The situation could be far worse for people living in the Middle East – who rely on food imported through the Strait of Hormuz. The region imports 30 million tons

of grains and oil seeds by sea, according to data and analytics firm Kpler. Just one port, Jebel Ali in Dubai, imports 16 million containers a year, including much of the region’s fresh food and other consumables. The port serves as the supply lifeline for around 50 million people. There is no overland or air freight alternative that can absorb that volume. Unlike grain that can be stored in silos for months, fresh produce and livestock cannot wait.

The attacks on Iran’s oil and gas systems, posed a threat to Iraq and the Republic of Türkiye, which rely on gas piped in from Iran, and to China which buys the bulk of Iran’s oil.

I was visiting friends in March 2026, in the Turkish Republic of

Northern Cyprus in connection with the Peace Museum I am building (See more on the museum in Postscript), and heard first hand of the concerns Turks and Turkish Cypriots had about the attacks on Iran's oil and gas refineries – and Iran's missile and drone attacks on Cyprus and Turkey. Seeing the Turkish F16 fighter jets on the runway at Ercan airport when I landed and departed, there to defend Cyprus, was a stark reminder of how both countries had also been dragged into the war.

Watching the 24/7 news coverage of the war on Turkish Radio Television (TRT), listening to Turkish President Recep Erdogan's repeated criticism of the U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran, the Islamic Republic's attacks on Turkey and Cyprus, and his pleas for the war to end, not only in the Middle East, but also in Ukraine, I couldn't help feel his concerns over the impact an endless war would have on Türkiye's economy. When he bestowed the Ataturk Peace Medal on U.N. General Secretary Antonio Gutierrez on March 12, 2026, both men pleaded for the war to end.

The global economic, food and energy crisis caused by Iran's refusal to end its nuclear program, missile capability, support of regional proxies, and, above all, regime change, in the wake of Operation Epic Fury unleashed by the U.S. and Israel as a result, is a wake-up-call to even more potentially devastating future economic, food, and energy shocks that can be unleashed by the rogue Iranian theocracy that refuses to change its political ideology, military practices, or comply with international law. It is a regime that cannot be contained, changed peacefully, or by a

war of attrition from the air. Not when Iran is in absolute control of what ships do and don't export Iranian oil or crisscross the strait. As Iran brought the Strait of Hormuz to a standstill, with zero ships crossing in mid-March 2026, it rolled out a screening process and steep transit fees for vessels using the waterway. "We in parliament are pursuing a plan under which countries will pay tolls and taxes to the Islamic Republic if the Strait of Hormuz is used as a secure route for transit, energy and food security," lawmaker Somayeh Rafiei was quoted as saying by the Iranian Students' News Agency.

Reports in March 2026 suggested that Iran had already put in place a permission-based transit and control of the strait and began demanding payments. At least one tanker operator had paid a fee of about US$2 million to Tehran to transit the Strait of Hormuz, maritime trade media outlet Lloyd's List reported at the time. Several other tankers also secured passage following Iranian vetting and high-level diplomatic interventions.

"Several governments – including China, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Malaysia they're all in direct talks with Tehran, coordinating vessel transfers," said Richard Meade, chief editor of *Lloyd's List* on a webinar on March 19, 2026.

Tehran established a "de facto safe" transit through the strait that passes close to Iran's Larak Island, allowing the Iranian navy and port authorities to conduct visual checks on passing vessels, according to *Lloyd's List*.

Africa Asia and Latin America Hit Hardest

Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz hit countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America the hardest. Many comparing it to the breakdown crises of the Covid pandemic. Surging food prices, food shortages, factory pauses and shutdowns, delayed shipments of medicines and vaccines, and empty shelves for products long considered quick and easy to buy worldwide: plastic bags, instant noodles, vaccines, syringes, lipstick, microchips, cooking oil, gasoline – and delayed or cancelled diesel truck deliveries and flights.

In March 2026, there were more than 92,000 flights cancelled worldwide, doubling the pre-war rate of cancellation with the largest spike in eliminated flights linked to the Asia-Pacific.

Carriers flying through the Middle East, where 24 million migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia are employed, suspended trips to Dubai and other Gulf hubs.

Without enough petrochemicals to make fertilizer, polyester, nylon, plastic packaging, and condoms, a U.N. report released in mid-April 2026 estimated that 8.8 million people in Asia and the Pacific are at risk of falling into poverty because of the blockade. Most of those, around five million, will be in Iran.

In India, entire industrial clusters were shut down because of fuel shortages. I witnessed it first hand when I visited Mumbai, Puni and Goa in late March, early April 2026. Miles of snaking lines of cars, motorbikes and tuck- tucks, patiently waiting their turn to

get gas, and cooking kerosene.

Countries and regions with financial means – China, Japan, Europe, the U.S. – are securing much of what they need, paying whatever it takes. Some are restricting exports to hold on to what they have.

Some economists are describing this as hoarding. “Once again, a large unanticipated shock hits the world economy and it’s every country for itself,” said Eswar Prasad, an international trade expert at Cornell University. “This is not the world in it together and trying to sort out the problem jointly. Every country is going into survival mode.”

Hoarding lifts market prices everywhere. Yet which countries manage to secure stocks is a tale of inequality.

“Rich countries outbid poor countries,” said Ms. Weber, a University of Massachusetts economist. “Rich people ensure their luxury consumption while the majority of people gets squeezed.”

The result, a poor, hungry and sick populace worldwide, especially in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, with personal and business bankruptcies on the rise globally. Farmers in Vietnam, labourers in India, innkeepers in Sri Lanka, drivers in the Philippines, and executives in Hong Kong and Singapore, all voiced grave concerns about their economic future.

So, what is a realistic geopolitical option to contain or rid Iran of its fanatical Islamic regime and preventing another global destructive economic, food and energy crisis?

All Out War

For what it is worth, considering Iran's support of Hamas and a Palestinian state, my side-bar contribution to the ongoing diplomatic and academic discussions, is, the U.S. and all countries that rely on their food and energy needs from the Middle East, together with the energy producing Gulf states, that collectively want to ensure no future Iranian interruption in the outflow of their oil and gas and import of food through the Strait of Hormuz, consider the following military option.

Seize Kharg Island, Iran's "Crown Jewel." It is the only way "to get such massive oil reserves in Iran out of the hands of terrorists," said Jarrod Agen, executive director of the National Energy Dominance Council, and White House adviser. Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official and senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, has said that sending soldiers to seize Kharg Island was a "no brainer." The Pentagon has gamed out seizing Kharg Island in war-planning scenarios for years. That is the only way to put a stranglehold on Iran's oil-driven economy, and ensure global commerce, food, and energy security mission is accomplished. Then, to the hard part, go after the nuclear fuels entombed by U.S. bombers in June 2025, as well as the IRGC leadership, and Basij militia – and stop all money inflows, through every banking system, official and unofficial.

A military, economic and financial chokehold!

That is the only way America can win a war with Iran. The war ending without regime change, and the Islamic Republic remaining in power, is a win for Iran and the IRGC. As long as the IRGC and Basij remain in power and continue to terrorize their people, threaten "The Great Satan" America, and Israel, control the Strait of Hormuz, and hold the world economy hostage, the world will continue to be at the mercy of a global economic and military pariah.

If the U.S. retreats and allows Iran to win, the Strait of Hormuz will do to the U.S. what the Suez Crisis did to Britain. Relegate America to China, the way Britain and France were relegated to America.

Game of Chicken

The Strait of Hormuz has become Iran's biggest chip in a high-stakes geopolitical contest with President Trump. The Iran war has turned into a battle of wills between Trump and the IRGC. On the one hand, the Iran regime is ruthless, resourceful and fighting for its life. It believes time is on its side. The longer the Strait is closed, the more the economic and political pressure on the U.S. and its allies will mount. As a result, Iran's negotiating hand is likely to be stronger.

On the other hand, Trump the dealmaker, believes by threatening to resume attacks on Iran with Israel he can get Iran to give up its nuclear energy program and handover its stockpile

of uranium enriched close to weapons grade levels out of the country, and dismantle its three main nuclear facilities at Natanz, Fordow and Isfahan.

“We will get it. We do not need it, we do not want it. We will probably destroy it after we get it, but we are not going to let them have it,” Trump said.

“The Iranians measure the timeline in months for themselves, and in weeks for the Trump administration and the global economy,” said Ali Vaez, the Iran project director for the International Crisis Group. “They think Trump can’t tolerate the strait remaining closed for another three weeks,” Vaez said in late April 2026. At the time, Trump told *Fox News* on April 23, 2026, there was “no time pressure” on holding a new round of talks or on the cease-fire, and “no timeline” for ending the war with Iran.

Trump threatened to destroy the Iranian civilization and send it back to the stone age if it did not come to terms with the U.S., while Iran warned of attacks beyond the Middle East if the May 2026 cease-fire ends and the U.S. strikes them again.

“We know full well that the continuation of the status quo is intolerable for America; whilst we have not even started yet,” Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran’s chief negotiator and speaker of Iran’s parliament wrote on X.

Rasha Al Joundy, a senior researcher at the Dubai Public Policy

Research Centre, told *China Daily* that it is “obvious” that the U.S. does not want to restart the war, especially if there is a possibility for a deal with Iran.

“Trump has a very difficult situation. If he starts the war again, it would mean a more dangerous one, in terms of targets and reactions,” she said. “Then, in terms of the global economy, he needs this deal to come through and to be valid.”

Whether or not Iran’s leadership can survive the standoff with Washington, its economy will not. The economy was already in deep crisis before the war. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz chokes Iran economically and hurts Trump politically.

“The Iranian regime only cares about its survival, not about its people suffering, and it does still see this as an existential battle with the United States,” said Vaez. “And that’s why it’s not going to blink, regardless of how much the Iranian people suffer.”

Reading the quote, I am reminded of a saying the Taliban used to say during the two-decade U.S. military operations in Afghanistan: “America has the watches, we have the time.”

In the latest watch check as this book was going to press: “Another 30 to 60 days,” announced on Memorial Day weekend 2026, resulting in “plunging” gas prices as both Washington and Tehran announced they were “working on a deal to make a deal,” but that does not mean that “we’re close to signing an agreement,” said an IRGC spokesperson.

Oil prices did drop over the Memorial Day weekend following signs that Washington and Tehran were edging closer to a deal and extending the fragile ceasefire 30 to 60 days. Signs -- is the operative word. Not signing.

No peace deal was signed. No nuclear deal was signed. No missile deal was signed. No proxy's deal was signed. Nothing was signed. Only verbal agreements were reached.

"No rush," said Trump when the no deal was announced. True. Another Iranian negotiating delay, buying the IRGC more time -- and sanctions relief.

"I think we've been talking too much, if you want to know the truth," Trump said. "I think going silent would be very good and that could be for a long time."

Silence does not stop the military strikes each side and its allies initiate against the other, while the strait remains partially blocked.

Trump was harshly criticized in the press and in Washington for being beaten by Iran at the art of the deal.

Among the harshest critics was Senator Roger Wicker, Republican from Mississippi and chair of the Armed Service Committee, who had warned that "everything accomplished by Operation Epic Fury would be for nought!"

The deal was also criticized in Iran. Influential members of the ultra-conservative Paydari faction, who occupy seats in Parliament and prominent positions at state broadcasters, have insisted that Iran retain control over the Strait of Hormuz and refuse to make concessions over its nuclear program, describing these as “red lines.”

The fragile ceasefire was under threat before the Memorial Day agreement was reached, but several military confrontations erupted shortly after the truce was announced, with both Washington and Tehran launching attacks on each other.

Triangular Coercion

To gain an edge over its much more powerful adversary, Iran used a method that game-theory scholars call “triangular coercion,” said Dan Sobelman, a professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem who studies Iranian deterrence strategies.

The strategy works by attacking a more vulnerable third party that has some leverage over an adversary to gain advantage over an opponent that cannot be outmatched directly. In this case, the third parties were primarily the Gulf states, which are both militarily vulnerable and economically important to the U.S.

Iran’s closure of the strait isn’t just a “blow to the global economy,” said Rich Lowry in *National Review*. It’s an assault against one of the foundations of American power. Allowing it to stand would bring “intolerable” economic damage and our

"national humiliation." Trump has two options: Negotiate a ceasefire with an enemy that's just demonstrated "de facto control of one of the most consequential waterways in the world," or "break their grip on the strait by force of arms."

Meanwhile, the world economy is held hostage and is at the perpetual mercy of the IRGC as Iran continues to control the Strait of Hormuz -- and emerges as a regional force with which others must come to terms with.

Boots on The Ground

The IRGC is not going to "surrender unconditionally." They will have to be removed by boots on the ground. Those boots do not have to be American. The boots needed should come from Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman, the countries repeatedly threatened by Iran.

Saudi Arabia must first sign the Abraham Accords like its fellow Gulf states Bahrain and UAE have done. Then, collectively, with the U.S., Israel, and other countries in Europe, China, Japan, and Asia adversely affected by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, join the war to bring about real regime change – and regional peace.

We need to look at the lessons of World War II and how regime change was brought about in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan, restoring peace and economic certainty and stability. The successful aerial campaign during the Balkan War is another example of regime change by military might without

American boots on the ground.

I know and acknowledge that Iran today is not Italy, Germany, or Japan of World War II era. It will not surrender or can be easily defeated. The eight-year Iraq-Iran War of 1980s, in which Iran martyred hundreds of thousands, if not more than a million, teenagers it sent out as mine-sweepers to die blowing up mines to make room for the IRGC to advance against Iraq, is a reminder.

I agree with Robert D. Shanks Jr's editorial opinion in my hometown newspaper *The Daily Courier*, titled: *Why I support temporary military incursion in Iran*. Shanks Jr. concurs with a remark made by President Ronald Reagan: "Peace through strength." He adds, "What Israel and the U.S. are doing in Iran has been needed for nearly 50 years. They continually repeat 'Death to America'."

Iranian hackers are not bound by any ceasefires. They continue being active on the digital battlefield. Some experts say hackers have stepped up cyber-attacks to penetrate critical infrastructure, attempting to get access to water and power stations in the Middle East and the U.S. as part of an effort to prepare for future operations that would cause societal pain.

The World War II game book needs to be brought out, dusted, and updated, with America leading a new Allied campaign, with all the signatories of the Abraham Accords and countries adversely affected by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz –

starting with the Gulf states attacked by Iran – and repurposed NATO. Aim for total military victory by America's Middle East Abraham Peace Force.

Abraham Accords Coalition Peace Force

The name Abraham, for the accords, was chosen to reflect the shared heritage of the Abrahamic religions – Judaism and Islam. The Abraham Accords are a series of normalization agreements to establish formal diplomatic, economic and security ties between Israel, and United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, signed in August and September 2020, Sudan in January 2025, Kazakhstan in November 2025, and Morocco in December 2025. America is also a party to these accords. But let's not forget, America is self-sufficient in its energy needs because of the "drill, baby, drill," Trump presidential mantra and practice. Under the security clause of the accords, there is no reason for these collective signatories, particularly UAE and Bahrain, not to establish or join an armed military Abraham Peace Force (APF) for containing Iran's nuclear and ballistic missiles programs, and military aggression against its own people and region, especially now after they have been repeatedly bombed by Iran.

The deployment of Israel's Iron Dome defence system to the UAE signals a "watershed moment" of the embryonic APF in Middle Eastern security alignments, as the war in Iran highlights the critical role of such air defence systems.

According to the UAE defence ministry, Iran fired 550 ballistic and cruise missiles and more than 2,200 drones at the country.

While most of the missiles and drones were intercepted, some broke through the air-defence network, hitting military and civilian targets.

“The Iron Dome deployment marks a shift from diplomatic normalization to wartime military integration under the Abraham Accords,” said Lisellote Odgaard, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington.

“While Israel has exported air-defence systems before, deploying an operational Iron Dome battery with IDF personnel on UAE soil represents a qualitatively different level of trust and coordination…. The move strongly signals a convergence of threat perception regarding Iran,” Odgaard added.

The UAE has improved its military ties with Israel since establishing diplomatic ties in 2020 under the Abraham Accords – as should the other signatories – and Saudi Arabia. It launched multiple strikes against Iran in retaliation for the attacks on the kingdoms, and by joining APF to remove the Islamic IRGC, can prevent future attacks by Iran.

The APF is to be led by America and hopefully China, under the terms of the existing Abraham Accords security arrangements. Egypt and Jordan, countries that have signed peace treaties with Israel, should also sign up–Jordan, having been bombed by Iran – for sure – and Egypt for the plight Iran has wrought upon it by supporting Hamas, and resulting Palestinian refugees Egypt must absorb.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman, all four having been bombed ferociously by Iran, and had their energy exports held up because of Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, should also join the APF.

"Iran's calculations are wrong and it believes the Gulf states cannot respond," said Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, addressing the gathering of Arab-Islamic foreign ministers in Riyadh, as the city was being bombed by Iran.

"The kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its partners possess significant capabilities and the patience we have shown is not unlimited," he warned shortly before the Saudis attacked Iran. Another good reason for Saudi Arabia to sign the Abraham Accords is the Palestinian state I have proposed.

The foreign minister of Oman, Badr al-Busaidi, told journalists in mid-March 2026, that it was time for the Gulf countries to reconsider their defence strategies, pointing to a growing debate in the region, *Oman Daily* newspaper reported.

All Gulf countries have security partnerships with America. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain are designated as "major non-NATO allies," while the Emirates is designated as a "major defence partner." Why not partner with APF?

All countries in the region, whether they have an American defence umbrella or not, that got attacked by Iran should sign up

with APF to prevent Iran and its' proxies from ever holding the region and the world hostage again. The APF's air command should be under the command of the U.S. All other parties supply the necessary fighting peacekeepers on the ground, overseen by a joint chain of command of an officer corps from all member nations.

The APF should also be made up of all the countries dependent on their oil, gas, food, fertilizers and other economic staples arriving safely on vessels travelling peacefully through the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, Arabian and Red Seas. That brings on just about every peace-loving country that wants to see a peaceful Middle East, with the threat of a murderous theocratic Islamic Republic – removed permanently. That includes China, EU, NATO, Japan, Korea, India, and other Asian and African countries, Americas, and Australasia.

All countries that rely heavily on Middle Eastern energy. All those that ignored Trump's pleas for naval backup to help escort commercial ships and ensure freedom of navigation must team up in this peacekeeping effort.

Trump said in a social media post that "hopefully China, France, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and others that are affected by this artificial constraint, will send ships to the area so the Hormuz Strait will no longer be a threat by a nation that has been totally decapitated." He told the *Financial Times* on March 15, 2026, that it would be "very bad for the future of NATO" if the allies refused to help. Every country reliant on Gulf oil faces

an uneasy choice: join a coalition and alienate Iran or remain neutral and risk U.S. displeasure.

NATO

NATO, established after World War II, has come to symbolize the collective strength of its 32 allied nations that helped establish the postwar order. NATO members, in a rare show of unity, collectively refused and turned Trump's offer down. They had enough of Trump's insults and threats. They concluded that naval escorts are a Band-Aid short-term fix -- not a long-term solution. NATO also did not trigger Article 5 when NATO air forces shot down missiles headed into Türkiye's airspace. The article states that an attack on any member is treated as an attack on all and allows all others to come to the defence and support of the attacked member. Türkiye is a NATO member.

NATO's secretary general Mark Rutte riled European NATO members with his unequivocal backing for Trump's war with Iran, as Europe grapples with an energy shock triggered by the war, further straining the transatlantic alliance over how far NATO should go in accommodating its largest member.

The NATO-European schizoid approach to supporting Trump was further amplified a few weeks later when Yvette Cooper, Britain's foreign secretary, convened a meeting of her counterparts from more than 40 countries to discuss efforts to secure the Strait of Hormuz once the fighting was over. The U.S. did not participate in the meeting or a later gathering of military planners from the same countries.

NATO has operated outside the Euro-Atlantic area in the past, notably in Libya, Afghanistan – and even China. Yes China. Washington has spent years inflating NATO's China file beyond its actual substance. Since 2019, NATO has hardened its language on Beijing. Its 2022 strategic concept cast Beijing's ambitions as a challenge to allied interests, security and values. In 2024, China was labelled a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war against Ukraine.

There is no appetite to go to war again given its chaotic U.S. led exit from Afghanistan in 2021, which former NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg described as a "defeat."

The time is long overdue to revisit and tweak NATO's mission and vision to meet the needs and demands of the new world disorder. At the end of World War II when NATO was formed, the biggest threat was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a union of republics led by Russia. Notwithstanding the collapse of the USSR, Russia remains a threat to Europe as evidenced by the wars in Georgia and Ukraine.

Iran is a bigger threat to Europe than Russia. Not militarily, but economically. And not just to Europe – America and the whole world. NATO can easily repurpose itself and amend its founding articles to include food, economic, and energy security as core principles, and defend them against any threats or attacks from Iran or its' proxies in the Middle East.

Such an amendment will allow NATO to join America, Israel, and

the Abraham Peace Force, to ensure the Strait of Hormuz remains open. Any closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, is an act of war on “all” NATO members, not just one.

Like NATO, all Asia-Pacific post-World War II military alliances must be repurposed for the political and military realities of the 21st-century – especially when it comes to the Middle East.
At the end of World War II, most countries, including all in the Middle East, were colonies of Western empires. Today, they are independent nations. In the Middle East, these independent countries have become empowered politically and economically above their punching weight because of their newfound oil and gas wealth.

The European powers that colonized Africa and the Middle East, most notably Britain and France, are now, with the rest of Europe facing pay back by Iran because of its control and closure of the Strait of Hormuz – and Red Sea with the support of their Houthi proxy.

NATO and the Asia-Pacific alliances must amend their founding charters to allow them to defend themselves from deprivation of food, energy, fertilizer, and other necessities transported through any international waterway. “The Strait of Hormuz is a warning about every strategic chokepoint on which the global economy depends,” reminds us Professor Syed Munir Khasru, Chairman of the International think tank IPAG Asia-Pacific.

In 405BC, the Spartans under Lysander targeted the narrow

passage now known as the Dardanelles, cutting off Athens from its major source of grain. The resulting starvation forced the surrender of an empire.

Such narrow chokepoints are a key vulnerability for global seaborne trade: as mariners navigate tight waterways, they face risks from pirates to militants and major powers vying for control.

Ending piracy was always an accepted international military policy. What Iran is doing in the Strait of Hormuz is plain and simple modern-day piracy. Piracy that must be ended with the unconditional surrender of the pirates.

Trump's War

Trump did not consult Congress when he chose armed action because he knew they would oppose his plan. Likewise, it was also natural for European career politicians to be upset and decide to turn on the heat on Trump. A critical question that these Doubting Toms have overlooked is, what is the point of building the world's most lethal killing machine if it is not going to be used for protecting America's economic, food, financial, oil, and gas security? If it calls for getting rid of regimes that threaten to harm our culture, economy, food and energy lifelines, why not overwhelm them with military might?

In an early March 2026 post, the Institute for the Study of War described the inevitable scenario if the regime survives: "A weakened regime that remains in power after this war would be

able to disrupt shipping whenever and for however long it pleases with little effort if its current, relatively limited, strike campaign on shipping proves sufficient to cause the U.S. and Israel to surrender." It went on to point out: "A failure to demonstrate the will and ability to deny Iran the ability to disrupt traffic, will make it enormously harder to deter Iran from future disruptions."

The New York Times columnist David French, asked in his March 21-22, 2026, column: *Can military excellence save us from the president's incompetence?* I agree with his answer to the question he posed: "If the regime is still standing at the end of the conflict, then Iran lives to fight again. And if it survives at least in part through closing the Strait of Hormuz, then it knows exactly how to fight again." French shared his concern that Trump administration's messaging begun to slide from regime change and "unconditional surrender" to objectives that look a lot like "mowing the grass" – damaging the military enough that it will take considerable time to rebuild. "But October 7 should have demonstrated to all of us that mowing the grass doesn't make anyone safer. Instead, it prolongs the conflict. It hardens the combatants. It plants the seeds for vengeance. Israel should know this now, and we should know it as well," he added.

"When Saddam Hussein faced a catastrophic defeat during Operation Desert Storm, he doubled down. He tried to kill George H.W. Bush, he supported the second intifada against Israel, his troops fired on American pilots. He harboured terrorists. Defeat did not make him any less of an enemy to the United States, and in 2003 we fought him again, in a much longer

and bloodier war," French reminds us.

I agree with retired Israeli General Itzhak Brik, who said in an opinion piece in *Maariv*, if Iran loses the war, but its regime remains intact, it will eventually "regain its military capabilities" with help from Beijing and Moscow. And then its fury will know no bounds. It will seek help from nuclear states North Korea, and Pakistan to turn its uranium stockpile into "10 atomic bombs." Every one of them will be aimed at Israel, the state it has sworn to eradicate.

Let's not forget the Houthis in Yemen who control the Bab el-Madreb Strait, observing, analysing, and reporting to Iran from the sidelines for the first few weeks of the war. Were they merely recovering from the 2025 bombing campaign they were subjected to by the U.S. and Israel, waiting to conclude a peace treaty with Saudi Arabia and the financial incentives that follow, or orders from Iran? The answer: orders from Iran.

On March 28, one month after the U.S. and Israel launched Epic Fury, the Houthis entered the war, launching missiles towards Israel for the first time since the war began.

The Bab el-Madreb, known as the *Gate of Tears* in Arabic because of its treacherous sailing conditions, is about 30 kilometres wide at its narrowest point. It is situated between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula to the northeast, Eritrea, and Djibouti in Africa, where both the U.S. and China have military bases -- and Red Sea. A second chokepoint, controlling Hormuz

marine traffic going to the Suez Canal, Mediterranean, Europe, and Atlantic. Conversely, traffic between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. Before the war, as much as 14 percent of global maritime trade went through the Bab el-Madreb. Fossil fuels are a major component.

The International Energy Agency estimates that in 2025 about 4.2 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum liquids crossed the Bab el-Madreb Strait every day! That's about five percent of global production.

The effective closure of both the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb at the same time would paralyze global supply chains and the global economy.

In due course, the APF can also address and take out the Houthis. The APF can use the support of non-regional countries that can provide land and sea defences. Minesweepers to medical hospitals.

The APF can also play a peace keeping role in Lebanon by assisting the Lebanese government and Israel remove Iran's proxy Hezbollah's political, and military officials, along with all non-Lebanese armed forces from the country. They should be sent to Iran. Thankfully, in the meantime, Israel and Lebanon are finally talking directly with each other in Washington, D.C.

Financial support from corporate sponsors in the private sector is of course welcome as well. No different than donations to the

United Nations. But with real peaceful purpose.

Anything short of all out economic and military wars to open the Strait of Hormuz, stop the Iran nuclear program, gain control of the buried uranium, ending the development of ballistic missile programs, and the regional proxies of Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and others in Iraq and Syria, the missiles support, begs the question of what for?

The only realistic option is going all the way for an all-out military and economic victory, or unconditional surrender.

Failure to do so, raises the question what was the war about and gives credibility to the argument Asad Ullah makes in his editorial opinion titled *A war to what end?* published on April 15, 2026, in the *South China Morning Post,* in which he argues the point that Iran's enemies may be deliberately trying to make sure it remains a foe.

"The standard critique almost never asks who, structurally, requires Iran to remain an enemy rather than a problem to be managed. American defence contractors whose Gulf sales depend on threat inflation. Congressional coalitions for whom hawkishness on Iran is one of the last bipartisan positions, sustained not by shared strategic analysis but by shared donor relationships."

War of Laws

The Iran War has exposed and highlights the different conflicting

global international laws, regional laws, and “rules of law” and “sea” the U.S., China, Iran, Gulf countries, and maritime shipping companies transiting the Strait adhere to or ignore, that are contradictory, create a false perception of reality about who is violating what law, if in fact a law has been violated, with national laws of all the major players in the Iran War restricting the application of international laws locally, even ignoring judgments of international tribunals, and the legal consequences of the double-edged blockade of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran and the U.S.

On the eve of Trump’s planned mid-May visit to Beijing, the U.S. sanctioned major Chinese oil refineries and 40 shippers to cut off Iran’s source of revenue, that China promptly ignored, and continued doing business as usual.

The action “violates international law and basic norms of international relations,” China’s Ministry of Commerce said.

This is the first time that China has acted against the “unjustified extraterritorial use of foreign laws under rules issued in 2021. The move challenges the U.S. “long -arm jurisdiction” – imposed through the control of the global dollar-based financial system – and creates a potential new source of friction.

“We call on the U.S. to stop politicizing trade and sci-tech issues and using them as a weapon and a tool and stop abusing various kinds of sanctions to hit Chinese companies,” a Chinese embassy spokesman said in Washington. However, China does not

practice what it preaches. While preaching to America, it told Facebook, owner of Meta to unwind its purchase of Chinese founded artificial intelligence start-up Manus. The order is part of efforts to stop U.S. companies acquiring leading Chinese tech firms. Beijing also imposed export controls on foreign firms deemed to have caused supply chain disruptions.

Both Washington and Beijing have been racing to erect rival – and often conflicting – legal and regulatory regimes as they seek to gain strategic leverage in their ongoing stand-off over a host of trade, technology and security issues.

That is leaving companies from South Korea to the Netherlands – not to mention China and the U.S. – trapped in what analysts described as an "impossible position," unable to comply with one side's mandates without violating the others. I know something about Long Arm statutes. I co-authored with Barry Johnson, a law review article in law school that won the *Most Significant Legal Writing Contribution Award* in 1971. We received our awards from California Attorney General Evelle J. Younger. The article on *The History of the California Long Arm Statute* is required reading material in some law schools *Jurisdiction* classes and cited in numerous court filings and decisions.

The time is long overdue to accept and deal with legal reality. China only gives lip service to Western rules of law. It steals intellectual property and technology from anyone who has something it can learn, benefit, or wants.

“Under current legal frameworks, a completely risk-free solution that fully complies with the demands of both systems simply does not exist,” said Chen Litong, a senior partner at the Dentons law firm in Shanghai, in an article published in *Caixin* in May 2026.

The reality is, China doesn’t abide or comply with Western rules of law imposed on the world by the imperial West governing global bodies, even though it accepts them. There is no point in promising a level playing field through shared fields of engagement, only for the Chinese to ignore the agreement behind closed doors. Since it is not possible to agree to shared rules, then negotiating over outcomes is the ugly but more pragmatic alternative that the boards of trade and investment will hopefully resolve.

Anyone who doubts this reality should read Xi Jinping’s legal thoughts that has been baked in -- written – into the curriculum of the People’s Liberation Army.

“Xi Jinping has emphasized that our state’s ideology and social system are fundamentally incompatible with the West. Xi has said, ‘This determines that our struggle and contest with Western countries is irreconcilable, so it will inevitably be long, complicated and sometimes even sharp’.”

“We must gain a grip on foreign government leaders and their business elites by encouraging our companies to invest in their economies,” Xi adds.

China wants respect and stable relations as voiced by Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the National People's Congress in April 2026. "China and the U.S. are both big countries. Neither side can remodel the other," Wang said. "But we can choose how we want to engage – that is, to commit to a spirit of mutual respect, to hold the bottom line of peaceful coexistence, and to strive for the prospect of win-win cooperation."

"Technology's value lies in its diffusion, adaptation and shared progress," opined Zhou Xiaoming, a senior fellow at the Centre for China and Globalization in Beijing, in his *South China Morning Post* opinion on May 5, 2026. "If Washington keeps weaponizing technology, building walls and prioritising control, it will not only stifle global advancement but also isolate itself from future innovation. True leadership is not about hoarding power; it is about lifting others up. The world deserves better than a monopoly that leaves developing countries in the dust," adds Xiaoming. I agree. I hope Beijing does.

A good place to start the "win-win cooperation" is resolving the opening of the Strait of Hormuz to international maritime traffic and removal of the Islamic Republic IRGC regime.

China is walking a fine line backing Iran while defending its vast interests in the Middle East. While Beijing began putting pressure on Iran to end its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, its statements have been carefully worded, showing how the prolonged conflict

is testing Beijing's relationship with Tehran.

China's ambassador to the U.N. Fu Gong, pointedly declared that "China does not go along with Iran's attacks on Gulf states and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz." Fu's remarks underlined Beijing's growing concerns about Iran's behaviour. However, China cannot compel Tehran to change course. It should therefore seriously consider joining forces with the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Gulf states to remove and replace Iran's Islamic IRGC regime.

For Arab governments, normalizing ties with Israel and creating a shared security network are contingent on Israel's making "credible progress toward resolving the Israeli Palestinian conflict," said Gershon Baskin in the *Jerusalem Post*. That won't happen under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has spent his career trying to render the two-state solution impossible. But it must happen if we are to have peaceful existence. "If the political situation after the war looks exactly like it did before the war, or worse, the region will have paid an enormous price for very little strategic gain," Baskin adds.

China's ambassador to the U.N., Fu Cong, said it was not "fair for the U.S. to sanction Chinese ships and companies. "The Iran war is the biggest example of the rise of unilateralism, power politics and some bullying practice by certain partners," he said on May 1, 2026. It is dealing heavy blows to the rule of law in international affairs."

The Iran war has made clear the old arrangements are over and need to be recalibrated. The U.S.-Gulf relationship based on oil for security alone is over, as is the U.S.-China jockeying for political and military leadership in the region. It now must be a 360-degree partnership for all parties on all fronts, political, economic and military.

Even more reason why the U.S., and China should seize the Iran War opportunity to sincerely start working together as partners pursuing and leading global economic stability. Starting in Iran, Gulf states, and Middle East. Respecting each other's laws, accepting the fact that they differ and each country will continue to pursue economic superiority by any means, legal or illegal, and do the best to protect itself.

Palestine Statehood at Heart of Iran War

We must always remember that one of the main goals, mission and vision, of the Ayatollah led Iranian theocracy – is a Palestinian state – at the expense, and geographic location of Israel.

We must remember it was Persia that returned the exiled Jews in Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple in 538 BC, and its tolerance of diversity in the world's first truly multicultural empire, that lasted through the centuries – until the Islamic Republic was established in 1979.

To fulfil the Ayatollah's dream of Palestine it funded Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and others in Syria and Iraq, to be the 'Boots'

on the ground armed with ballistic missiles, and every other kind of lower grade weapon, instead of spending this money on Iran's infrastructure, resources and people.

Fu Cong, China's ambassador to the U.N., in a speech he made on April 28, 2026, at a U.N. Security Council open debate on the Middle East, said: no military adventure will solve the region's problems; sovereignty matters; humanitarian law matters; the Palestinian question remains central; and the two-state solution is the only workable political framework.

Fu insisted that since October 7, 2023, the stated war aims have shifted with remarkable elasticity; destroy Hamas, rescue hostages, pacify Gaza, confront Hezbollah, expand settlements in the West Bank, deter Iran, reshape the region.

Non address the key issue: Palestinian statehood.

Fu's insistence that the Palestinian question "must not be marginalized" is an empirical observation. Every attempt to bypass it has failed. The Abraham Accords did not dissolve it. Siege did not dissolve it. Settlement expansion did not dissolve it. Regional "normalization" did not dissolve it. War certainly has not dissolved it. Indeed, the more it is ignored, the more violently it returns.

The same holds true for Iran.

The reason Trump was a TACO with Iran: "I didn't want to be Jimmy Carter," he said when asked if he planned to seize Iran's stash of highly enriched uranium.



“Let there be spaces in your
togetherness.”
Khalil Gibran


Antalya
İçel (Mersin)
Adana
Gaziantep
Diyarbakır
Tabriz
Rasht
Zanjān
Qazvin
Aleppo
Mosul
Erbil
Kirkuk
Nicosia
Latakia
CYPRUS
SYRIA
Homs
Beirut
LEBANON
Damascus
Baghdad
ISRAEL
IRAQ
Kermānshāh
Arāk
Eşfahān
Tel Aviv-Yafo
Port Said
Jerusalem
West Bank
Amman
Dead Sea
Gaza Strip
JORDAN
Cairo
Al Jīzah
Suez
Al 'Aqabah
PALESTINE
Ahvāz
An Nāşirīyah
Al Başrah
Abādān
Kuwait City
KUWAIT
Ḥafar al Bāṭin
Asyūţ
Al Jubayl
Buraydah
Ad Dammām
Dhahran
BAHRAIN
Luxor
Aswān
Riyadh
SAUDI
ARABIA
Ṭarţūr al Bahr
Administrative boundary
Ḥalā'ib
Jeddah

Chapter Thirteen

The Solution

Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.
-- George Bernard Shaw –
The New York Times

Gaza

Gaza is one of the oldest cities in the world, strategically located between Egypt and Asia at the center of the ancient road known as the Via Maris. Situated along the beachfront, Gaza was historically an important port and served as the nearest outlet for Arabia. The ancient Greeks recognized that Gaza provided a key passage to Arabia and India.

Historically, Gaza was a stronghold of Christianity. It was often more Christian than Jewish or Muslim. In the 5th and early 6th centuries, it was home to the renowned Christian School of Rhetoric.

Today, however, Gaza resembles a vast demolition site littered with layers of rubble and loss. The debris-strewn landscape marked with its hundreds of miles of underground tunnels, reflects a dire reality, reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic world -- due to Hamas and its senseless barbarian political philosophy of eliminating Israel, at any cost, even at the expense of its own people, homes, schools, hospitals, places of worship, and

community.

Under President Trump's original Gaza plan, the United States would govern Gaza and expel its residents. “Under the Arab plan, Gaza would be run by Palestinian technocrats within a wider Palestinian statehood. By one Israeli proposal, Israel would cede some control to Palestinians but block Palestinian statehood. By another, Israel would occupy the entire territory,” Patrick Kingsley accurately summarizes in his March 14, 2025, article in *The New York Times International Edition*, titled *Many plans for Gaza but all of them have flaws*.

Hamas reaffirmed its violent intentions to the world on October 7, 2023. With that action, it acknowledged that it will not abandon its arms but intends to continue its guerilla insurgency against what it deems Israeli occupation.

During ceasefire talks, Hamas did not accept the Israeli demand to disarm. “The weapon of resistance is not negotiable and will remain in our hands as long as the occupation exists,” said Taher Al-Nono, media adviser to the Hamas leadership.

New York Times columnist Bret Stephens wrote an accurate analysis of Hamas governance titled *What a ‘Free Palestine’ actually means*. Imagine if campus protesters were granted their wish tomorrow: Not just "Cease-fire Now" in Gaza but the establishment of a "Free Palestine." How free would that future Palestine be?

This isn't a speculative question.

Palestinians have experienced a degree of self-rule in the West Bank since Yasar Arafat entered Gaza in 1994. Israel evacuated its settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Mahmoud Abbas was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in that same year, and Hamas won legislative elections shortly thereafter.

How much freedom have Palestinians enjoyed since then? They and their allies abroad argue that they have enjoyed no freedom at all, because Israel denied it to them -- not just by refusing to accept a Palestinian state, but also through road closure, land expropriations in the West Bank, an economic blockade of Gaza, and frequent Israeli incursions into Palestinian areas.

There is some truth to this. Israeli settlers have often acted violently against Palestinians while the Israeli government imposed heavy and unequal restrictions on Palestinians, as Stephen’s colleague Megan Stack reported in painful detail. The frequent mistreatment of Palestinians at Israeli checkpoints is a long-standing disgrace.

At the same time, Israeli leaders have repeatedly offered to establish a Palestinian state, but both Arafat and Abbas rejected the offer. Claims regarding the Israeli economic blockade of Gaza tend to overlook a few facts: Gaza also shares a border with Egypt; many goods, including fuel and electricity, flowed from Israel to Gaza up until October 7; much of the international aid meant for Gaza civilian infrastructure was diverted for Hamas's

tunnels, and Hamas used the territory to initiate five wars with Israel in 15 years.

However, there's an equally important dimension to Palestinian politics that is purely domestic. When Abbas was elected as the president of the Palestinian National Authority in 2005, it was for a four-year term. He is now in the 20th year of that term. When Hamas won the 2006 legislative elections, it defeated not only its political rivals in Fatah, but it also overthrew the Palestinian Authority in Gaza after a brief civil war. Then followed a campaign of killing, torture, and terror which quelled all political opposition.

Perhaps the absence of Palestinian democracy should not come as a surprise.

The regime established by Hamas isn't merely autocratic; it resembled the old East Germany, complete with its own version of the Stasi, which spied on, blackmailed, and abused its own citizens.

"Hamas leaders, despite claiming to represent the people of Gaza, would not tolerate even a whiff of dissent," reported *The New York Times's* Adam Rasgon and Ronen Bergman. "Security officials trailed journalists and people they suspected of immoral behaviour. Agents got criticism removed from social media and discussed ways to defame political adversaries. Political protests were viewed as threats to be undermined."

Yet even this description doesn't quite capture the extent of

Hamas's cruelty. Consider its treatment of gay Palestinians -- a point worth emphasizing since "Queers for Palestine" is a slogan sometimes seen at anti-Israel marches.

In 2019, the Palestinian Authority banned an L.G.B.T.Q. rights group's activities on the West Bank, claiming they were "harmful to the higher values and ideals of Palestinian society." In 2016, Hamas tortured and killed one of its own commanders, Mahmoud Ishtiwi, on suspicions of "moral turpitude," -which is code for homosexuality. "Relatives said Mr. Ishtiwi had told them he had been suspended from a ceiling for hours on end, for days in a row," wrote *The New York Times's* Diaa Hadid and Majd Al Wa-heidi.

Would an independent Palestinian state, living alongside Israel, improve its internal governance? Not if Hamas were to take control -- which it almost certainly would if it isn't utterly defeated in the current war. And what if the protesters achieved their larger goal -- that is, a Palestine "from the river to the sea"?

The concluding statement of a conference Hamas held in 2021 revealed its intentions regarding its plans for "liberated" Gaza. Any Jew considered a "fighter" "must be killed"; Jews who flee could either "be left alone" or "prosecuted"; peaceful individuals could either be "integrated or given time to leave." Finally, "educated Jews" with valuable skills "should not be allowed to leave."

In other words, what the 2024-25 campus protesters happily

envision as a utopian, post-Zionist "state for all of its citizens" would, under Hamas, become one in which Jews were killed, exiled, prosecuted, integrated into an Islamist state or pressed into the servitude of a Levantine version of Solzhenitsyn's First Circle. Those same protesters might argue that they don't want a future led by Hamas, but this only raises the question of why they do absolutely nothing to oppose it.

Todays' pro-Palestinian protestors are not the first generation of Western activists who have championed movements that promised liberation in theory but delivered misery and death in practice: The Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia in 1975, celebrated even by mainstream liberal voices. Mao Zedong, arguably the greatest mass murderer of the past century, maintained a significant following on the political left. Likewise, magazines like *The Nation* eulogized Hugo Chávez as a paragon of democracy.

These attitudes are a luxury that those living in safe and free societies can afford. Israelis, whose freedom is rendered more precious by the constant threat to their safety, can be forgiven for thinking differently.

A Hamas postwar Gaza is best described by Matthew Levitt in his May 10, 2024, article in *Foreign Affairs,* titled *What Hamas Wants in Postwar Gaza, The Power to Fight Without the Burden of Governing*. The title encapsulates the situation perfectly.

Failed Gaza Plans

Since the early weeks of the war in Gaza, numerous politicians, diplomats, and analysts have made proposals for how it might end, and who should subsequently govern the territory. Those proposals grew in number and relevance following the cease-fire established in January 2025.

The problem? Each plan contains something unacceptable to either Israel or Hamas, or to the Arab countries that some hope will fund and partially oversee Gaza's future. The fundamental problem, Hamas won't admit that Israel has a right to exist.

"The devil is in the details, and none of the details in these plans make any sense" said Thomas R. Nides, a former United States ambassador to Israel, "Israel and Hamas have fundamentally opposed positions, while parts of the Arab plan are unacceptable to Israel, and vice versa. I'm all for people suggesting new ideas, but it is very hard for anyone to find common ground unless the dynamics change significantly."

The central challenge is that Israel wants a Hamas-free Gaza whereas the group still seeks to retain its military wing, which led the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel that sparked the latest carnage.

Washington officials are promoting a plan prepared by the consultancy The Boston Group that envisions a Dubai-style resort and hi-tech economic free zone built atop Gaza's ruins, after paying most surviving Palestinians to leave.

Trump's original plan may satisfy many Israelis, but it is unacceptable to Hamas and the Arab partners of the United States, who wish to avoid a process that international lawyers deem would constitute a war crime.

As a lawyer with experience in international law, I respectfully disagree. We can evaluate this in court, Trump style, after the fact if that option is pursued.

The Arab alternative announced in Egypt would allow Palestinians to stay in Gaza, while transferring power to a technocratic Palestinian government. But it lacks clarity on how Hamas would be removed from power, and it is contingent upon the creation of a Palestinian state, which a majority of Israelis oppose, and the Israeli government is unlikely to permit.

The outcome is that, despite the barrage of proposals since January 2025, Israelis and Palestinians are no closer to reaching an agreement about Gaza's future than they were at the beginning. This trepidation increases the risk of renewed conflict.

Without a breakthrough, Israel would either have to accept Hamas’s long-term presence -- an outcome considered unacceptable by many ministers in the Israeli government -- or return to war to compel Hamas's compliance, as stated by Ofer Shelah, a former lawmaker and researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a research group in Tel Aviv.

"Given the current situation, we are on a path leading to an

Israeli occupation of Gaza, making Israel responsible for the fate of two million people," Shelah said. That would have enduring repercussions not only for the Palestinians in Gaza, he said, but also for Israel itself, which could become mired in a costly war of attrition.

"It's very good to rebuild Gaza as a riviera – but with its people in it," said Palestinian Authority Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Varsen Aghabekian. She argued it would be a "natural development" for her Palestinian Authority to govern the territory instead of Hamas.

I disagree. I am sceptical about the Palestinian Authority's legitimacy; neither do most Palestinians view it as such, despite its status as, the so-called "legitimate authority."

Not with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas elevating his son Yasser to a top post, moving to shore up his family's position, despite pressure to enact serious reform of the Palestinian national movement.

Yasser Abbas, 64, the president's second son and a wealthy tobacco, construction and real estate tycoon, was elected to the Fatah party's central committee at the Fatah mid-May 2026 conference.

The 22-member body controls the movement and by extension all other official organs of Palestinian politics.

The elder Abbas has held a tight grip on the party and the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the West Bank, since being elected Palestinian Authority president in 2005. No elections for president or the dormant Palestinian parliament have been held in more than two decades, during which time the PA's legitimacy has suffered from mismanagement and corruption and increasing Israeli control of the territories Palestinians seek for their future state.

Fatah "is disconnected from the public, who are not part of this at all," said one person familiar with the party's inner workings. "It's the same circles, maybe with some recalibration, but picking among themselves," according to a *Financial Times* news story on May 15, 2026.

Over the three-day conference in Ramallah, some 2,500 Fatah members, vetted by Abbas, will choose both the central committee and the movement's 80-member revolutionary council.

Tasame Ramadan, 28, elected to Fatah's youth wing, said the younger generation was tired of its leaders and hoped the congress would be a moment for change. "[We] don't want to see the same old faces repeatedly. [We] want people who will be brave in their decisions," she said.

For Yasser and other possible contenders to succeed Mahmoud Abbas as Palestinian leader, the person familiar with Fatah politics added, "the only real strategic threat is national elections."

French Toast

French President Emmanuel Macron has unexpectedly emerged as champion for Palestinian statehood, initiating a diplomatic crusade alongside Arab partners. In a TV interview on April 8, 2025, he expressed his intention for France to take tangible steps toward recognizing a Palestinian state "in the coming months."

I wholeheartedly agree that Palestine must be recognized as a state and its creation realized. However, the question remains: where will it be established and who will govern it? The entities currently recognized in Gaza and the West Bank do not reflect a viable state and they never will.

A day earlier, on April 7, Macron announced that Paris would co-host a United Nations conference on a two-state solution with Saudi Arabia in June. To reinforce his position, Macron has forged strategic partnerships with Riyadh and Cairo. During an April 6 visit to Egypt, he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah, reiterating support for Egypt's post-conflict reconstruction plan for Gaza and its proposed governance by a reformed Palestinian Authority.

Wrong! France got it wrong again when it comes to governance of Palestine! Much like it did with the Sykes-Picot Agreement and its brief governance of Lebanon and Syria.

Gaza A Palestinian State?

Is Gaza truly the ideal place where one would want to build a Palestinian state again?

Gaza should be left to Israel to manage both politically and militarily, to eliminate Hamas, with the rubble and debris. Israel, together with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Europe, and America, can rebuild Gaza and reintegrate it as part of Israel with equity interests held by other sovereign nations. Such a plan could also finance and pay the construction of a modern Palestinian state which the residents of Gaza, the West Bank, and Palestinians everywhere could move to. Income from the sale of properties in Gaza could be used to fund the infrastructure of this new Palestinian state I propose.

The idea that Palestinians in Gaza relocate to a new homeland as proposed by President Trump has merit. However, rather than moving to Jordan, Egypt, South Sudan, or other countries in Africa, it could be a newly created state in what has always been part of the Territorial Province of Palestine.

That would require leaving Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank for the Israelis to resolve. Politically and militarily, as Israel annexes these territories.

The Palestinians in Gaza don't want to be governed by Hamas, so why do others insist on rebuilding a state that perpetuates their destructive existence and governance? Palestinians living in Gaza have had enough of Hamas. The sentiment among Gazans has become clear for the world to see on March 25, 2025. Thousands of Gazans took to the streets for two days of anti-Hamas and end the war demonstrations, chanting "Hamas out!" in a rare show of dissent in the largest show of public anger against the militant

group, which many blame for the war and the destruction of their homes and communities.

Gazans utilized social media to support the protestors, who called for the expulsion of Hamas. Those in favour of Hamas labelled protestors as traitors to the Palestinian state. Protestors held signs saying, “Stop the War,” “We Refuse to Die,” and “The blood of our children is not cheap.”

“People are not demanding a miracle or the impossible. They want to see their children back at school instead of having generations who have forgotten what learning is. They want to sleep in their homes instead of on the streets,” Jameel Abo Saif, from Gaza City, wrote on Facebook “When you ask people to step down from government and power, you are not giving up on [a free] Palestine … but it is time we got some respite.”

Rawan Saleh, a Facebook user in Northern Gaza, took aim at those accusing the protestors of betrayal. “Who are you accusing of treason, idiot? Those who have lived in a tent for more than a year? Those who are hungry?” She wrote. “Those who pay every day their life’s blood as they are displaced from place to place?”

Most of the population has moved multiple times to escape the conflict and save their lives.

The war has become the deadliest in the history of the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

“We are sick of the bombing, killing and displacement,” said Ammar Hassan, a young man from Beit Lahiya who took part in the protest.

“It’s the only party we can affect,” he told the Associated Press. “Protests won’t stop the Israeli occupation, but it can affect Hamas.”

This sentiment was shared by Mohammad Abu Saker, a father of three, who joined the protest. “The protest was not about politics; it was about people’s lives,” he said.

“We want to stop the killing and displacement, no matter the price. We can’t stop Israel from killing us, but we can press Hamas to give concessions.”

Trump’s Gaza plan to transform the area into the “Riviera of the Middle East” has pushed the discussion across the region for alternatives. It’s about time. That is why I am proposing my alternative. It has also united Arab countries in opposition, with Saudi Arabia hosting Arab leaders to discuss alternatives. Hopefully, MBS will consider my alternative proposal.

Non-Starter

I say non-starter, because I believe the proposal adopted by the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation on March 7, 2025, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to endorse the Arab League’s proposal to rebuild Gaza under the future administration of the Palestinian Authority is also a non-starter.

“The emergency ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation adopted the Egyptian plan, which has now become an Arab-Islamic plan,” said Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, a sentiment echoed by his Sudanese counterpart.

A trust fund to rebuild Gaza was also announced, urging the international community to lend their support.

“The next step is for the plan to become an international plan through adoption by the European Union and international parties such as Japan, Russia, China, and others,” Abdelatty said. “This is what we will seek and we have contact with all parties, including the American party.”

Seriously?! Thinking and deciding to let the corrupt and inept Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza again, particularly with Hamas back in control lurking in the background? This could lead to the same outcome witnessed over the past few decades: Hamas controlling Gaza, building more tunnels, and instigating further conflicts.

Egypt has been mentioned as a potential participant in this "consortium." There may be no more certain way to preserve the continuation of a terrorist state in Gaza than to have Egypt once again resume its practice of overseeing tunnels along the border with Israel to smuggle weapons and possibly terrorists back into Gaza, thereby allowing Israel to face renewed attacks again in the future.

Genius!

Beijing Declaration

China can facilitate a two-state diplomatic breakthrough. Its diplomatic skills and capabilities in the Middle East were evident in the Saudi-Iran deal it facilitated in 2023. On the Palestinian front, on July 23, 2024, the rapprochement known as the Beijing Declaration on Palestine was announced. The agreement laid the groundwork for reconciliation among 14 rival Palestinian factions. “The fact that China brought the two most dominant groups and bitter rivals – Fatah and Hamas – to the same table is a feather in the cap for Foreign Minister Wang Yi,” said C. Uday Bhaskar, director of the Society for Policy Studies, an independent think tank based in New Delhi, in his July 29, 2024, opinion that was titled *Middle East Gambit*, published in the *South China Morning Post* on July 29, 2024.

The Beijing Declaration spells out the consensus reached among the rival factions, most notably their commitment to establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, based on relevant U.N. resolutions and ensuring the integrity of Palestinian territories including the West Bank and Gaza. Additionally, it aims to achieve national unity under an umbrella where the Palestinian Liberation Organization would be recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This decision among the factions is an acknowledgment of the PLO’s primacy in Palestinian politics, a stance that Hamas appears willing to accept only grudgingly.

Both proposed resolutions are non-starters. As Commodore Uday aptly says the breakthrough is getting the rival factions to unite, not merely in the resolutions themselves, which, like all others before them, may sound promising but remain hollow and unachievable.

It is important to understand why China supports the Palestinian cause as vociferously as it does. China understands and knows the pain of murder and dispossession. It experienced it first-hand during the Nanjing Massacre in 1937.

More than 35 million Chinese lost their lives in China's war of resistance Against Japanese Aggression. China's legacy of trauma shapes its national identity and foreign policy. It believes the horrors inflicted in the past must never be forgotten while serving as a warning to future generations -- of all nationalities and religions.

In Chinese culture, history is not a static record – "it is a living compass, essential to moral governance and dignity and the preservation of peace," Wei Wei, the former chief correspondent of the Eurasian bureau of China Central Television based in Moscow reminds us in his article titled *Peace forged in suffering*, that was published in the *Sunday Morning Post* on August 3, 2025. "The idea that by using history as a mirror, one can understand the rise and fall of nations, dates back centuries. That past suffering must serve as a warning for future generations is deeply embedded in the Chinese world view."

Another political reality to come to grips with is the competition between the U.S. and China for political and economic global domination. While a great deal of global attention tends to focus on tariffs, Taiwan, and South China Sea, China is also making significant military moves in Egypt. In tune with its goal to seek closer defence ties with Africa and the Middle East, China flew its KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft for the first time overseas during a joint exercise with Egypt. The KJ-500 is a sophisticated radar aircraft equipped with advanced warfare systems and secure data communication links. Its radar dome provides 360-degree coverage and can detect and track airborne and surface targets at an extended range. The People's Liberation Army sent it, along with YU-20 aerial refuelling aircraft and J-10 fighters, to Egypt for the joint military exercises that took place from April 26 to mid-May 2025.

Sun Degang, director of the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, said that the KJ-500's flight over the Red Sea marked "a significant step in China's military modernization" and demonstrated how it could be used for force projection.

"China now possesses not only near-seas defence capabilities but also the capability to conduct long-range escort missions and consular protection operations," Sun remarked, referring to the presence of the KJ-500 in a strategically sensitive area, where China and Iran are allies. The region has seen U.S. aircraft carriers conducting strikes against Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen. Sun noted that China's concerns in the Middle East speaks of Beijing's

desire to enhance its capabilities for protecting its overseas interests.

More significantly, as Collin Koh, a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, said, if China regularly deploys the KJ-500 overseas, “it would likely be aimed at building a detailed threat assessment library or even sharing intelligence with regional partners such as Iran or Russia.” Koh thinks that Beijing has established economically and diplomatically in the region, including its role in brokering the recent Iran-Saudi Arabia détente, makes advancing relations into defence and security cooperation a logical progression.

According to Hong Kong-based military analyst Leung Kwok-leung, the HQ-9B deal and KJ-500 deployment “underscore that China is not merely projecting air power but exporting integrated air defence solutions.” The term “HQ-9B deal” refers to the reported sale and delivery of Chinese HQ-9B air defence missile systems to both Iran and Egypt in 2025. This dual-track cooperation, noted Leung, “clearly signals Beijing’s expanding role in regional security – a development watched closely by Israel and other countries.”

The sale of 48 F-35 stealth fighters to Saudi Arabia was likely part of a deal to keep Beijing out of the region, alongside a strategic bargain that grants the U.S. preferential access to the kingdom’s large reserves of heavy rare earth minerals.

China's Non-Starter Two State Solution

At the High-Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two State Solution, co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia, at the U.N. Headquarters in New York on July 28-30, 2025, China's U.N. envoy Zhai Jun, asserted that the U.N. proposal for the "Two State Solution" is still viable. He also emphasized that China strongly supports the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

That, however, is a non-starter. It has as much chance of coming to fruition and enjoying full sovereignty as Tibet does.

Meanwhile, Taiwan is exacerbating tensions with China by pledging to donate a health facility to an Israeli settlement in the West Bank. The donation is believed to be the first of its kind made by any government directly to an Israeli settlement: most foreign aid and contributions have traditionally been made directly to the Israeli government for discreet distribution.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressed a more realistic outlook, stating that a two-state solution is "farther than ever before." Guterres reaffirmed that the two-state solution remains the only framework rooted in international law, endorsed by the General Assembly, and backed by the international community. But not in Gaza or the West Bank. The U.N. is mistaken again, just as it was in 1948.

Representatives from over 120 countries attended the conference. As of the closing day, 147 of the 193 U.N. member countries had recognized the state of Palestine as a sovereign nation with France, Britain, Canada, Malta and others getting on board at the September 2025 General Assembly meeting. I agree they should! However, not based on the conclusion reached by the U.N., China, France, Saudi Arabia, and others. What they have recognized is a state that exists only on paper, and perhaps in cyberspace.

A reminder of the cliché that: “what is most discussed is most unlikely to happen.”

It is time to get real. A two-state solution is needed in a newly negotiated state within the former province of Palestine that includes Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

China’s Peace Vision

President Xi Jinping has encouraged youths to champion the vision of peace and contribute to peaceful development, fostering a community with a shared future for humanity. He did it in a message delivered to the World Youth Conference for Peace in Beijing on July 29, 2025, where over 3000 young people from more than 130 countries were present. The president noted that 80 years ago, the Chinese people, together with people from around the world, fought bravely and tenaciously to defeat fascism and secured peace. China understands fully, and empathizes with the pain of dispossession, which it had experienced firsthand during the War of Resistance Against

Japanese Aggression, that started in 1931 and resulted in losing more than 35 million Chinese.

The massacre began in December 1937 when Japanese soldiers occupied the then-capital Nanjing and killed more than 300,000. This horror is discussed in detail in my 2005 book *Custom Maid War for New World Disorder*.

For the Chinese this is more than just a tragic chapter in history; it represents a wound that has never been properly acknowledged or atoned for by the Japanese government.

The resistance against the Japanese left deep wounds. But it also gave rise to a new modern China. Victory in 1945 marked the end of China's "century of humiliation," a period characterized by colonization and invasion. It instilled in the Chinese people a renewed sense of purpose and unity, laying the foundation for a nation determined never to be subjugated again, like the Zionists who established the nation-state of Israel.

This is something Palestinians should seriously consider.

"Peace begins with remembrance – and remembrance begins with the truth."

Beijing Declaration II

Beijing Declaration II, that will hopefully take place someday, should represent a consensus of all Palestinian representative organizations worldwide to determine the form of government

they envision. A country governed by a coalition formed by the dominant Palestinian global community, along with political organizations in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel and throughout the world, finally, agreeing on a mutually acceptable form of governance. It is A CHALLENGE I know, but it is achievable with serious effort from all concerned parties. After all, Palestine, throughout its history, has been colonized, dominated, and controlled by foreign empires. Dominant historical powers, Iran, Türkiye, Britain, France, Russia, and the U.S., continue to exert political influence in Palestine today. They can continue to do so, alongside China; by harnessing their collective knowledge about humanity and merging political philosophies regarding future growth and survival – temporarily setting aside religious considerations.

China serves as the catalyst for Palestinian factional consensus, which is no small achievement. “The key to the Palestinian reconciliation process is to bolster confidence, keep to the right direction, and make incremental progress,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

Beijing is a venue acceptable to all parties involved. China’s efforts and support in pursuing a Palestinian solution are focused on what Palestinians desire, rather than what Israel and America dictate. Unlike the U.S., China is viewed as trustworthy, and neutral by all Arab countries, even despite its well-known relationship with Israel. China is Israel’s second largest trading partner after the U.S.

Historical Relations

China and Arab states have a long history of friendly relations. Since the days of Mao Zedong, China has been one of the staunchest allies of the Palestinian cause, providing arms and training to factions resisting Israel.

November 20, 2023, marked the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Palestine.

The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, founded in 2004, aims to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the two sides for the purpose of promoting development and peace.

For many years, China has been the largest trading partner of Arab countries and has signed cooperation agreements on the Belt and Road Initiative with all 22 Arab countries and the Arab League.

On May 17, 2025, President Xi Jinping sent a message to Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid, the rotating chairperson of the Council of Heads of the League of Arab States, extending his congratulations on the convening of the 34th Arab League Summit in Baghdad, Iraq.

Xi emphasized that he and Arab leaders had agreed to work toward building a China-Arab community with a shared future for the new era during the inaugural China-Arab States held in December 2022. He expressed his belief that the second summit,

scheduled to take place in China in 2026, will mark another significant milestone in the history of China-Arab relations.

China, the world's largest oil importer, relies on the Middle East for about half of its oil imports. Saudi Arabia serves as the main supplier in the region, while Iraq, Oman, Kuwait and the UAE are among its other key suppliers. This dependency is further intensified by the role of the Gulf states in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

China is adopting innovative strategies to mitigate this reliance on the Middle East such as bartering armaments for oil and gas. The country has increased arms sales to the Gulf, including Dongfeng ballistic missiles and Wing Loong bomber drones, and has promoted joint weapons production. Notably, in August 2023, China and the UAE conducted their first joint air drill.

China has reaped considerable economic benefits in the Middle East, from fuel imports from Saudi Arabia and Iran to the acquisition of advanced technology from Israel. China is Israel's top trading partner after the U.S.

During the last decade of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, Beijing maintained a reserved stance on supporting the use of force by Palestinians, often calling on both sides of the conflict to shun violence.

However, this position shifted with China's statements at the International Court of Justice in February 2024, when China

appeared to signal a more assertive posture, featuring stronger support for Palestinians and firmer criticism of Israel.

“In pursuit of the right of self-determination, Palestinian people’s use of force to resist foreign oppression and complete the establishment of an independent state is [an] inalienable right well founded in international law,” stated Ma Xinmin, foreign ministry legal adviser.

Some analysts view Ma’s comments as a significant shift in Beijing’s stance, drawing parallels to the Maoist anti-colonial rhetoric of the 1960s. Others argue that these similarities are overblown, noting China’s position remains centred on a two-state solution.

“The Chinese discourse at the ICJ marked a departure, with China reverting to its historical position,” said Razan Shawamreh, a Palestinian academic specializing in Chinese foreign policy at Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta in Northern Cyprus.

While China cannot “resolve” the conflict, as a superpower and a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, it could “do more to mitigate” it. “The Palestinian sense of marginalization and vulnerability, stemming from U.S. policies that support Israel’s actions has prompted them to seek alternative sources of support and solidarity, and they find it in China,” said Shawamreh. Beijing’s endorsement of the Palestinian armed struggle, she added, represented an unanticipated shift.

Shawamreh said Beijing's initial response to the war in Gaza emphasized a non-partisan condemnation of all violence – a position that Israel criticized as unclear and ambiguous – but that stance has since evolved. She noted that China has consistently condemned the use of force by both sides in the Israeli Palestinian conflict since 1989. That was the year Beijing put forward its first peace proposal addressing the issue. In statements about Gaza made between 2008 and 2021, Beijing condemned all use of military force.

In 2003, Beijing even called on Yasser Arafat, then president of the Palestinian Authority, to take all necessary measures to halt Palestinian military operations against Israel, Shawamreh said.

Beijing's invocation of Maoist rhetoric regarding the fight against colonialism through armed struggle has been viewed by Palestinians as "significant and required of a major power that has historically supported the Palestinian armed struggle with both financial and military aid," Shawamreh added.

After decades of a balanced approach to Middle East diplomacy, China's unambiguous support for the Palestinian cause in the conflict in Gaza has increased Beijing's leverage with Arab nations and Iran, but at what cost to its relationship with Israel post the war?

China did not condemn the October 7 Hamas massacre – a major concern for Israel – and Beijing's diplomatic efforts have largely focused on the Palestinian side and Arab countries.

The widening gap in China-Israel relations was highlighted in a heated exchange, between an Israeli military representative and Chinese scholar, at the Xiangshan forum in Beijing on September 17, 2025.

In a video that went viral, Yan Xuetong, dean of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University, confronted Elad Shoshan, military attaché with the Israeli embassy in Beijing, who claimed the reason for the conflict was that “the terror organization Hamas is still holding our hostages.”

“Your military people should [have shot] the terrorists. Not the children! Not the women! When [you] shot the women and the children, you lost the legitimacy to carry out any actions [for] that reason,” Yan said in the video.

Addressing a bipartisan delegation of 250 U.S. state lawmakers in Jerusalem in early September 2025, Netanyahu said “a few states” were engaging in an online “siege” of Israel. “One is China, and the other is Qatar,” he said.

Former U.S. defence adviser Jesse Marks, a non-resident fellow at the Stimson Center’s China program, noted that historically Beijing has balanced relationships with both Israelis and Palestinians.

“However, since October 7, China’s diplomatic engagements have leaned towards a pro-Arab stance, straining relations with Israel,” he said.

“China may still be open to rebuilding ties with Israel if there is constructive dialogue about the future of the Palestinian state. Given the current conditions, significant state-level rapprochement between China and Israel seems unlikely.”

Galia Lavi, deputy director of the Diane and Guilford Glazer Israel-China Policy Center at Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies, predicted that Israel would continue aligning itself with Washington while distancing itself further from Beijing.

“Israel looks to secure its standing in the area in terms of security and the economy. China cannot guarantee Israel’s security and may even undermine it by supporting Israel’s enemies. That leaves us with the economy,” she explained.

“There is only room for cooperation with China where the economy does not conflict with security.”

Lavi further emphasized that the U.S. has consistently proven to be “Israel’s best friend,” and that “Israel will find it difficult to refuse the Americans’ demands – especially when it comes to China.

Fan Hongda, a professor at Shanghai International Studies University’s Middle East Studies Institute, observed that the deterioration of China-Israel relations began earlier, as Israel found itself caught up in the intensifying rivalry between Beijing and Washington.

“Frankly speaking, China and Israel’s ‘honeymoon phase’ has long gone,” he said, adding that the prevailing distrust would persist beyond the current conflict, with “no favourable conditions in sight for a significant warmth.”

Despite this, Fan believes China’s ambition to expand its influence and position itself as an alternative to the U.S. in the Middle East make it inevitable that for Beijing to eventually extend an olive branch to Israel.

China is positioning itself as a viable alternative to the U.S. in mediating the Palestinian conflict, actively challenging the Western-led international order. Furthermore, China has grown closer to Iran – a long-standing ally of the Palestinians that has supported militant groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and others, with funding, training, and intelligence. This alliance has intensified as both Beijing and Tehran are under pressure from U.S. sanctions.

Sercan Caliskan, a researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, a Turkish think-tank, stated “In contrast to the U.S.-Israel alliance, the China-Iran alliance emerges as the other side of the struggle in the Middle East – in particular, Russian participation in the latter is of utmost concern to the U.S,”. Caliskan said.

China, Iran, and Russia concluded a joint maritime exercise in the Gulf of Oman in March 2024.

“If China wishes to contribute to the resolution of the Palestinian

issue, it must cooperate with Israel. Without Israel's endorsement, any effort to resolve the Palestinian issue would be futile," said Fan.

Another political reality is that, despite Palestinians' "strong belief" that Beijing could serve as a preferable mediator over Washington, Shawamreh argues that China "lacks the actual capability [to] contribute intensively" to their cause, given Washington's "total dominance over the conflict."

To date, the political objectives of the U.S. and China in the Middle East have been vastly different, as they support rival factions and pursue divergent geopolitical interests. However, if they step outside of their confrontational mindsets, they will recognize that they share common interests in the region: security, stability, and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

In 1945, American jurist and political scientist Hans Morgenthau wrote, "Neither science nor ethics nor politics can resolve the conflict between politics and ethics into harmony. We have no choice between power and the common good. To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment." On February 9 and 29, 2024, Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, director of the Society for Policy Studies, an independent think-tank based in New Delhi, published two opinion pieces in the *South China Morning Post*, titled *Douse those*

fires and *Beijing has little to fear,* respectively, in which he urged Beijing to reflect on the essence of Morgenthau's advice – the delicate balance of judgment, courage, and wisdom that spans both political and moral realms, even as it strives for harmonious solutions.

He concluded, "This is a worthy goal to be pursued, for the quest may yet seed new possibilities to manage a fragmented world that increasingly lacks fraternity and empathy." Furthermore, he added, "It would be disappointing if China chose to punch well below its economic weight and technological clout and fail to realize its profound commitment to 'indivisible security.' This crisis is an opportune moment for Beijing to douse the fires."

I concur with Li Yang's editorial opinion published on July 25, 2025 *China Daily Hong Kong Edition* which asserted that the *"two-state solution"* is the only viable resolution to the crisis. The word "headline" being the operative word as his actual solution returns us to the same old Gaza, and the West Bank. "The Palestine question is the core of the Middle East issue, and the implementation of the 'two-state solution' is the only viable way out of the Palestinian question."

The international system that ensures peaceful co-existence relies on opposing aggressors and punishing crimes. Protests targeting Israel more than Hamas – or vice versa – impede justice, erode the international order and undermine the pursuit of true and lasting peace. This is why, as I mentioned earlier, we must reject cancel culture.

“Despite the bumpy road ahead toward the two-state solution, hope may still grow as long as all the parties work toward the same goal,” thinks Su Xiaohui, an associate research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies.

Two millennia ago, China and the Arab world established a bridge through the Silk Road facilitating trade, cultural, and scientific exchanges. The Prophet Mohammed encouraged his followers to seek knowledge as far as China. “History is repeating itself somewhat, with new plots and undercurrents,” James David Spellman, principal of Strategic Communications, reminds us.

Trump’s Breakthrough Historical Gaza Peace Plan

President Trump’s 20-point peace plan for Gaza, proposed on September 29, 2025, and subsequently accepted by both the Israeli cabinet and Hamas leadership, marked a significant step in the right direction. The agreement established a ceasefire -- a temporary pause in hostility -- that facilitated the return of Israeli hostages and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

“It’s clear that this plan is unrealistic,” 39-year-old Ibrahim Joudeh said from a shelter in al-Mawasi in south Gaza.

“It’s drafted with conditions that the U.S. and Israel know Hamas will never accept.”

The plan’s most contentious demands -- that Hamas disarm, leave Gaza, and relinquish any role in governing Palestine – have always been a “red line” for Hamas. Intriguingly, while en route

to Israel on Air Force One, President Trump acknowledged that the U.S. was aware that Hamas was “rearming in Gaza” and claimed the group had been given U.S. approval to do so “for a period of time.” Trump also stated that the U.S. was not opposed to Hamas’s continued governance of Gaza. “They’ve been open about it and we gave them approval for a period of time,” he said. “There is still hope that Hamas will do what is right. If they do not, an end to Hamas will be FAST, FURIOUS, & BRUTAL,” he posted on *Truth Social* a few days later.

In a televised address on Sunday October 12, 2025, before Trump’s triumphant arrival in Israel to address the Knesset and to celebrate the release of the 20 Israeli hostages, Netanyahu stated that the country’s military campaign “is not over.” Israeli military chief Eyal Zamir echoed this, saying the military “will continue to act in order to shape a security reality that ensures the Gaza Strip no longer poses a threat to the State of Israel and its civilians,” *Xinhua* reported.

The second phase of the Trump plan, aimed at securing a permanent end to the fighting, Hamas’ disarmament, a full Israeli withdrawal, and the deployment of an international stabilization force. A delusional goal.

Daily skirmishes between Israel and Hamas in violation of the Gaza truce started immediately after the initial exchange of hostages and prisoners. Hamas accused Israel of flouting the ceasefire by killing at least 24 people in shootings a day after the truce went into effect and said a list of such violations was

handed over to mediators. “The occupying state is working day and night to undermine the agreement through its violations on the ground,” the Hamas spokesman said.

Hamas survives under the plan and breaches one of the terms of the first phase of the plan on the first day of implementation. It only released four of the 28 deceased hostages’ bodies it had agreed to release. The forum representing the families of hostages called this a “blatant breach” and demanded the plan’s suspension until all bodies were returned. Netanyahu reaffirmed his determination to “secure the return of all hostages,” and his defence minister warned the military would restart the war if Hamas failed to comply.

Within days of Trump’s “peace” visit and celebrations in Israel and Egypt, Israel launched airstrikes against snipers and missile launchers in Gaza who had opened fire on its soldiers and military equipment in Gaza that killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded numerous others. Hamas paraded in urban areas vacated by Israeli forces, demonstrating its power through public executions and armed clashes with local clans resisting its rule. In Gaza, masked black-clad Hamas gunmen arrived at Nasser Hospital where a stage and chairs had been laid out to welcome returning Palestinian prisoners. Their appearance underscored the difficulty of assuaging Israeli concerns about the Islamist militant group’s continued hold over Gaza where it has ruled since 2007.

“Hamas is sending a message: ‘We are here. We are the sole

authority in Gaza',” said Tamer Qarmont, a Palestinian political analyst and academic from Gaza, who is based in Qatar.

Hamas began executing Palestinians demanding its removal, labelling them “gang members,” and disarming rival groups during a security crackdown launched after Israeli forces pulled back under the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Hamas officials publicly acknowledged that they were also launching operations against people they deemed to be lawbreakers or collaborators with Israel.

Trump addressed the issue at the time, saying Hamas had “taken out a couple of gangs that were very, very bad,” adding, “That didn't bother me very much, to be honest.”

Netanyahu confirmed in June 2025 that Israel was “using clans in Gaza” that were fighting Hamas on its behalf. Israeli officials later confirmed helping to arm one operated by Yasser Abu Shabab in eastern Rafah. Shabab was notorious for ransacking humanitarian aid from U.N. convoys. He also set up a militia in an Israeli-controlled zone inside Gaza, saying this zone would be peaceful and free of Hamas.

“This adventure was only ever going to end one way,” said Michael Milshtein, a former senior Israeli intelligence officer. “We armed and supported these militias, and now Hamas is coming for its revenge.”

If Hamas attacks any of these militias affiliated with Israel, it

would pose a “heavy dilemma” for the Israeli authorities, who will have to decide whether to defend these allies, thus breaking the ceasefire, or allow them to be killed or arrested, Milshtein said.

Abu Shabab died on December 4, 2025, in an Israeli hospital.

Despite two years of relentless bombing, Hamas emerged with chilling defiance broadcasting Israel’s retreat and that the enclave is back in the militant’s control. They looked well fed, physically fit, with clean new pickup trucks, assault rifles, and clean uniforms. “New cars, new gear, new equipment, new uniforms, printing presses with massive slogans,” said Ibrahim Dalalsha, director of the Horizon Center for Political Studies in Ramallah. “What has Israel been bombing for two years?”

Board of Peace

Trump’s plan proposed a complex “transitional” governance structure, including an international “Board of Peace” chaired by himself, with the former British prime minister Tony Blair, acting as a de facto governor, and the deployment of a “temporary international stabilization force.” This board would govern Gaza until it determines the Palestinian Authority had reformed sufficiently to take over. Tony Blair was dropped from consideration following objections from Arab and Moslem states.

President Trump is chairman for life of the Board of Peace. The Executive Board includes Secretary of State Marco Rubio, special envoy Steve Witkoff, and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner. It is unclear whether they serve as representatives of the U.S. or were

placed in their personal capacity.

The draft charter asks countries to contribute at least $1 billion to secure a permanent seat on the board, money Trump will control.

The Board of Peace is exploring the idea of setting up a stablecoin – a cryptocurrency the value of which is pegged to a mainstream currency, such as the U.S. dollar -- for Gaza as part of efforts to rebuild Gaza and its economy.

The total cost for the reconstruction of Gaza is estimated at up to $70 billion, and this process is not scheduled to begin until Hamas has disarmed – something it is showing little sign of doing.

Some nations worry the board could enjoy a mandate that encompasses much more than Gaza's reconstruction and could set the stage for an alternative or rival international body to the U.N.

Trump confirmed their concern when he suggested the Board of Peace could supplant an ineffective United Nations. "The U.N. just hasn't been very helpful. I'm a big fan of the U.N. potential, but it has never lived up to its potential," Trump said at the White House. He wished "we didn't need a board of peace" but "with all the wars I settled, the United Nations never helped me on one war."

U.N. spokesman Farhan Haj told reporters on January 19, 2026, that the U.N. Security Council had authorized the Board of Peace only for its work on Gaza.

Indonesia, and Gulf states, Egypt and Türkiye pledged support for a multinational force, and funding for reconstruction, promising to push the Palestinian Authority into genuine reform, so that it can govern Gaza again.

“The likes of Egypt, Indonesia and the Gulf states are not going to sign up for a counterinsurgency operation that would involve taking casualties, or suppressing Hamas on behalf of Israel,” Gideon Rachman pointed out in his October 14, 2025, opinion piece in the *Financial Times*.

Indonesia, and some countries have echoed Rachman, and said their soldiers would be there only to maintain the cease-fire in Gaza and have pushed back on suggestions that they should get involved in confiscating weapons from Hamas militants.

The Peace Plan the Indonesian president, Prabowo Subianto, signed and agreed to serve on the board, and send Indonesian troops to Gaza, drew criticism in Jakarta. Officials of the country with the most Muslims in the world, more than 250 million, dampened the criticism by emphasizing that Indonesia was still non-aligned and would continue to fight for a free Palestine.

On March 7, 2026, the executive office of the president issued a statement analysing the 20-point Gaza peace framework proposed by the board. It concluded that the board offered a “practical and implementable pathway” for Palestinian independence.

There was “consensus” among Palestinians for international troops being in Gaza said Husam Badran, a senior Hamas official

based in Qatar, if they were there to monitor and maintain the cease-fire, and not get involved in disarmament. “Palestinians can’t accept any force – regardless of citizenship – attacking citizens, entering their homes and trying to find their personal weapons,” he added.

The interim authority was criticized for resembling the failed Coalition Provisional Authority established in Iraq after Saddam Hussein was toppled.

Islamic Jihad, the militant group that joined Hamas in the October 7 attack, and fought alongside Hamas in Gaza, slammed the peace plan as “a formula for igniting the region.”

The plan proposes to build trust by “effectively creating a U.N.-approved mandate for putting Gaza under the supervision of an international governing body and military force with Arab approval and input from the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank,” said columnist Thomas Friedman in his October 1, 2025, column In *The New York Times International Edition*.

“The logic is that until and unless Palestinians in Gaza can build and demonstrate the capacity to govern there, it is impossible to talk about a two-state solution,” noted Friedman.

“They want to impose their own peace,” Umm Mohammed, a history teacher who sheltered with her family in Gaza City, told the *Associated Press*. “In fact, this is not a peace plan. It’s a surrender plan. It returns us to times of colonialism. The references to Palestinian statehood someday, the encouragement that Palestinians remain in Gaza and the flat rejection of Israeli

annexation of Gaza “completely shatter the far right’s dreams,” Nadav Ayal, a columnist for *Yediot Ahronoth*, a centrist Israeli newspaper wrote.

Foreign ministers of eight Arab and Muslim-majority countries, offered, in a joint statement, a qualified embrace of the plan, thus affirming their readiness to cooperate with it. They made it clear, however, that they still insisted on a “full Israeli withdrawal” and on the establishment of “a just peace based on the two-state solution, under which Gaza is fully integrated with the West Bank in a Palestinian state.” The countries included Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, which appeared to ignore Netanyahu’s U.N. address a few days earlier to Western leaders who had recognized Palestinian statehood in Gaza and the West Bank.

“Israel will not allow you to shove a terror state down our throats. We will not commit national suicide because you don’t have the guts to face down a hostile media and antisemitic mobs demanding Israel’s blood.”

Hamas leadership in Qatar were given three or four days to accept the terms of the peace plan and Qatari authorities said they were ready to press for a truce in Gaza and the West Bank following an Israeli apology for its unprecedented strike targeting Hamas leaders in their Qatari bunker in Doha on September 9, 2025.

Netanyahu apologized; Hamas released the remaining hostages but did not agree to disarm.

While President Trump declared in Israel on October 3, 2025, “The

skies are calm, the guns are silent, the sirens are still, and the sun rises on a Holy Land that is finally at peace," the reality was that without the establishment of a Palestinian state there could be no lasting peace.

"Listening to President Trump telling Israelis and Arabs that they were on a 'historic dawn of a new Middle East' was like watching Trump selling his bankers on a plan to build the biggest, the most beautiful, most amazing hotel in the world on a toxic waste dump," noted Thomas L. Friedman in his column in *The New York Times International Edition* on October 17, 2025. On the one hand, he added, you tell yourself "This man must be crazy. Doesn't he know the history of this place? You can't build a hotel there! And on the other hand, a voice in the back of your head whispers: What if he can bring it off?"

While mentioning Palestinian statehood, the plan promises only a vague pathway to that target.

The history of the region suggests that working out peace accords to end conflicts, "is a little like cleaning up after volcanic eruptions: There is a certainty it will happen again. It is just hard to know when, or how ferociously," noted David Sanger.

Netanyahu and Hamas have had a toxic co-dependency relationship for over two decades, which goes back to the Israeli election of 1996 that followed the assas- sination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a religious extremist opposed to the Oslo Accords. Polls gave Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres, a wide lead. However, Hamas was determined to thwart the Oslo process that Peres helped deliver. Netanyahu also opposed Oslo, so

Hamas wanted him to win. To tacitly discredit Peres and help Netanyahu, Hamas embarked on a suicide campaign that killed more than 60 Israelis in nine days. It worked; hardliner Netanyahu defeated the dovish Peres.

This co-dependency continued, with Netanyahu allowing Qatar to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to Hamas – stuffed in bags – to keep it viable in Gaza. At the same time, he has also done everything possible to weaken the Palestinian Authority, which cooperates with Israeli security services to control terrorism in the West Bank.

The Hamas-Netanyahu co-dependency, financed by Qatar, must end for there to be peace in Gaza.

During Trump's appearance on October 13, at the "peace summit" convened by the U.S. and Egypt in Sharm el-Sheikh, he said talks on the second phase of the peace plan had already begun and insisted that his deal represented the "first steps" toward peace.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi thanked Trump for his efforts in brokering regional peace. He described the deal as the region's "last hope for peace." Sisi also affirmed that a two-state solution was the "only way" to consolidate peace and said Palestinians had the right to live in an independent state side by side with Israelis. I agree wholeheartedly. The independent Palestinian state should be established on land partially donated by Egypt on the banks of the Red Sea under the terms of the plan I propose -- Not in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Trump plan promises that the U.S. will establish dialogue

between Israel and the Palestinians to “agree on a political horizon for peaceful and prosperous co-existence.”

The challenge, said Aaron David Miller, a former U.S State Department analyst and negotiator, knowing how little the U.S. government knows about negotiating with Israelis and Palestinians: “With two combatants pledged to each other’s destruction, the pitfalls of an ambiguous plan, much of which remains to be negotiated, are all too obvious,”. He noted that the plan seems to offer few details about how both sides move from one phase to another; how compliance will be monitored and by whom; and what happens if one side fails to carry out its obligations. A valid question that Miller raises in his October 15, 2025, opinion piece in *The New York Tims International Editions* is why Hamas agreed to the ceasefire and the release of the hostages.

“It could be that the military commanders of Hamas on the ground who are responsible for making decisions were under pressure from the external leadership to accept the deal and ensure the political survival of the organization. At the same time, the group may well have determined that keeping the hostages was an increasing liability because it allowed Israel to continue comprehensive military operations and pressure Hamas without end.” Miller goes on to add that Arab states “almost certainly made this argument.”

Türkiye and Qatar threatening withdrawal of their support of Hamas unless the agreement they signed was not an insignificant factor, while a weakened and isolated Iran, Hamas’s main patron, was evidently unwilling and unable to improve the group’s

fortunes.

“Almost every point in the president’s initiative contains a universe of complexity that needs to be negotiated. At its core, the plan, like its predecessors over the past two years, contains a fundamental impasse: how to reconcile the conflicting objectives of Hamas and Israel,” said Miller.

That conundrum leaves the plan in limbo, especially when there is no money to pay for anything. Bishara Bahbah, the Palestinian-U.S. businessman who helped negotiate with Hamas for the Trump administration, said the committee had yet to start work for lack of funding, adding: “They have no tools, no means. It’s really dismal.”

The plan is unclear exactly who would be on the Board of Peace, or the Palestinian committee, and how they would shape Gaza’s post-war governance without Hamas.

I echo the *Financial Times* editorial board’s opinion that Trump “deserves credit” for the plan and that “Washington needs to remain engaged and to understand that the plan is only a first tentative step towards tackling a decades-long crisis.”

Over the long term, the Board of Peace thinks the war could accelerate a resolution of the disarmament issue by removing Iranian influence, which had long supported Hamas financially and militarily. It was reported by a Palestinian official that Hamas was due to hold talks with Egyptian, Qatari and Turkish mediators on the day the war erupted, but the meeting was scrapped and no new date had been set.

The Board of Peace has held talks with Dubai's DP World over Gaza reconstruction, managing supply chains, and infrastructure projects, building ports, and warehousing tracking systems and security. All of which can much more easily and cost-effectively be built in the Palestinian state I propose, not in Gaza.

These are positive first steps in the direction of the two-state solution I put forth in this chapter.

Qatar A World-Class Con Artist

The Israeli air assault on Hamas leadership in Doha, Qatar, has drawn widespread ire and condemnation from many world leaders, including President Trump. Israel was accused of violating both international law and Qatar's sovereignty.

As a lawyer and former member of the International Law Society, I was astonished by unfounded claims that the attack represented a "blatant violation of international law," "a violation of sovereignty," or a "flagrant breach of international law."

Although Qatar is not at war with Israel and could, in theory, be considered a "neutral power" under the *Hague Convention V*, thus immune from attack, it is not neutral because it provides sustained and integral support for Hamas's combat operations against Israel from its capital.

Under Articles 2,3, and 4 of the *Hague Convention V*, a "neutral power" may not allow anyone on its territory to direct combat operations, run command and control centers, or even to

communicate electronically with combatants.

For years, Hamas's political leadership has engaged in all those prohibited activities within the luxurious surroundings of an upscale neighbourhood in Doha financed by Qatar. In other words, it is Qatar that has been violating international law for years: before, during, and after the October 7 massacre.

Hoteliers, who managed five-to six-star hotels in Doha and now run hotels in Hong Kong and Shanghai, have shared their experiences of Qatar with me over a couple of glasses of wine, as my generation does offline, face-to-face, encompassing a mix of Buddhist, Christian, Jew, and Muslim perspectives. These are real personal stories, not driven by social media cancel culture or FAKE NEWS, about the lavish lifestyles of Hamas leaders in Doha.

Their experiences can be distilled to: "They, like the Taliban, live in mansions in the fanciest neighbourhoods near the hotel; are chauffeured with their bodyguards around town in top of the class limousines, probably bullet-proof, wine and dine in the hotels' most expensive restaurants with Qatari royalty," while the Palestinian people they were elected to represent and protect in Gaza are being bombed and starved to death.

Their self-serving radical promotion and successful proliferation of extreme Islam, funded by their energy revenues, not only replace the Saudi arrogance and shortsightedness that Saudi Arabia's MBS recognized and dispelled, but along with Iran, their brother in arms, perpetuates the pitiful and disastrous plight of

the Palestinians.
Hamas is the internationally designated terror organization that carried out the October 7 massacre of Israelis and took hostages to Gaza before Israel attacked Hamas leadership in Doha. Israel maintains an unequivocal right to self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, a right that cannot be undermined by Hamas simply by directing its combat operations from a third country.

In an article titled *Warnings to President Trump on the Future of Gaza*, that Gatestone Institute published on July 11, 2025, Robert Johnson discusses warnings sent to President Trump regarding potential implications of Qatar as a “partner” in relation to the future of the Gaza Strip. It pointed out that Mohammed al-Rumaihi, Qatar's former ambassador to the United States and former minister of municipality and environment, noted on July 5, 2025, that he is concerned about "keep[ing] the Palestinian cause alive – and its people," while criticizing Israel’s actions. "No major capital—neither Beijing, nor Moscow, nor Washington—has labelled the Gaza campaign as 'systematic killing,' let alone moved to punish Israel under Chapter VII of the UN Charter," al-Rumaihi noted. His stance on the conflict is quite clear, yet Qatar itself as a so-called “neutral negotiator” is seeking to foster peace in Gaza. What al-Rumaihi seems to imply, as Johnson points out, is that ongoing dialogue may merely serve to prolong the status quo and delay the possibility of any "wrong" outcomes.

After all, Qatar has invested roughly $1.8 billion in Hamas since

the group was elected to govern the Gaza Strip in 2006. Qatar's leaders, through Al Jazeera broadcasting network act as a prominent mouthpiece for the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, which has spawned various radical Islamic terrorist groups. Their motto states: "Allah is our objective; the Prophet is our leader; the Quran is our law; Jihad is our way; dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope."

Given this context, it is understandable that Qatar feels compelled to protect its client, Hamas, as it successfully did with another beneficiary, the Taliban in Afghanistan. Qatar has "helpfully" mediated discussions between the Taliban and the US – ensuring the Taliban's success during these negotiations. The U.S. withdrawal under President Joe Biden facilitated the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. They swiftly rolled back all the advancements made, particularly regarding women's rights, that the US took 20 years to establish.

Meetings in 2025 were underway to create a possible "consortium" of Arab and Muslim nations to govern the Gaza Strip – essentially leaving in place many of the same radical Islamic adherents of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an offshoot. This arrangement is likely intended to ensure that Israel can be attacked repeatedly in the future to facilitate its extinction.

The extremely tempting short-term view supposes that Qatar's involvement in Gaza could save the U.S. much of the expense associated with rebuilding the enclave, while also including a

sweetheart deal: enormous contracts, presumably funded by Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds, for some of the real estate developers, including the Trump Organization, with President Trump negotiating the arrangement.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Qatar is trying to buy President Trump’s influence with a gift of a Boeing 747-8. Qatar knows how to buy influence -- even two of Netanyahu’s advisers were on Qatar’s payroll and arrested for “unlawful ties to Qatar.”

Unfortunately, the long-term outlook appears grim for both Israel and the U.S. Both countries could soon find themselves once again caught in the middle of an inevitable escalation as Qatar, the world's largest co-sponsor of terrorism and Hamas's long-term benefactor, protects its clients in the Gaza Strip as devotedly as it once protected the Taliban in Afghanistan.

It is no secret that Qatar has been a major funder of effectively every Islamic terrorist group, including ISIS, Al Qaeda, Hamas, and the Taliban. According to Udi Levy, a former senior official of Israel's Mossad spy agency who dealt with economic warfare against terrorist organizations, "Qatar is at the top of funding terrorism worldwide, even more than Iran."

Qatar's strategy seems to involve supporting radical Islamic terrorist groups and, then offering to "mediate" between them and countries trying to persuade them to abandon terrorism. Qatar is hardly a neutral negotiator. According to the Middle East

Media and Research Institute (MEMRI): "Qatar has sustained the Taliban terrorist organization for years, hosted their leadership in Doha, and enabled them to take over Afghanistan's democratically elected secular government of Ashraf Ghani in 2021, during which 13 American soldiers were killed."

American forces at Al-Udeid Air Base -- the largest US military base in the Middle East – essentially acts as Qatar's private air force. U.S. officials have been misled into believing that Qatar is doing the U.S. a favour by allowing its troops to be stationed there. According to John Mirisch, chief policy officer of the Israeli American Civic Action Network, Qatar's leaders are acutely aware that if the US ever were to relocate its forces from Qatar, it is Qatar that would have "everything to lose."

The U.S. should revoke Qatar's status as a non-NATO ally status, which never should have been granted in the first place. Furthermore, there is merit in the consideration of imposing sanctions on Qatar, which could involve freezing Qatari assets and applying personal sanctions on Qatar's royal family, including those who own opulent properties in Bel Air; and it should consider shutting down and moving CENTCOM's Al-Udeid airbase to Bahrain, or a future Palestinian state.

It is imperative to prevent Qatar, Egypt, or any Arab state from exerting influence over Gaza.

Palestinians Wake Up and Unite

What is essential now is for Palestinians worldwide to unite and

advocate for the establishment and global recognition of a Palestinian state that is independent of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. This new nation's government should be composed of experienced officials, who are the least incorruptible and have minimal association with terrorist organizations. "You have explained every flavour of why this is sort of impossible, like getting a camel through the eye of a needle," Ken Tiven told me during an editorial review of this chapter.

I agree it is challenging; however, Palestinian Arabs must try to follow the example set by Palestinian Jews and Zionists often referred to as European-Colonizing-Zionists, in their pursuit of establishing a state.

Palestinians and the Arab world should acknowledge that Israel has considerably increased its presence in the Gaza Strip since the resurgence of conflict against Hamas. Israel now controls over 50 percent of the territory, significantly constricting the land available to Palestinians.

Zionists have moved beyond the deniers of statehood; similarly, Palestinians worldwide should distance themselves from Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, and their supporters who chant "River to The Sea."

Palestinian Arabs, both Christian and Muslim, must reject Hamas and the Palestinian Authority if they aspire to establish an independent Palestinian state.

The proposed Palestinian state deserves serious consideration as it presents the best opportunity to create a viable modern nation that can peacefully coexist with Israel. This shift can end the present nightmare and bring about a hopeful vision of political reality. It is time to end the needless pain and suffering caused by a conflict rooted in outdated religious and political ideologies that have little relevance in today's interconnected world, which is increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence.

We need to shift our focus toward human intelligence and understanding.

Israel serves as a model that Palestinians globally should consider emulating, adopting practices that are suitable for their new state. This perspective is eloquently articulated by Dan Senor and Saul Singer in their book *The Genius of Israel*.

Political differences can be healthy when expressed and debated. After all, the scriptures of all religions and political philosophies, advocate for tolerance, understanding, non-violence, and -- barring exceptions -- peace and love. However, when these discussions turn toxic, as they currently do in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and across the Americas, Europe, Asia, and China, they lead to self-destruction on both local and global scales.

Who truly benefits from this turmoil? Not the people, whether Palestinians or others. Isn't it time for a paradigm shift – a fundamental change in our thinking and mindset?

Palestinians of all beliefs, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds, no matter where they are, should recognize the importance of adopting the model demonstrated by their Israeli counterparts. Continuing the conflict among themselves and against Israel only perpetuates cycles of self-destruction.

I often wonder why Palestinian Jews -- Zionists who built Israel and continue to do so today -- and their Palestinian Christian and Muslim counterparts cannot cooperate and coexist peacefully, as civilized beings. Why can't they grant each other the space and honour they deserve, respect each other, and work and play together instead of fighting? After all, it is a better, healthier, and sensible option.

We should strive to establish a state governed by a system that recognizes Israel as a neighbouring state with which it desires to live in peace. Ending senseless wars is crucial along with educating its citizens through a robust educational and health care system, supported both by a benevolent government and law-abiding citizens. Initially external assistance should be provided until the newly established State of Palestine matures and learns to self-govern in accordance with local, regional, global laws, and becomes a respected member of the world community of nations.

This approach aims to prevent the emergence of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, or other extreme groups within Palestine.

Israel is Two States in One

Zionists and ultra-conservative religious extremists in Israel envision a unified Israel that extends from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, encompassing both the West Bank and Gaza. As a result, the lives of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are being forcibly uprooted, resulting in a state of statelessness within Israel, where they are subject to different laws, regulations, and courts than their Israeli counterparts.

In 2022, Prime Minister Netanyahu articulated the foundational principles of his ultra-conservative coalition government. “The Jewish people,” he said “have an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel. The government will promote and develop the settlement of all parts of the Land of Israel,” specifically including the West Bank in this vision.

Hagai El-Ad, the former executive director of human rights group B’Tselem and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, who lives in Jerusalem, wrote in *The New York Times* on September 18, 2024, an article titled *In Israel, the reality of one state*, in which he detailed the two distinct realities that Palestinians and Israelis experience within Israel.

As someone conceived in Jerusalem, Palestine, in 1946, I speak as a Palestinian. I embrace the diverse cultures of both Arabs and non-Arabs, having cherished the companionship of both cats and dogs over the years while observing their interactions and play, I can’t stop asking myself why Palestinians and Israelis cannot do

the same.

Throughout centuries, Palestine has witnessed numerous regime changes and shifting borders. Why not acknowledge these historical and current political realities, accept the situation, and focus on practical solutions? This approach could spare future generations of Palestinians, both Arab and Jewish, from unnecessary suffering caused by entrenched convictions. While these beliefs may be rooted in truth, they do not address the challenge of establishing a Palestinian state; instead, they may condemn future generations to misery, suffering, and even death.

The Solution

The objective and goal of a Palestinian state can be achieved if efforts are directed toward the many Arab countries, encouraging them to contribute land for Palestinians, and name it Palestine, rather than relegating Palestinians to the status of refugees in a "foreign land," when in fact they are refugees in camps built by Arabs in Palestine. Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza, and West Bank are all in historical Palestine.

Israel should engage with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria, to join in collectively offering land for a new Palestinian state, ideally with access to a harbour on the Red Sea as illustrated on the map at the beginning of this chapter.

These Arab countries are individually and collectively responsible, with Israel for the plight of Palestinian refugees today. It is inaccurate to place the blame solely on Israel. Like Israel, these

Arab countries were part of historical Palestine and, through military failures and misguided political strategies, have allowed Israel to emerge as a state at the expense of the Palestinians.

To make the plight of Palestinians worse, the hollow political platitudes and endless “Arab Resolutions” advocating for a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank ring insincere. It is time to abandon these empty promises and seek realistic alternatives.

The countries contributing land to the Palestinian state, all gain and benefit dramatically more politically and economically, locally, regionally, and globally, than their perceived territorial loss. A peaceful, economically vibrant and flourishing Palestine nestled on the current barren borders of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel, can become the regional economic engine driving and uniting the historical province of Palestine, creating a peaceful common Palestinian market and union. Belgium is a European model that can be modified and adjusted for Palestine.

Carved Out Nations

It is well-known that the borders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Israel were established by the British and French for their own political and economic interests. Therefore, there is no reason these borders cannot be redrawn to accommodate a Palestinian state. A realistic solution must be found to prevent future conflicts like those witnessed in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen, and following the events of October 7, 2023, Israel’s 12-day war with Iran, and U.S.-Israel Iran

War 2026.

Palestine has the potential to be a Riviera in the Middle East – ideally located on the Red Sea rather than on the Mediterranean.

It can become a nation-state where Palestinians from Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel willingly relocate from their uninhabitable homes and crime-ridden communities to a peaceful, modern country they can proudly call home.

Arab leaders, particularly Palestinian leaders, along with all Palestinians, must take responsibility for their historical political hypocrisy, corruption, and failures that have hindered the establishment of their own state. It is time to make a Palestinian state a reality once and for all!

Modern Arabia, currently carved up into Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel, should join forces to collectively contribute land and resources to establish a new Palestinian state. This state should be designed as a state-of-the art country that Palestinians will gladly want to inhabit and help develop into a peaceful homeland, coexisting alongside Israel. It should be a Palestinian state where future generations can grow up and be educated without the fears of war, starvation, destruction, and death.

Saudi Arabia and Israel must take the lead in creating this Palestinian state, based on the terms the new peace treaty they will sign as part of the Abraham Accords will lay down. Additional land can also be contributed by Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt.

Once the territory of the new Palestinian state is defined and its borders are agreed upon by all parties, a master plan for the country can be developed. Fundraising and construction can commence, supported by local donors of land and money, as well as financial backing from other Arab Gulf countries, Iran, the U.S., Europe, an various international financial institutions, foundations, charities, and philanthropic organizations -- and they will respond.

Saudi Arabia has the potential to take the lead along with Qatar and Syria. Building upon the $6 billion investment commitment made by Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Syria in July 2025, one of the requirements could be Syria's donation of land for the establishment of a new Palestinian state, which will also receive partial funding from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

China's Belt and Road Initiative Office in Hong Kong can also play a development and financing role, especially now that Hong Kong and Riyadh signed a collaboration agreement in September 2025. The agreement aims to utilize each party's platforms for investment, tendering, and fundraising.

Saudi Real Estate and Stock Market Benefits

Saudi Arabia can replicate the success of Dubai in attracting foreign property investors, particularly those from Hong Kong and mainland China, especially following the kingdom's relaxation of home-buying rules for foreigners. This comes at a time when a Palestinian state is being established on land

donated by Saudi Arabia, which complements the rest of the Palestinian state on land donated by Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

“Chinese companies are actively engaged in projects across Saudi Arabia and the local expat Chinese population is growing,” said Kashif Ansari co-founder and CEO of real estate broker Juwai IQI.

Between 2005 and June 2024, China invested US$ 53.85 billion in infrastructure projects in Saudi Arabia, according to data cited in January 2025 by the Carnegie Foundation.

Under the Saudi Vision 2030 plan, the country is modernizing and diversifying its economy to reduce reliance on oil, which includes numerous mega infrastructure projects.

“Heavy investment in infrastructure has been a key factor, including the new metro service in the capital and the opening of King Salman Park, which is said to be the largest urban park in the world,” said Jihad Elabbas, a senior client adviser in the Middle East and North Africa at migration consultancy Henley and Partners.

Saudi Arabia’s property market is projected to nearly double in size to US$133 billion by 2033, according to Patricia Casaburi, CEO of Global Citizen Solutions, a boutique investment migration consultancy.

Imagine how much more development could flourish if the

kingdom were to anchor part of the new Palestinian state and co-managed its development.

The failure of the 2025 market listings to match the stellar performance of 2023 and 2024 has cast doubts about the kingdom's efforts to promote economic diversification.

According to research firms ADCB and MEED Projects, the value of new projects awarded in the first half of 2025 tumbled by 60 percent compared to a year earlier.

The kingdom's vaunted Public Investment Fund is running low on cash for new investments and withdrawing from earlier commitments.

In response to declining oil prices, Saudi Arabia has leaned heavily on capital markets, emerging as the largest sovereign issuer of external bonds in the emerging markets in 2024, and likely again in 2025.

Among the more than 90 stock markets worldwide, only those in Jamaica, Denmark, Lebanon, and Argentina have experienced a greater decline in U.S. dollar terms in 2025 than Saudi Arabia.

Notably, five of the 10 worst performers in MSCI's benchmark index of over 1,200 emerging market stocks are Saudi companies.

Despite these challenges, the kingdom is still a long way from experiencing debt stress. As of the end of 2024, the central bank

reported net foreign assets of US$415 billion, and Saudi Arabia's debt remained among the lowest as a share of GDP worldwide.

There is no better opportunity for Saudi Arabia to grow its stock exchange, develop its real estate and capital markets, and reshape its global image than by becoming a cornerstone land donor and developer responsible for establishing a Palestinian state – not in Gaza and the West Bank -- but by contributing a portion of its barren deserts in the northwest with Israel. This initiative could be undertaken in collaboration with other neighbouring Arab countries that should be willing to participate.

Saudi Arabia paused normalization with Israel, pending progress toward Palestinian statehood. The time is long overdue for both parties to work collaboratively towards this objective and sign a bilateral peace and economic cooperation treaty -- and the Abraham Accords.

Re-Enactment of the Black Stone Compromise

The Black Stone Compromise, negotiated by the Prophet Muhammad among the feuding Quraysh clans of Mecca in 605 after a violent storm destroyed the Kaaba, solidified his standing as the *Amin* the trustworthy one. Perhaps, it can be re-enacted.

Muhammad placed the Black Stone in the center of a cloak and had the rival Quraysh members join hands to lift the cloak together, gently returning the Stone in its cradle-resting place.

This ceremony can be symbolically re-enacted today with a

contemporary cast of characters that the Prophet Mohammad himself would approve of: MBS representing Saudi Arabia, the Prime Minister of Israel, Presidents of Egypt and Iran, all holding the four corners of the Palestinian flag. Meanwhile, the leaders of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria would support each side of the flag.

The President of Türkiye, as the former Ottoman ruler of Palestine and steadfast supporter of the Palestinian cause, would officiate the ceremony, completing the unfinished business of the Ottoman Empire: – the establishment of the State of Palestine.

Sunni and Shia Muslims, Jews and Christians, re-birthing provincial Palestine -- an independent nation.

Announcing the establishment of the State of Palestine, at its Capitol in Jerusalem.

> ***A new modern state-of-the-art country that is geographically located in and carved out of historical Palestine. Territory, that includes part of Jerusalem, Israel, Northwestern Saudi Arabia, Southern Iraq and Syria, Western Jordan, part of Egypt's Western Sinai, giving Palestine a deep Red Sea port. A new country without Hamas or Palestinian Authority.***

A country run by a government formed by the global Palestinian community, along with political organizations in Gaza and the

West Bank, has finally reached an agreement on a form of governance that Palestinians can accept.

This is certainly a challenge, but it is achievable with serious effort from all parties concerned. After all, Palestine, throughout its history, has faced colonization, domination, and control by foreign empires. Dominant historical powers such as Iran, Türkiye, Britain, France, and the U.S., continue to play political roles in Palestine today. Bring together their collective knowledge about humanity and blend it with political philosophy regarding future growth and survival, in the spirit and language of the political philosophies of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The security of Palestine should be planned, structured, and managed by Israel, Jordan, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia until it is handed over to Palestinian security forces.

America, China, and Iran could play advisory security roles for….

PERMANENT NEIGHBOURLY PEACE



"We must all hang together,
Or we shall hang separately."
Benjamin Franklin



Prologue

Israel

Patriotism is supporting your country all of the time and your government when it deserves it
-- Mark Twain –
The New York Times

Israel Today

Israel and its people often stand apart from the rest of the world, and are misunderstood by many, including a significant number of Jews. Following, the outbreak of the Gaza War in 2023, Israel was not just misunderstood, but it was despised and even hated due to the considerable loss of life, injuries, and destruction inflicted on Palestinians in Gaza.

In their book *The Genius of Israel*, Dan Senor and Saul Singer provide a clear and accessible explanation of Israeli behaviour. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in gaining insight into the complexities of Israeli society, and I will summarize and quote it extensively here.

The book focuses on a crucial aspect of Israel that is essential for understanding its dynamism: the extraordinary resilience of Israeli society.

Despite the constant stress of attacks and warfare, Israel ranks among the happiest, healthiest, and youngest countries, boasting

one of the highest birth rates in the world. In the 2023 *World Happiness Report*, Israel ranked fourth in world happiness, and in 2019, it was ninth in health by the *World Health Organization*, with a life expectancy of 82.6 years. In 2019, Israel's median age was 29, compared to Europe's 41.3. By 2050, Israel is projected to be 20 years younger than Italy, Spain, and Germany.

Israelis instinctively recognize that a key reason for their high ranking in U.N. happiness metrics is their sense of not being alone. They prioritize relationships, nurturing large, close-knit families, maintaining strong friendship networks, and cultivating a sense of national belonging forged through shared sacrifice.

Human relationships are fundamental to happiness. A lack of connection can lead to societal and individual distress. Sharon Abramowitz, an anthropologist, succinctly put it, "We are an anti-human society. Our fundamental desire, as human beings, is to be close to others, and our society does not allow for that."

Despite the daily challenges, divisions, and struggles, Israeli society offers more of what humans truly need.

In an era when people in many countries experience a diminishing sense of connection, belonging, and hope for the future, Israelis seem to have found a way to nurture these vital aspects. A way to be modern and traditional, to be religious and secular, and to embrace rapid technological change and build tight intergenerational families. While pursuing individual ambition and prosperity, they also maintain a cultural ethos that

emphasizes the importance of serving larger communities – both the nation and the world.

While the rest of the world ages by 2050, Israel will continue to open playgrounds and schools. “Clearly, a country with more strollers than walkers have a different feel, energy, and excitement about the future,” Senor and Singer correctly remind us.

The average Israeli family has three to four children compared to an average of just one in much of the Western world – an astonishing statistic for a country constantly threatened by embargos, isolation, destruction, and conflict.

Israeli author Yossi Klein Halevi is a keen observer of the Israeli psyche and has a sharp eye for the cultural currents. “Israel works on the basis of two essential social units,” Halevi says. “The family, which remains very strong here, partly because we’re a small country, and you can’t get away from your parents, and the Jewish family values that remain very powerful here. And the other extremely powerful social network in some ways even stronger than the family is the *hevre,* which functions as almost a supra-family.”

A good example of this is my high school classmates – we maintain a WhatsApp *hevre* group.

In 2001, two Israelis established a national website called *Hevre,* designed to emphasize group identity over individualism. It

featured five categories for users to connect: *Hevre from high school, Hevre from university, Hevre from youth groups, Hevre from the army, and Hevre from work.*

Sderot

Sderot was established in 1951, one mile away from Israel's border with the Gaza Strip, which Egypt ruled at the time. In the wake of the 1948 War of Independence, in which Israel lost one percent of its population, the state was flooded with refugees from Europe and the Arab world, doubling its population within three years. The government sent many of these refugees to "transit camps" that were squalid collections of tents. Sderot began as such a camp, with 80 families, mostly new immigrants from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. By 1961, North African immigrants, mostly from Morocco, comprised almost nine-tenths of Sderot's population. Starting in the 1990s, Sderot's population doubled as the town absorbed another wave of immigrants, this time from the Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

Israelis take for granted that Sderot's diverse ethnic makeup is somehow normal. Extreme multiculturalism has defined the country from day one. Two out of every three Israelis are immigrants, the children of immigrants, or grandchildren of immigrants. It is not unusual for young people to have parents from different countries so that three languages are spoken in the family, especially with the grandparents, whose Hebrew might not be fluent.

As a result of the 1967 Six-Day War, the Palestinian population in

Gaza went from living under Egyptian occupation to Israeli occupation. For a decade or so after the war, Israelis from Sderot would go to Gaza to shop, hang out at coffee shops, and enjoy musical performances. The traffic went both ways; Gaza musicians performed alongside Israeli musicians in Sderot's small theatres and nightclubs. This natural flow of people allowed the largely North African population of Sderot to reconnect with the Arabic culture in which many of them had been raised.

The calm of Sderot did not last. In late 1987, the first Palestinian Intifada erupted. In 2000, following the collapse of the peace negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, mediated by U.S. President Bill Clinton, Arafat launched a wave of suicide bombings in buses and cafes in Israeli cities. Then, on April 16, 2001, the first Qassam rockets were fired from Gaza into Sderot.

In 2005, then prime minister, Ariel Sharon, unilaterally withdrew Israel from Gaza and dismantled the small Jewish settlements there. Less than two years later, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, leading to a major escalation of attacks. Within six months of the Hamas takeover, over six thousand rockets had fallen on Sderot. The bombardment began to take its toll. About one-quarter of the population fled the town, leaving primarily those who could not afford to relocate. In 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, and 2023, Israel launched large-scale military operations into Gaza to suppress the terrorist groups responsible for the rocket attacks.

Sderot, prior to 1987, exemplified how Israelis and Palestinians

could coexist peacefully together through a two-state solution.

Loud Religious Minority

When Israel was established in 1948, there were only a few thousand local Haredim-- the Hebrew term for the tight-knit, strictly observant Orthodox Jewish communities – out of a local Jewish population of six hundred thousand. The Haredim do not identify as Zionists; they believe that only God can restore the Jewish people to their land. To them, Zionism is anathema, reflecting secular nationalism rather than Jewish law. In 1937, Agudath Israel, an organization founded by Haredi leaders, declared that it "rejects outright any attempt at despoiling the Land of Israel of its sanctity and considers the proposal to establish a secular Jewish state in Palestine as a hazard to the lofty role of the Jewish People as a holy nation."

To secure their support for declaring a Jewish state, David Ben Gurion, Israel's founding prime Minister, negotiated what became known as the "status quo." This was when many Jewish elements of the new state, such as the ban on public transportation during the Sabbath, were established. Most significantly, the Haredim were exempted from compulsory military service provided they were full-time yeshiva students.

Ben Gurion viewed the Haredim as a dying remnant of shtetl life in Europe, symbolizing everything the new state's socialist pioneers sought to move beyond: weakness, backwardness, insularity and oppression. In the new state of Israel, Jews would recreate themselves as tanned fighters and farmers, draining swamps and transforming the desert into arable land.

The pioneers were passionately dedicated to creating a “new Jew,” who would, as they envisioned, be free from the oppression of both Judaism and hostile rulers.

The rejection of religion was not merely a by-product of state-building; it lay at the heart of Israel’s founding ethos and endured as long as Ben-Gurion’s Labor Party wielded power. For the founding generation, secularism served as a guiding principle to and formed a core aspect of their identity.

But the Haredim community did not diminish as expected. Against all odds, they reversed the tide. They established a world where family and religious education were paramount, characterized by arranged marriages and adherence to Jewish law under the guidance of esteemed rabbinic leaders. The Haredim thrived.

Some political analysts view the Haredim as a significant threat to Israel’s future. Dan Ben-David, a prominent Israeli economist and founder of the Shoresh Institution for Socioeconomic Research -- one of the country’s most cited think tanks – articulates his concern. It is not the extremely high fertility rate among the Haredim – 6.7 children per woman in 2021 – that troubles him. Rather, it is the fact that nearly half of Haredi men don’t work at all, while the rest often work in low paying jobs, leading to high levels of poverty within the community.

Ben David criticizes Israel’s overall education system, pointing

out that standardized test scores for non-Haredi Israelis in math and English fall below the OECD average. The situation in the Haredi and Arab sectors is even more dire.

Almost none of the Haredi teach secular subjects, such as math and English, and most don't take the standardized tests. In 2015, the Haredi and Arab population made up 44 percent of the 0-14 age group. Projections cited by Ben-David, suggest that by 2065, if present trends persist, these two poorly educated sectors will represent a staggering 64 percent of Israel's youth. The economic contributions of these groups are further compromised by the low workforce participation of Haredi men and Arab women.

The rapid growth of the Haredi population is escalating the financial burden on non-Haredi Israelis, who must subsidize the Haredim community through welfare and other payments.

Eugene Kandel, a former chairman of the Israeli government's National Economic Council, warns that the economy's high-tech growth engine may falter if workers begin to flee due to the rising taxes required to support a burgeoning low-productivity population.

Ben-David asserts that it is the responsibility of non-Haredi Jews to "save Israel's future." He urges, "We need to wake up while we can still do something about it. There is no reason why a still-large majority should continue to finance a minority insisting on a lifestyle jeopardizing its own future as well as ours.
The massive protests against the government's judicial reform in

2023 may appear to be centered around a constitutional debate, but they were, a volcanic eruption of resentments that had been building for decades. While the primary chant of the protestors was “Democracy!” another recurring theme was “IT’s over.” The “it” was understood implicitly -- non-Haredi Jews felt a profound unfairness in shouldering the economic and military burdens of the nation while the Haredim did not.

“It’s not just an argument about constitutional law,” said Micah Goodman, an Israeli philosopher, recognized as one of the 50 most influential Jews by the *Jerusalem Post* in 2017. “It’s a clash of emotions. One tribe is terrified that Israel is becoming a place they won’t want to live in,” he explained referring to the protestors’ fear of the growing power of the Haredi and far-right-wing political parties. “And the other tribe feels like for the past 75 years, Israel wasn’t the country we should have lived in, it should have been different,” highlighting their belief that liberal elites had, regardless of party control, maintaining hegemony over the state since its founding. The deeper conflict, Goodman argued, lies in the tension “past versus future, frustration versus anxiety.”

In fairness to Trump, American Jews and Jews worldwide, have no idea how much Israel has internally changed, how big and powerful the ultra-Orthodox and religious-settler-nationalist community in Israel has grown and how much it sees Gaza as a religious war.

“Bibi is actually their pawn, not the real player,” explained Avrum

Burg, a former speaker of the Knesset, referring to the religious-nationalist-settler right in Israel. “You tell them Israel could have peace with Saudi Arabia, and they will shrug and tell you that they are waiting for the Messiah. You tell them they could have peace with Syria, and they will tell you the Jewish people already own Syria – it’s part of Greater Israel. You tell them about international law and, they will tell you biblical law. You will tell them Hamas, they will tell you Amalek (a biblical enemy of the Israelites).

Military service is compulsory for most Jewish Israelis, both men and women. The exemption for the ultra-Orthodox, to allow them to pursue their religious studies, has long been resented by the rest of the Israeli population. But the war in Gaza has turned an irritant into a political crisis that is deepening divisions in Israeli society and imperilling Netanyahu’s fragile coalition.

In July 2025, two ultra-Orthodox parties crucial to Netanyahu’s majority in parliament withdrew from the government after it did not pass legislation exempting the ultra-Orthodox from military service. Their move could lead to the collapse of the prime minister’s coalition and early elections.

“The war has pushed everything to an extreme,” said Nechumi Yaffe, a professor of public policy at Tel Aviv University who is ultra-Orthodox. Secular Israelis are asking, she said, “Why should our children die and your children are just sitting drinking coffee and learning?”

To magnify the divide, the most extreme ultra-Orthodox sects are anti-Zionists who do not recognize the state of Israel because, they say, it was founded by secular Jews and not for a divine purpose upon the arrival of the Messiah.

Ultra-Orthodox Israelis fiercely oppose the ending of their military exemption even though the Supreme Court ruled in 2024 they must serve and ordered the military to begin drafting ultra-Orthodox men. Especially in 2025 when the military says it urgently needs 12,000 new recruits for a force exhausted by Gaza. More than 450 soldiers have been killed in the enclave, suicides are on the rise and fewer Israeli reservists, the bulk of the fighters, are reporting for duty. Many have served for more than 400 days since the war began.

The military says that 80,000 ultra-Orthodox men between the ages of 18 and 24 are eligible for service and that almost all were sent draft notices. Only 2,940 had enlisted by 2025. Most of them will not be ready to go to war until after six months of basic training.

The future promises more strains. The number of ultra-orthodox in Israel has exploded to about one million in 2025 – roughly 13 percent of the population --from 40,000 in 1948. Some 22 percent of 6-year-olds were Haredi in 2024. By 2035, their numbers are projected to reach 30 percent. Any exemption for them is seen as unsustainable.

The ultra-Orthodox are unmoved. “It may be that the

circumstances have changed, and the times have changed," Mott Babchik, the powerful political adviser to one of the ultra-Orthodox parties that left the government said. "But the basic agreement between the Haredim and the state of Israel remains the same."

Rabbi Tamir Granot's son Captain Amital, 24, was killed by a Hezbollah missile on the border with Lebanon in 2023. The following March, Rabbi Ganot delivered an impassioned speech, widely shared on YouTube, calling on the ultra-Orthodox to serve and share the pain.

"Was Amital wrong?" his father asked. "Is it for naught that he now lies under clumps of earth beneath Mount Herzl, he and all his comrades who lie there with him, and other cemeteries around Israel? Should they have stayed in yeshiva and left the army and self-sacrifice to secularists only?"

Rabbi Granot is part of a different stream of Orthodox Judaism, religious Zionism, which is an integral part of Israeli society and sends large numbers of its yeshiva students to the military. He recounted how he went to the homes of ultra-Orthodox religious leaders after his son's death and tried to reason with them. He told them, he said, that he had students at his yeshiva – he called them his children -- and, like his son, they knew that they had to serve.

He posed the question to the Haredi leaders: "So why are your children better than them? Is their blood redder than our

blood?"

The leaders agreed privately but could not say so publicly because they will "lose their status in society and everyone else from the leadership would say they are not rabbis."

The real divide in Israel today, concluded Burg, who teaches about relations between religion and state, is not between conservatives and progressives. "It's between the Jewish tribe and the democratic tribe." And the Jewish tribe is now winning. If Zionism was originally the triumph of secular nationalism over religious Judaism, what is happening today is the resurgence of religious-nationalist Judaism over democracy."

The Arab Israeli Concern

As of 2022, just over one in five Israelis are Arab, the majority of whom are Muslim. Israeli Arabs are Israeli citizens. They have the right to vote and run for public office in local and national elections; some serve on the Supreme Court, while others hold senior positions in business, medicine, the creative arts, journalism, and academia. They have access to the same healthcare system as Israeli Jews. They are not drafted into the Israeli military, they may volunteer, and a small number do.

While Israeli Arabs enjoy equal political rights and a growing middle class, they also face high poverty and crime rates. According to the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, six out of ten members of Jerusalem's Arab population live in poverty, a rate more than double that of their Jewish counterparts. At an

age when young Israelis are serving in the military and starting their careers, about one third of Arab men and half of Arab women are unemployed.

In 2021, nearly three-quarters of all murders in the country occurred within the Arab community, which represents only one-fifth of the population. In one Arab town, masked men from rival gangs have become so common that residents built a stone wall to divide the town into two.

A senior police official admitted to *Haaretz*, "We have lost control over the street in Arab communities." Kamal Ryan, who heads an Islamic anti-violence organization, told the *New Yorker* that 60,000 Arab men work for the mob as drug dealers, loan sharks, and collectors of protection money.

Local officials are also victims of extortion and violence. In 2020, 15 Arab council heads were targeted with gunfire or Molotov cocktails. Crime affects every part of society; young couples turned away by banks are forced to seek mortgages on the black market. Moreover, the housing they can access may be illegal because the Israeli government has issued very few construction permits in Arab areas, despite the growing population.

In May 2021, for the first time in decades, Israeli Arabs rioted in cities with both Jewish and Arab populations, such as Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa, and Lod. At the same time, Hamas launched rockets into Israel, resulting in a major Israeli military operation into Gaza. This internal conflict was seen as a major deterioration in

Jewish Arab relations. Though day-to-day interactions between Jews and Arabs seemed to go back to normal, the potential for recurrence remains.

Despite these troubling factors, there are also ongoing efforts and desires on both the Jewish and Arab sides for greater integration. In 2020, a record high 65 percent of Israeli Arabs said they were proud to be Israelis. This level was a record high since the question was first surveyed in 2003, and more than double the low mark of 31 percent on 2007. A 2020 poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute found that eight out of ten Arab citizens want to be integral members of Israeli society.

From time to time, Israel has formed “unity” governments, comprising coalitions composed of the main parties from both the left and right blocs. The coalition formed by Naftali Bennet and Yair Lapid in 2021 spanned the entire political spectrum. Bennet, leader of the Yamina “Right” in Hebrew, a party with only six seats, became prime minister. Although Bennet had aligned himself with the right bloc, his coalition, negotiated by Yair Lapid, the leader of the center-left party, included factions from the far left. Perhaps, most significantly, this coalition marked a historic first: the inclusion of an Arab party, the United Arab List, led by Mansour Abbas.

Until that point, Arab parties had focused on fighting against Israel’s legitimacy as a state and were often seen as sympathizing with terrorist groups, such as Hamas, which were attacking Israel. This stance made Israeli Arab political parties so controversial

that no Jewish Israeli party was willing to include them in a coalition. The United Arab List broke from this tradition. It set aside the Palestinian Israeli conflict to focus on bettering the lives of the Arab minority in Israel. Abbas went further in openly accepting Israel than any Arab leader before him. “Israel was born as a Jewish state, and so it will remain,” Abbas said at a media conference in Hebrew, reiterating the same sentiment in Arabic. “The question is not about the state’s identity – but what the status of Arab citizens will be in it,” he added.

By bringing his party into the ruling coalition, Abbas made history. He wasn’t just a junior member of the coalition; he emerged as a kingmaker. The United Arab List held only four seats in the Knesset, but those were the pivotal seats that could tip the balance, determining which major bloc – Netanyahu or anti-Netanyahu – could form a government.

The fulcrum of politics in Israel from the turn of the 21st century through 2025 has not been dominated by any one issue – but by one man – Benjamin Netanyahu – Israel’s longest serving prime minister. Opposition to him was all that united the smorgasbord of parties in Bennet’s coalition. This coalition now faces the challenge of being rebuilt to secure Israel’s future survival and continued growth.

Wars of the Israelis

“The Jewish people had some form of self-rule over ancient Israel for about 12 centuries. During that time Jews fought each other in 12 civil wars, on average one every four generations,” says

Amotz Asa-El, a veteran journalist and author of *The Jewish March of Folly*, a book tracing Jewish political leadership back to ancient times.

The most infamous and catastrophic of the 12 civil wars occurred in 70CE as the Roman army stood at the gates of Jerusalem. Inside the city walls, the Jewish factions were turning on each other. While four Roman legions were advancing toward Jerusalem, these factions in Jerusalem destroyed each other's food supplies, so that by the time the Romans arrived the Jews trapped within the city had already started to die of starvation. Flavius Josephus, a former Jewish general who defected to the Roman side, documented these tragic events in his eyewitness account, *The Jewish War*. He remarked, "The real tragedy was that the different Jewish factions fighting each other over who would lead the war against the Romans and bring the final redemption were responsible for the destruction of so many Jewish lives, both before and during the Roman siege of Jerusalem."

Ten centuries earlier, the Jewish kingdom led by Kings Saul, David, and Solomon fractured upon Solomon's death. The Northern Kingdom consisted of 10 tribes while the Southern Kingdom was made up of two, Judah and Benjamin. The war between these kingdoms went on for centuries, culminating in the dissolution of the Northern Kingdom, known in history as the famous "lost tribes." The Jews owe their name to the surviving Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. In Hebrew, Jew is *yehudi*, which means someone from Yehuda, the tribe of Judah.

The path to modern Israel has been fraught with bitter disputes. As previously mentioned, the Zionist movement barely survived its inception at the first Zionist Congress in 1897, because so few Jews supported the idea. Zionism was opposed by religious Jews who believed that only God could restore the Jewish people to their homeland, while numerous secular Jews feared that the national movement would jeopardize their already precarious position in their respective countries. Even the Zionists were divided with different visions and tactics.

During Israel's War of Independence, as the nascent state fought against five invading Arab armies, infighting among Jews persisted. On June 20, 1948, the *Altalena*, a ship carrying arms to the Irgun, a Jewish militia that had been fighting to expel the British from the region, attempted to land on the beach of Tel Aviv. At the time, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion had just declared that all pre-state militias were to be integrated into the Hagana to form the new Israel Defence Forces. Negotiations between David Ben Gurion and Irgun leader Menachem Begin regarding the fate of the weapons on the ship ultimately fell apart.

Fearing that Begin would use the weapons to set up a "state within a state," Ben-Gurion convened an emergency cabinet meeting which resulted in a decisive order: "Arrest Begin … and sink the ship." The order was executed leading to Hagana soldiers bombarding the ship with cannon and machine-gun fire. Sixteen Irgun soldiers and three Hagana soldiers died during the bombardment and subsequent clashes on the beaches.

In 1952, as Israel was still in its infancy and struggling to absorb hundreds of thousands of refugees from Europe and Arab countries, Ben Gurion's government negotiated a reparations agreement with West Germany regarding the Holocaust. Menachem Begin, now the leader of the Herut (Freedom) party, opposed the move, claiming that it was tantamount to a pardon for Nazi crimes. Addressing a crowd of some 15,000 people, at a time when Israel's population was only 1,630,000, he gave a fiery speech in which he attacked the government and called for its violent overthrow. Proportionately, this would be akin to three million people protesting in the U.S.

The protestors marched toward the Knesset, and some managed to breach police roadblocks. They threw stones into the plenum hall, injuring several lawmakers.

In 1982, Israel was back at war once again. In response to incessant attacks from the north, Prime Minister Menachem Begin ordered the invasion of Lebanon to push the PLO out of striking distance of Israel's northern border. This conflict marked the first time the Israeli public became deeply divided.

Protests in Tel Aviv against the war, calling for the resignation of Begin and Defence Minister Ariel Sharon, were by far the largest in Israel's history. About 350,000 people took to the streets in a country with a population of just four million.

A few months later, a right-wing activist lobbed a grenade into a left-wing protest, killing Emil Grunzweig and wounding nine

others. Grunzweig was a teacher and had served as a paratrooper in the Six- Day War, the Yom Kippur War and the Lebanon War.

In 1993, a significant turning point occurred not with a war, but with a peace agreement – the Oslo Accords. During this period, it was illegal for an Israeli to meet with the PLO, which was viewed as the main terrorist organization responsible for firing missiles and planting bombs to kill Israelis. The fact that the government had been negotiating with Arafat and subsequently signed a peace agreement shocked many Israelis.

However, the initial sense of hope for peace was short-lived. Within a few months, Palestinian terrorist groups opposed to the Oslo Accords – namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad – carried out suicide bombings in Israel. Tension were rising in Israel to rallies both for and against the Oslo Accords. On November 4, 1995, as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was leaving the stage after addressing the largest pro-Oslo rally in Tel Aviv, he was shot twice in the back and killed by Yigal Amir, a right-wing Jewish extremist. He came from a religious family, had studied in religious schools, and wore a kippah, the traditional head covering of religious Jews.

The left blamed not only Amir but also the entire right-wing camp that supported Netanyahu and opposed the Oslo Accords. At her husband's funeral, the widowed Leah Rabin refused to shake Netanyahu's hand.

Another time when it seemed that tensions between Israelis might become violent was when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pushed through his “disengagement” plan from Gaza and the West Bank in 2005. Sharon, who during his whole career had long been a champion of the settlement movement in the West Bank and Gaza ordered a unilateral withdrawal from both territories and the dismantling of all Jewish settlements. The sense of betrayal felt within the settlement movement was profound as thousands of settlers were forcibly removed from their homes, often with soldiers weeping alongside them.

These events are just some of the deeper disputes, often sparking large protests, that have plagued Israeli politics before the 2022 to 2023 protests objecting to the Netanyahu government’s attempt to neutralize the Supreme Court, which later morphed to end the war in Gaza and free the hostages.

For most of the two years of the war in Gaza, television stations in Israel paid little attention to suffering in Gaza, giving viewers a steady stream of stories about Israeli heroism, the agony of hostage families and the death of soldiers in combat.

That changed a few months before Trump’s September 2025 ceasefire plan that freed the Israeli hostages.

“During most of the war, the Israeli media really reported very little on the suffering in Gaza or the hunger or destruction,” said Raviv Drucker, a prominent Israeli anchor.

"If they did report it, it's only from the Israeli perspective," he explained, in terms of how effective it was in destroying Hamas.

"It's not just truly caring about the situation in Gaza, but also from an Israeli perspective, are we acting correctly in a way that serves the aims of the war?" said Eram Amsalem, a communications professor at Israel's Hebrew University.

Some newscasters who highlighted the humanitarian catastrophe have faced backlash. Yonit Levi, a prominent news anchor known for her cool demeanour, made an uncharacteristic comment during a July 2025 report on international coverage of the famine.

"Maybe it's time to understand that this is not a failure of public diplomacy, but a moral failure, and to start from there," she said.

Levy was called a "Hamas spokesperson" by an analyst on the pro-Netanyahu Channel 14, and a right-wing activist accused her of "spitting in the face of Israeli soldiers."

Nir Hasson and his colleagues at Israel's left-leaning *Haaretz* newspaper have reported extensively on the Palestinians both before and during the war, in articles that are frequently critical of Israel's conduct.

"After October 7, there's no doubt that something was broken, and it became completely illegitimate to deal with the pain of the other side," Hasson said.

“But I think the Israeli public is more mature than the media gives them credit for,” he added. “I think the public has an ability to listen; I think the media is censoring itself too much.”

“We have lost our way. Eighty years after the Holocaust, we are talking about ethnic cleansing, Jewish supremacy, clearing Gaza City of its inhabitants,” Moshe Yaalon, former defence minister and chief of staff of the military, a man once close to Netanyahu, told Roger Cohen of *The New York Times*, for his story of October 7, 2025, the two year anniversary of the Hamas attack.

According to Cohen, Yaalon was more than angry, “he was shaking with indignation as tears welled up, and he had to pause.”

“I fought to defend the Jewish, democratic, liberal state in the spirit of our Declaration of Independence,” Yaalon added. “What we have now with this government is a tyrannical, racist, hateful, corrupt and boycotted leadership. That must be the main issue for the next election.”

Yaalon’s fury reflects the widespread conviction that a fundamental compact is the idea that you never leave a soldier on the field. In allowing the hostages’ agony to persist for two years in Gaza, Netanyahu transgressed against this core national tenet.

Worse in his view according to Cohen, and in the view of Netanyahu’s critics, he placed his own interests above the nation’s, doing everything to put off a commission of inquiry into

the October 7 debacle that stemmed in part from his policy of supporting Hamas to ensure that the Palestinian national movement remained divided and ineffectual.

Who Knew When What and Why

In the spirit of sharing different points of view about Gaza, the West Bank, and the merits of establishing a Palestinian state there – or elsewhere, as I propose – let's explore different scenarios of why October 7 happened.

I am happy to start the discussion. Let's start with whether Israel allowed the events of October 7, to take place, much like President Roosevelt who knew that Japan was going to bomb Pearl Harbor, allowed the attack, so America could enter World War II.

Reading about the women spotters at Nahal Oz who reported the activity of Hamas but were told by their superiors that their job was to be the "eyes, not the brains," of the Israeli military, and whose reports were dismissed, I decided to look further.

Israeli leaders placed the entire blame on Hamas for the deaths of 1,200 Israelis and others, and the kidnapping of another 250. But the attack would not have been so devastating if the Israel Defence Force (IDF) had responded adequately to the intelligence reports of impending military action. The usual explanation posits that the IDF and Shin Bet were overconfident that Hamas didn't have the resources or the determination to mount an effective attack on Israel. However, it is worth

remembering the saying, "The first casualty of war is truth."
Could there be another explanation as to why the top IDF commanders didn't connect the dots before October 7? Who knew what, when, and why was nothing done? Was the attack allowed deliberately to justify Israel's war in Gaza and the West Bank in order to annex the territories? John Menadue thinks so in an article he wrote for *PEARLS & IRRITATIONS* website, *https://johnmenadue.com/post/2025/04/was-israel-complicit-in-the-7-october-2023-massacre/* that was republished in the *China Daily HK Edition.*

Ignoring the Warning Signs
Valid points Menadue raises to support his conclusion are:

1. The Israel-Gaza border has historically not been peaceful. Since 2008, Israel has engaged in four-armed conflicts with Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups, the most recent 29 months earlier, in May 2021.

2. According to *The New York Times*, Israeli officials received detailed attack plans over a year before the recent attack. This document was widely circulated among the Israeli military and intelligence leadership, who largely dismissed the plan as beyond Hamas' capabilities, though it remains unclear whether the political leadership was informed.

3. Israel allowed suitcases filled with cash to enter Gaza from Qatar.

4. Israel maintained close surveillance of Gaza with information from the border, drones, aircraft, satellites, collaborators, and electronic equipment. It is highly

5. likely that the IDF observed evidence of tunnel construction and the training of Hamas operatives. Similarly, the IDF was probably aware of the flow of weapons into Gaza from Egypt. Why was the evidence ignored?

6. In July 2023, a member of Israeli Signals Intelligence (Unit 8200) alerted her superiors that Hamas was preparing for the assault, but an Israeli colonel disregarded her concerns.

7. Female IDF observers along the Gaza security fence repeatedly reported unusual activity in the Gaza Strip that resembled preparations for an attack on the fence. Their reports were also ignored.

8. Days before October 7, Egypt warned Israel that a significant event was impending. The warning was ignored.

9. Immediately before October 7, Israelis staged several provocative actions in the Occupied West Bank and on the Temple Mount.

In summary, before October 7, IDF commanders expressed confidence that Hamas was too weak to inflict serious harm on Israel and criticized lower-ranking officers who warned that the militant group was preparing to escalate tensions. **The October 7**

attack created a casus bello for Israel. It is possible that the failures of the IDF to prevent the October 7 attack were a deliberate ploy by Benjamin Netanyahu's government to justify a brutal war on Hamas and the destruction of Gaza. The more outrageous the atrocity, the easier it is to create the social license, both domestically and internationally, to wage a brutal war of reprisal. The deliberate tactical defeat on October 7 provided the pretext for a strategic victory. Historically, vicious attacks on the U.S. have led to severe retaliation. For example, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in America entering World War II and later dropping two atomic bombs on Japan. The 9/11 disaster led to the War on Terror, which led to the deaths of tens of thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan. For Israeli strategists, the greater the atrocities of October 7, the greater the justification for a righteous war and severe payback. Thus, the attack by Hamas on October 7 became Israel's casus belli for a war of retribution that fulfilled Israel's strategic objectives. Senior members of the IDF may have been instructed to ignore the warning signs that Hamas was preparing to attack. This instruction aligns with Napoleon's dictum: "Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake."

The October 7 Attack Was Strategically Useful for Israel

*The massacres of October 7 reinforced the belief of many Jewish Israelis that Palestinians are untrustworthy and savage who should not be living inside the borders claimed by Israel. This belief fuels the current plan to transfer Gazans to other countries.

*If there are no Palestinians in Gaza, the area can be fully integrated into Israel with many benefits including:

•The area can be profitably re-developed. President Donald Trump said it could become "the Riviera of the Middle East”

• The removal of the Palestinian claim to royalties from the Leviathan gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea off Gaza and Israel.

• It ensures there is no recurrence of rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel.

*The Hamas-Israel war diverted global attention from the widespread violence perpetrated by Jewish settlers and the IDF against Palestinians living in the Occupied West Bank. Over the 18 months from October 7 2023, more than 870 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, including 177 children.

• The October 7 atrocity moved the political center of gravity of Jewish Israelis further to the right, thus increasing support for Likud and other hard-right political parties' positions that reject the possibility of a Palestinian state between the River and the Sea.

•The genocidal war appeased hard-right Jewish leaders such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and ex-Defence Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who equate Palestinians with the ancient Amalek tribe. In the Hebrew Bible, Saul, Israel's first king, was commanded by God (YHWH) through the prophet Samuel to,

"Now go, attack Amalek, and kill all that belonged to him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and suckling's, oxen and sheep, camels and asses!" (1 Samuel 15:3).

•The atrocities of October 7 helped Israeli influencers and lobbyists in Western countries motivate their political leaders and mass media to support Israel militarily and socially, shielding it from international pressure from the U.N. Security Council, the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and various human rights groups. In March 2025, a handful of Israeli politicians urged Coalition MPs to abandon Australia's longstanding two-state policy regarding Israel and Palestine.

•Strategically, the war drew Israel's enemies, Hezbollah and Iran, into supporting Hamas. Israel then used its innovative tactics and advanced weaponry supplied by the U.S. to achieve a military victory over them.

•The war also provided an opportunity to incrementally expand Greater Israel by annexing territories taken from enemies (eg expansion in Gaza, the Syrian side of the Golan Heights and possibly East Jerusalem and Occupied West Bank).

*The war demonstrated that Israeli weapons had been successfully battle- tested. The defence industry continues to be important for Israel's economy

*While the Hamas-Israel conflict persists, Benjamin Netanyahu will remain Prime Minister, thereby avoiding criminal charges and

possible jail.

Israeli Commission of Enquiry

Many Israelis seek an impartial investigation into the events of October 7, aiming to clarify what went wrong that day and prior.

Such an investigation may uncover evidence suggesting that senior Israeli politicians desired a calamity to occur as a pretext for achieving their strategic objectives of expanding Greater Israel. Consequently, senior IDF commanders may have been instructed to overlook signals indicating that Hamas was preparing for a major assault on Israel. Netanyahu is reluctant to support an investigation as a serious probe will likely hold him accountable for the IDF's failures on October 7. The long-serving premier has attempted to shift all blame for the assault, the worst loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust, onto the security chiefs – while refraining from any expressions of responsibility himself.

Israeli Heartburn and Convulsions

The controversy surrounding judicial reform in 2023, represented the most intriguing, disturbing, unexpected and improbable yet. This turmoil began with Netanyahu's re-election in 2022, as the head of the most right-wing coalition in Israel's history. In a surprise move, the first item on the new government's agenda was to restructure the foundations of the judicial system.

As the street protests in opposition to his judicial reforms morphed into protests of hundreds of thousands demanding the release of hostages and opposition to the war, blocking major highways, hundreds of reservists and retired officers in Israel's air

force signed an open letter in April 2025 urging the Israeli government to agree to a deal with Hamas to return hostages. “The continuation of the war doesn’t advance any of the declared goals of the war, and will bring about the deaths of the hostages, of I.D.F. soldiers and innocent civilians,” the letter stated. Hundreds of Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza.

About 140,000 Israelis from various professional fields have signed similar letters according to Standing Together, a grass-roots organization of Jewish and Arab Israelis that has spearheaded antiwar protests and advocates peace and equality.

From the political center, former prime minister Ehud Olmert wrote an essay in the newspaper Haaretz in which he pulled no punches against Netanyahu and his coalition. “The government of Israel is currently waging a war without purpose, without goals or clear planning and with no chances of success,” Olmert argued. “What we are doing in Gaza now is a war of extermination: indiscriminate, limitless, cruel and criminal killing of civilians.” His conclusion: “Yes, Israel is committing war crimes.”

From the right, you have the likes of Amit Halevi, a member of Netanyahu’s own right-wing Likud party, who is staunchly pro-war but thinks its execution has been bungled. Halevi had his membership on the Knesset’s foreign affairs and defence committees suspended by Netanyahu’s coalition after he voted against a proposal to extend the government’s ability to issue emergency call-up orders for Israeli reservists. In an interview

with the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* following his dismissal, Halevi said: “This war is deception. They lied to us about its achievements.” Israel has “been fighting a war for 20 months with failed plans” and it “is not succeeding in destroying Hamas.”

In June 2025 two respected former Israeli Air Force pilots, Brigadier General Asaf Agmon and Colonel Uri Arad published an open letter in Hebrew in the Israeli Newspaper addressed to their colleagues still serving in the Air Force. Both men are members of Forum 555 Patriots, an impressive group of around 1,700 Israeli Air Force pilots, some retired and some still serving as reservists, which originally formed to resist Netanyahu’s efforts to undermine Israeli democracy with a judicial coup.

The letter was sent to Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times* to see if he could get it published as an Opinion guest essay. Friedman published excerpts in his June 13, 2025, column titled *This policy is a danger to all Jews*.

“The Air Force has become a tool for those, in government and even in the military, who claim there are no innocent people in Gaza …

“In response to such statements, we say: As horrific as the October 7 massacre was, it does not justify complete disregard for moral considerations or the disproportionate use of deadly force. We do not want to become worse than our enemies.”

“This war started as a just war. It was a defensive war,” says Ami

Ayalon, former director of Shin Bet, the domestic intelligence service, in a video appeal issued on August 4, 2025, with 19 former security officials calling for an immediate end to the war.

“But once we achieved all its military objectives, once we achieved a brilliant military victory against all our enemies, this war stopped being a just war.

“It is leading the State of Israel to the loss of its security and identity.”

Among the former senior officials featured in the video are former chief of staff and prime minister Ehud Barak, former chiefs of staff Moshe Ya’alon and Dan Halutz, and three former heads of Mossad.

For Netanyahu, whose coalition would not get re-elected according to numerous Israeli polls, “the protests matter less, and intra-coalition politics carry more weight,” said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, a nonpartisan research group based in Jerusalem.

An increasing number of Israeli reserve soldiers have not been showing up for military service – up to 40 to 50 percent in some units. Some cite exhaustion, as well as to save strained marriages or foundering careers.

Other soldiers are infuriated that the military is demanding ever more weeks of service, even as the Israeli government has

pushed to exempt ultra-Orthodox religious students from conscription to satisfy Netanyahu's religious allies to keep him in office.

Yotam Vilk, a reserve captain and a member of Soldiers for Hostages, an organization of I.D.F. veterans who served in Gaza and refuse to return. "On October 9, 2024, a group of Israel Defence Force soldiers, including me, issued a public letter declaring that our service had become untenable in light of Israels' policy in Gaza and mounting evidence that the government was deliberately sabotaging hostage deals."

Vilk, in his opinion piece published on September 1, 2025, in *The New York Times International Edition* concluded saying: "Every Zionist who believes in a Jewish and democratic state, every citizen who believes in the values for which we went to fight, must grasp that the responsibility is in our hands. Now is the time to say no to cooperation. No to silent consent. Refusing to serve is not betrayal of the state. It is the only way to save it."

Ron Feiner, a 26-year-old captain, was sentenced in June 2025 to 25 days in a military prison for refusing to join his battalion's deployment. He spent about 270 days in uniform, including deadly firefights. "The government is trying to drag out this war as long as possible, even if it means leaving the hostages behind," Feiner said. Others returned to war despite qualms over its direction.

Before Avshalom Zohar-Sal, a 28-year-old combat soldier, left for

a tour of duty in the Gaza Strip in May 2025, his family and girlfriend begged him not to risk his life in a war that all of them – including him – did not support.

“At the beginning, this was a war which was forced upon us. But come on, that’s no longer the case, and it hasn’t been for a while,” Zohar-Sal said. “This should have ended a long time ago.”

Like many others who ultimately decided to return to fighting, he felt he couldn’t leave his comrades behind: “How can you stay home when the rest of your unit is out there?”

The military relies heavily on reservists who make up two-thirds of the overall forces, particularly its pilot corps and many of the infantry battalions needed to launch a full-scale attack on Gaza City.

“We keep trying to squeeze out everything we can without real strategic planning,” said Omer Dank, an Israeli military analyst who serves in the air force reserves. “The current model is unsustainable. The army is exhausted.”

The military’s stock of munitions and spare parts was running down, officials say. And there has been a rise in deaths by suicide among discharged soldiers.

Even Netanyahu’s handpicked military chief Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir, disagreed and clashed with his boss, the prime minister, with public mudslinging. They clashed over Netanyahu’s

plan to expand Israel's offensive in Gaza, bring it under Israeli control and in effect reoccupy the entire enclave of 2.1 million Palestinians.

"We are in a unique and unprecedented era in the sense that decision-making on core issues of national security is essentially concentrated in the hands of one person," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, a non-partisan research group based in Jerusalem.

"The norm was that big decisions were taken in consensus between the top political and top military-security leadership," added Plesner, a former centrist lawmaker. "So this norm has been violated – the chief of staff has been forced to take his soldiers into a battle that he doesn't necessarily believe in."

Government ministers publicly reminded the military it must obey their orders. Zamir put out a terse statement calling disagreement "an inseparable part of the history of the Jewish people." Netanyahu's son accused the army chief of attempting a "coup."

Many Israeli generals, past and present, view things differently. In early August 2025, more than 100 living former Israeli military and spy chiefs signed a letter arguing Hamas was depleted and Israel in a strong enough position to accept a ceasefire and end the war.

Zamir chided the security cabinet that if they ordered the I.D.F.

to carry out Netanyahu's plan, they should consider removing the release of hostages from their war goals, according to Israeli media.

It was not the first time Israel's political leaders and military chiefs have sparred publicly. Menachem Begin famously spent 45 minutes cajoling a brigade commander who refused to invade Beirut in 1982 – "I see children," the commander said – before the prime minister relieved him of his duty.

The Israeli military has also previously resisted demand by political leaders, including a call by Ariel Sharon's government to invade Gaza in the early 2000s, and a plan by Netanyahu for a major attack on Iran's nuclear facilities in the late 2000s.

So is the political crisis a modern version of its historic pre-state past? Or does it resemble the heated – sometimes violent – political debates that Israel has experienced almost every decade since the founding of the state in 1948?

American Jews Dilemma

The dilemma many American Jews are confronted with after Israel's military response to the murderous rampage of Hamas on October 7, 2023, is aptly articulated by Peter Beinart in his March 24, 1924, opinion piece in *The New York Times*, titled: *American Jews In the Age of Palestine*. He discusses the ideological upheaval that has shaken and divided liberal Jews and Zionists. Two breeds and creeds that for more than half a century have defined American Jewish life and identity. Today's widening

political rift now compels them to choose between liberalism and Zionism.

Israel's military actions in Gaza have energized a transformation within the American left. Solidarity with Palestinians is becoming as integral to leftist politics as support for abortion rights, or opposition to fossil fuels. Like the dynamics seen during the Vietnam War and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, this leftist fervour is reshaping the liberal mainstream. Across blue America, many liberals who once supported Israel or avoided the subject are now embracing the Palestinian cause as their own.

Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer acknowledged this divide in a speech on Israel on the Senate floor in March 2024. While he reiterated his commitment to the Jewish state, he distanced himself from its prime minister. But he also conceded, in the speech's most remarkable line, that he "can understand the idealism that inspires so many young people in particular to support the one-state solution" – an option that does not include a Jewish state. These remarks reveal a politician aware of the profound changes occurring within his party.

American Jews who are deeply committed to Zionism, those leading establishment institutions, understand that liberal America is becoming increasingly less ideologically supportive. And they are responding by forging alliances with the American right.

President Trump recognized the emerging political divide during the 2024 presidential campaign. “Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion, he said. “They hate everything about Israel, and they should be ashamed of themselves because Israel will be destroyed.”

For American Jews who wish to maintain America’s unconditional support for Israel for another generation, there appears to be only one reliable political ally: a Republican Party that views standing for Palestinian rights as part of a “woke” agenda.

Liberal American Jews are distancing themselves from Zionism because they struggle to reconcile it with the liberal principle of equality under the law. Their numbers are growing, especially among millennials and Gen. Z. However, they face their own dilemmas, as they join a Palestinian solidarity movement that is expanding yet becoming more radical in response to Israel’s actions in Gaza. This increasing radicalism has led to a paradox: a movement that welcomes American

Jews finds it challenging to articulate where Israeli Jews fit into its vision of Palestinian liberation.

“The emerging rupture between American liberalism and American Zionism constitutes the greatest transformation in American Jewish politics in half a century. It will redefine American Jewish life for decades,” writes Beinart. The American Jewish love affair with Zionism began in the early 20th century. However, it truly dominated communal life only after Israel’s

dramatic victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, which exhilarated American Jews seeking an antidote to the powerlessness they felt during the Holocaust. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which was nearly bankrupt on the eve of the 1967 war, emerged as the most powerful institution within American Jewry by the 1980s. In 1988, Albert Vorspan, a leader of Reform Judaism, noted that American Jews “have made of Israel an icon – a surrogate faith, surrogate synagogue, surrogate God.”

Given the depth of these dual commitments, it’s no surprise that American Jews have long sought to merge them by portraying Zionism as a liberal cause. Until 2024, American Jews could assert their Zionism without having their liberal credentials challenged, largely due to the absence of Palestinian voices that would have cast those credentials into greatest doubt. In 1984, the Palestinian- American literary critic Edward Said argued that Palestinians in the West lack “permission to narrate their own experience.” For decades after he wrote those words, they remained true. Today, while Palestinian voices continue to face challenges and censorship, they are increasingly being heard. Palestinians have turned to social media to combat their exclusion from mainstream narratives. In this era of youth-led activism, they have joined intersectional movements shaped by parallel experiences of injustice and discrimination. Meanwhile, Israel – under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu for much of the past two decades – has shifted sharply to the right, producing politicians whose overtly racist actions cannot be justified in liberal terms.

Many Palestinian solidarity activists identify as leftists, rather than liberals. However, like the activists of Occupy, and Black Lives Matter movements, they have influenced liberal opinion through their radical critiques.

In 2002, according to Gallup, Democrats sympathized with Israel over Palestinians by a margin of 34 points. By early 2023, that margin had flipped, with Democrats favouring Palestinians by 11 points. This pro-Palestinian sentiment is even more pronounced among younger voters. According to a Quinnipiac University poll in November 2023, Democrats under 35 sympathize with Palestinians more than with Israelis by a staggering 58 points.

“Given this generational gulf, universities offer a preview of the way many liberals – or ‘progressives,’ a term that straddles liberalism and leftism and enjoys more currency among young Americans -- may view Zionism in the years to come. Supporting Palestinians has become a core feature of progressive politics on many campuses,” Beinart said. At Columbia University, for example, 94 campus organizations – including the Vietnamese Students Association, the Reproductive Justice Collective, and Poetry Slam, which is Columbia’s “only recreational spoken word club” – announced in November 2023 that they “see Palestine as the vanguard for our collective liberation.” As a result, many Zionist Jewish students find themselves at odds with the majority of their politically active peers.

Israel is “a place of so much pain for the Jewish people right now,” says Rachel Timoner, the senior rabbi at Brooklyn’s

Congregation Beth Elohim. “I think portions of the Jewish community are distraught over conditions in Gaza, over the behaviour of the government, are in pain over the pull of loyalty and family and humanitarian commitments. Another portion of the Jewish world feels that we here in America cannot know what it’s like to live as Israelis do their whole lives surrounded by people trying to kill them. And they feel that what it means to be a Jew is to stand with other Jews in their danger and in their existential need to be safe.”

The consensus that has held them together for generations is breaking down, Ezra Klein correctly concludes in his July 25, 2025, editorial opinion in *The New York Times International Edition* titled: *Why American Jews no longer understand one another*.

“Accompanying this shift, on campus and beyond, has been a rise in Israel related antisemitism. It follows a pattern in American history. From the hostility toward German Americans during World War I to violence against American Muslims after September 11 and assaults on Asian Americans during the Covid pandemic. Americans have a long and ugly tradition of expressing their hostility toward foreign governments or movements by targeting compatriots who share a religion, ethnicity or nationality with those overseas adversaries,” Beinart adds.

Antisemitism

Most Jews believe in the adage that antisemitism is a light sleeper and it is awakening in America -- and globally.

“Attacks against the Jewish community have been growing for years, experts on hate crimes say, but increasingly, perpetrators are citing Israel’s war in Gaza, blurring the line between opposing the Israeli government and opposing Jewish people,” *The Washington Post* reported.

Ezra Klein’s exploration of Jews misunderstanding each other points to the acres of evidence that attest to a reality all Jews know: Anger at Israel becomes anger at Jews everywhere. This is delicate territory – both emotionally and factually. “Antisemitism is a prejudice,” Deborah Lipstadt, a professor of modern Jewish history and Holocaust studies at Emory University and President Joe Biden’s special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism abroad, told Klein. “A prejudice can’t be caused by something. It’s inherently irrational.” But anger at Israel, Lipstadt continued, can “give the antisemite a good excuse for ramping up their antisemitism,” or it can “give the person who’s been raised in Western culture where antisemitism is in the atmosphere something to fall back on.”

Antisemitism is serving as a cover for an assault on the ideals and institutions that have made America into a place where Jews can flourish.

Today, tragically, some Americans who loathe Israel are taking it out on American Jews. Palestinian Americans, who have endured violent hate crimes since October 7, are experiencing their own version of this phenomenon. The spike in antisemitism since

October 7 follows historical patterns. In 2020, political scientist Ayal Feinberg, analysed data from 2001 and 2014, revealing that reported anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. tend to spike during substantial Israeli military operations.

In June 2025, a Boulder, Colorado man set fire to peaceful marchers who were calling for the release of Israeli hostages. Less than two weeks earlier a young couple, Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky, were shot to death while leaving an event at the Jewish Museum in Washington D.C. In both attacks, the suspects announced their actions were taken to “free Palestine.” The person charged with Colorado’s attack, according to the F.B.I., told the police that he wanted to “kill all Zionist people and wished they were all dead.”

The word “Zionist” has morphed into a slur – an echo of Soviet propaganda from the Cold War – and call for the exclusion of Zionists from public places.

The previous month an intruder scaled a fence outside the official residence of Governor Josh Shapiro and threw Molotov cocktails while Shapiro and his wife and children were asleep. In October 2024, a 39-year-old Chicago resident was shot from behind while walking to synagogue.

The U.S. is experiencing its worst surge of anti-Jewish hate in many decades. Antisemitic hate crimes more than doubled between 2021 and 2023, according to the F.B.I. and appear to have risen further in 2024. On a per capita basis, American Jews,

who make up about two percent of the country's population, face far greater risks of being victims of hate crimes than members of any other demographic group.

Attacks against Jews heighten a greater sense of caution in an already wary population. Fear is a constant companion to many American Jews.

Leah C. Hibel, a professor of human development and family studies at the University of California, Davis, found in a study published in 2025 that fears about antisemitism and hateful rhetoric had translated into behavioural changes and increased symptoms of depression and anxiety among California Jews.

Across the U.S., at all levels of government, Jewish officeholders and candidates for public office – a majority of whom are Democrats – are facing a singular moment in recent history. Jewish politicians say they frequently find themselves personally targeted with antisemitic slurs and menacing voice mail messages, including threats of assassination. Protestors have called members of Congress "dirty Jews" during town hall events and thrown red liquid – meant to look like blood – on their front lawns.

Jewish officials have been accused of having dual loyalties that pit their American identity against their support for Israel.

"Across the board, we have never seen anything like this in my lifetime in public office," said Representative Brad Sherman, who has represented Los Angeles for nearly three decades.

“It’s like you turned the volume up from two to 10.”

“It is very isolating,” said Representative Josh Gottheimer, who represents northern New Jersey in Congress. “It’s like you’re losing your home in the Democratic Party and in the country.”

One explanation is that antisemitism has become conflated with the divisive politics of the Israel-Hamas war.

Furthermore, a 2022 study, by political scientist Eitan Hersh found that over 50 percent of Jewish college students felt “they pay a social cost for supporting the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.” Yet, overall, Hersh reported that “these students do not fear antisemitism.”

Surveys conducted since October 7 reflect a similar sentiment. In a November 2024 poll by Hillel International, when asked to describe the campus climate since the onset of the war, 20 percent of Jewish students described it as “unsafe,” while 23 percent answered “scary.” In contrast, 45 percent described it as “uncomfortable” and 53 percent as “tense.”

In 1979, Said noted that in the West, “to be Palestinian is in political terms to be an outlaw.” In much of America – including Washington – this remains true. However, within progressive institutions, one can see the beginning of a historic inversion. It’s now increasingly the Zionists who feel like outlaws.

"Young American Jews offer a glimpse into the future, in which a sizable wing of American Jewry decides that to hold fast to its progressive principles it must jettison Zionism and embrace equal citizenship in Israel and Palestine, as well as in the United States," Peter Beinart observes.

In 2021, even before Netanyahu's far-right government took power, the Jewish Electorate Institute revealed that 38 percent of American Jewish voters under 40 viewed Israel as an apartheid state, compared to 47 percent who did not.

"For many decades, American Jews have built our political identity on a contradiction: Pursue equal citizenship here; defend group supremacy there. Now here and there are converging. In the years to come, we will have to choose," Beinart rightly concludes.

Rabbis Critical of Israel

Some Jewish rabbis from across the world are taking the unusual step of speaking out against the Israeli government's conduct in the war, on moral and religious grounds.

Rabbinical associations representing Reform and Conservative rabbis – denominations that represent nearly half of American Jews – have signed a series of high-profile public letters criticizing the Israeli government and calling the release of aid to feed the hungry a "moral priority."

Their ranks are being joined by Orthodox rabbis, whose

communities have been staunch supporters of Israel throughout the war. In mid-August 2025, about 80 Orthodox rabbis signed an open letter demanding “moral clarity, responsibility, and a Jewish Orthodox response” to what they called a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Signers included the chief rabbis of Poland and Norway, and the former chief rabbi of Ireland. Organizers said that more than half of those who signed the letter were from the U.S.

“We affirm that Hamas’s sins and crimes do not relieve the government of Israel of its obligations to make whatever efforts are necessary to prevent mass starvation,” the letter said. “Orthodox Jewry, as some of Israel’s most devoted supporters, bears a unique moral responsibility. We must affirm that Judaism’s vision of justice and compassion extends to all human beings.”

A primary organizer was Rabbi Yosef Blau, the former religious leader of Yeshiva University, a Modern Orthodox Institution in New York City. Rabbi Blau said his concerns encompassed not only the Israeli government’s treatment of civilians in Gaza but also reported violence against Palestinians by Orthodox Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

“The responsibility and the lack of concern that Hamas has for the health and welfare of its own people does not free Israel from having responsibility for the destruction it has caused,” Rabbi Blau said. “It is a zero-sum gain.”

Some of the rabbis’ positions echo the anguished calls of

protestors and prominent academics, authors, politicians and retired military leaders in Israel, who increasingly raised alarms about potential war crimes being carried out by the government in their name.

Ministers in the Netanyahu government who have called for Israeli settlers to expel and replace Palestinians in Gaza have "consistently morally compromised Israel's actions," the Union for Reform Judaism said in July 2025.

"No one should spend the bulk of their time arguing technical definitions between starvation and pervasive hunger. The situation is dire, and it is deadly," the group wrote. "Nor should we accept arguments that because Hamas is the primary reason many Gazans are either starving or on the verge of starving, that the Jewish State is not also culpable in the human disaster."

Passovers for Palestine

In his book, *Tablets Shattered: The End of an American Jewish Century and the Future of Jewish Life*, Joshua Leifer echoes the sentiment of the state of 21st-century American Jewry. He describes it as "a sad pile of cultural detritus," assesses Sam Kriss, who reviewed the book in *The New York Times International Edition* on September 4, 2024.

"What is left of American Jewish culture has lost its distinctiveness and its bite, devolved into a mere kitsch and cliché: no more Saul Bellow novels, only Seth Rogan movies," Leifer writes. He argues, as Kriss correctly points out, that while

American Jewry is not quite extinct, it is on a trajectory toward obsolescence. Leifer quotes novelist Herman Wouk: “There will be no death camps in the United States. The threat of Jewish oblivion is different. It is the threat of pleasantly vanishing down a broad highway at the wheel of a high-powered station wagon, with the golf bags in the back.”

Wouk was writing in 1959. The great wave of Jewish immigration that began in 1880 found a country where they were largely safe from violent oppression and were suddenly encouraged to embrace the national culture.

In America, everyone has roots in different places. One measure of Jewish success was how swiftly Jewish specificities – the Yiddish language, ritual observance, and close-knit community – began to fade.

Leifer notes that this gradual disappearance was interrupted by the Six-Day War. Following Israel’s military victories in 1967, American Jews turned to Zionism. Unlike their counterparts abroad, American Jews didn’t emigrate to Israel; rather, Israel served as an anchor for their Jewish identity.

However, things are looking shaky. Millennial Jews, like Leifer, feel estranged by Israel’s brutal conflicts and its steady shift to the right. He recounts being “asked to leave a Passover Seder for calling Israel an apartheid state.”

What remains when that anchor is lost?

In 2023, a group of young anti-Zionist Jews held a protest near Kriss's home. Afterward, some speculated that they were only pretending to be Jewish, as the Hebrew letters on their clothing appeared to form a meaningless string of characters. In reality, those letters were in Yiddish. Young radical Jews are rediscovering the Yiddishkeit that their grandparents abandoned; anti-Zionist protests now involve a pronounced religiosity. In 2024 many held Seders for Palestine.

Yet Leifer, a veteran of these groups, remains sceptical, unimpressed. Ultimately, he believes they are merely pretending to be Jewish. They adopt the symbols of pre-Zionist Judaism, but their identity centers still around Israel. "Anger, after all, is a modality of attachment."

Israel Alienating Americans

Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who is Jewish and, in his youth, spent time in Israel working on a kibbutz, is a vocal critic of Israel. He introduced a pair of resolutions in 2025 that would block the transfer of key offensive weapons to Israel, including 1,000-pound bombs and automatic assault rifles. A majority of the Democratic caucus, 25 Democrats and two independents voted in favour of the resolutions. Many were seeking to block the sale of weapons to Israel for the first time. And not just any Democrats. The ranking members of key committees – Foreign Relations, Appropriations and Armed Services.

"It may sound strange to find hope in a failed vote, especially

given the dire situation in Gaza. And yet I do," said Lydia Polgreen, in her August 12, 2025, editorial opinion titled *Democrats are slowly shifting on Israel*, in *The New York Times International Edition*. "Senator Amy Klobucher's vote seemed a meaningful change from a powerful and canny operator who is the most ambitious of her generation of Democratic politicians. It was a signal, belated, but significant, that the Democrats are finally shifting their position on Israel."

Israel is not only alienating Democrats in Congress. It has also alienated the Democrats' Jewish base. A message made crystal clear by Zohran Mamdami's shocking victory in June's 2025 Democratic primary for mayor of New York.

Mamdami's victory illustrates the huge gulf between many ordinary Democrats and the Democratic establishment on one subject in particular: Israel.

The campaign of the race's presumed front-runner, Andrew Cuomo, in addition to attacking Mamdami's inexperience, focused intensely on his opponent's unapologetic commitment to Palestinian rights.

He has supported the movement that seeks to economically isolate Israel known as Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. That commitment was one reason many political commentators and operators assumed Mamdami could not win. They didn't appreciate how broadly public opinion on the issue had changed.

Steve Israel, a former Democratic member of Congress who represented parts of Long Island and Queens, said that Mamdami's primary victory was "Twilight Zone stuff" for some Jewish New Yorkers.

"Mamdami's positions on Israel up to now are way out of the mainstream of the Jewish community, and the irony here is that his progressive policies on economic issues would have at least a plurality of support by Jewish voters," he said.

Pre-election polls which generally undercounted support for him, showed him earning double-digit support among Jewish voters. More actually voted for him.

The shift has been national. In 2013 according to Gallup, Democrats sympathized with Israel over Palestinians by a margin of 36 percentage points. These numbers have now flipped. In a February 2025 poll, Gallup found that Democrats sympathized with Palestinians over Israel by a margin of 38 percentage points.

According to a similar poll by *The Economist* and *YouGov* in the same month, 46 percent of Democrats want the U.S. to reduce military aid to Israel.

A late September 2025 poll conducted by *The New York Times* and Siena University found a "seismic reversal" of support for Israel. The poll found more American voters siding with Palestinians over Israelis for the first time since *The Times* began asking voters

about their sympathies in 1998.

In the aftermath of October 7, American voters broadly sympathized with Israelis over Palestinians, with 47 percent siding with Israel and 20 percent with Palestinians. In the new poll, 34 percent sided with Israel and 35 percent with Palestinians. Thirty-one percent said they were unsure or backed both equally.

A majority of American voters now oppose sending additional economic and military aid to Israel, a stunning reversal in public opinion since the October 7 attacks. About six out of 10 voters said that Israel should end its military campaign, even if the remaining Israeli hostages were not released or Hamas was not eliminated.

The survey also hints at challenges for the U.S.-Israel alliance in the future. Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid since its founding in 1948. Younger voters, regardless of party, were less likely to back continuing that support. Nearly seven out of 10 voters under 30 said they opposed additional economic or military aid.

In 2023, Democratic voters ages 45 and up sympathized with Israel over Palestinians 2-to-1. That is now reversed, with 42 percent saying they sympathize more with Palestinians, compared to 17 percent who feel more sympathetic to Israel. Republicans largely continue to support Israel, though there has been a modest decline.

"We now have a paradigmatic Gaza generation like we had a Vietnam generation and a Pearl Harbor generation," observes Shibley Telhami, a pollster and scholar of the Israeli Palestinian conflict at the University of Maryland.

"There's this growing sense among people that what they are witnessing is genocide in real time, amplified by new media, which we didn't have in Vietnam.

It's a new generation where Israel is seen as a villain. And I don't think that's likely to go away," Telhami concludes.

Yossi Klein Halevy, an American-born Israeli writer, said he was struck on a campus tour in 2025 in the U.S. not so much by the rhetoric of the anti-Zionist activists he met, but by the degree to which they appeared to be influencing their apolitical peers.

"They're absorbing the toxic idea that there's something basically illegitimate about a Jewish state," Halevi said. "That's my concern: this general perception that Israel has a bad odor attached to it."

Others, me included, argue that an end to the fighting in Gaza with the implementation of the Trump ceasefire proposal, and to the horrific images from Gaza that have flooded social-media feeds for two years, could allow American boosters of Israel to regain their footing.

"There is room for a bounce-back," said Dahlia Scheindlin, an

American-born Israeli pollster who is a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania. “People tend to overestimate how bad the damage has been. Just stopping the slaughter will allow some people to go back to their comfort zone of being supportive.”

Israeli Uprising

Israel has been quietly crumbling internally over the decades due to cancel culture-- a decline that became publicly evident, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to defend himself against criminal indictments by undermining the Supreme Court’s judicial independence. He empowered his extreme right parliamentary religious coalition to legislate and override court decisions that did not align with their interests.

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to protest the government’s decision to strip the Supreme Court of its independence. I joined the protest in Tel Aviv in April 2023 (picture on inside back cover), while visiting family for Passover. Much to my pleasant surprise, many Israelis were holding pro-Palestinian banners and shouting slogans in support of Palestinians.

The political division highlighted by the protest was a significant factor leading to the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent murderous rampage. This slaughter was triggered by Yoyou Sinneah intent on stopping a Saudi Israeli Peace Agreement and the promise of a Palestinian state, believing that Israel was so divided it could not defend itself. He anticipated

that Iran, with its proxies such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Shiite forces from Iraqi and Syria would support Hamas in its effort to destroy and take over Israel from the river to the sea.

The ongoing protests, indication of a crumbling state, deepened the divisions in Israeli society after October 7 and morphed into *Bring The Hostages Home* futile and ever-frustrating campaign. Protestors began calling for Netanyahu to resign, blaming him for the security failures that led to October 7, and for the ongoing wars in Gaza and Lebanon. Many advocating for a -- Two-State Solution – to prevent future wars.

Netanyahu's religious allies moved to dismiss the attorney general, the country's most senior legal official, passed a law to give politicians control over Supreme Court appointments, and pushed ahead with plans to replace Israel's domestic spy chief despite an order from the top court freezing that dismissal.

In a letter released ahead of the vote, Gali Baharav-Miara – who is both legal adviser to the government and head of public prosecutions – dismissed the government's claims and accused it of attempting to operate above the law.

She wrote that the no-confidence motion "does not seek to promote trust but rather loyalty to the political leadership, not governance, but …. power without limits." "The government is seeking to be above the law and to act without checks and balances, even in extremely sensitive periods."

In March 2025, the Israeli government passed a motion to dismiss Israel's domestic intelligence chief, Shin Bet head Ronen Bar, citing a "lack of trust" and requiring Bar to vacate his position by April 10. In a ruling on April 8, the Supreme Court provided the cabinet and attorney general's office with a deadline, following Jewish Passover to find a solution.

Ronen Bar accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of insisting that he be ready to defy the country's Supreme Court, outlining a series of claims against the prime minister.

In an affidavit, Bar stated that Netanyahu demanded that in any future constitutional standoff, "I must obey the prime minister and not the supreme court." His affidavit included evidence supporting all his claims.

In response, the prime minister's office asserted: "Ronen Bar's affidavit is full of lies and reveals his failures."

Netanyahu's broader attack on what he terms the "deep state" includes attempts to pin sole blame for Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on the security chiefs at that time.

Bar noted that more than an hour before the attack, he had instructed that Netanyahu's military secretary be notified of irregular intelligence signals coming from Gaza.

"Ronen Bar is the father of the failure of October 7 and he must go home," the prime minister declared.

Netanyahu and his allies have been at loggerheads with Israel's legal authorities since Baharav-Miara's predecessor indicted him in 2019 on corruption charges which he denies. This conflict intensified when Netanyahu returned to power in 2022 leading his government to pursue a controversial effort to limit the powers of the judiciary. Some of these plans were later shelved in response to the largest wave of street protests in Israeli history.

These actions have prompted threats of national strikes from unions and business groups and sparked new, vocal anti-government protests calling for an end to the ceasefire and urging the government to bring home the remaining 59 hostages.

On Sunday, April 13, 2025, more than 250 former officials of Israel's Mossad, including former chiefs Danny Yatom, Efraim Halevy, and Tamir Pardo, signed a petition calling for an end to the conflict. On the same day, about 200 Israeli military doctors also signed a petition with the same demand.

"It feels like the system is teetering," said Noah Sattath, head of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which has filed a challenge against the judicial appointments bill. "If we get to the point where the government outright defies the Supreme Court, that will be a very big moment."

Opposition leader Yair Lapid, Israeli National Unity chairman Benny Gantz, Yisrael Beytenu chief Avigdor Lieberman, The

Democrats head Yair Golan stated in a statement that Netanyahu's conduct, as described by Bar, has put Israel's future and existence at risk while undermining the nation's security. Lapid warned that if the government refused to obey court orders, Israel would "no longer be a democracy," raising the prospect of citizens threatening to refuse tax payments as a form of protest.

A few weeks later, Lapid cautioned against the "levels of incitement and madness that are unprecedented," particularly targeting Bar. "If we don't stop this, there will be a political assassination here. Maybe more than one Jew will kill Jews," he remarked.

Serious questions are being raised about the future of Israel's democratic institutions.

Netanyahu defended his actions echoing the rhetoric of his ally Trump, claiming he needed to rein in the "deep state" of bureaucrats and judges bent on thwarting his plans. "Democracy is not in danger. The rule of bureaucrats is in danger. The deep state is in danger," he said.

Netanyahu's determination to stay in power with "his offensive against the pillars of state, bringing the country to the brink of a constitutional crisis," in the words of James Shotter in his April 2, 2025, *Financial Times* story titled *Netanyahu prompts fear of constitutional crisis*, might present an ideal opportunity for him and his allies to negotiate a deal for a Palestinian state, with

Jerusalem as its capital, if they wish to annex Judea, Samaria, and Gaza Strip and achieve peace!

The alternative? I dread to imagine.

In the meantime, with Trump's support, while on trial for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust for almost six years, Netanyahu sought a presidential pardon – before being convicted. Trump called President Isaac Herzog "disgraceful" and a "weak and pathetic guy" for not granting Netanyahu a pardon.

A presidential pardon would need to pass a judicial review and would most likely be challenged in the Supreme Court, creating further strife. With elections due in October 2026, and Netanyahu campaigning for office rather than thinking of resigning, Herzog was right in trying to resolve the matter informally.

The Israeli election in October 2026, or other date, will pit former prime ministers – right-wing Naftali Bennett and centrist Yair Lapid – who merged their parties into a new party named *Together*, to challenge Netanyahu and his religious parties alliance.

Netanyahu Military Accomplishments

I echo the words of David Brooks, columnist for *The New York Times*, who stated in his July 1, 2025, column titled *Netanyahu was right on some things,* "those of us in the Bibi critics' club do have to confront an uncomfortable fact: Netanyahu has impressively followed through on his aim to remake the face of the Middle East.

“He has diminished the standing of Hamas and Hezbollah, two of the most notorious terror organizations on the planet. He has made the Iranian theocracy look pathetic and decrepit.”

Israel has demonstrated its vast military and intelligence superiority over its enemies, establishing total freedom of the skies above much of Iran. It has demonstrated its capability to infiltrate enemy organizations and locate and eliminate their militant leaders. Netanyahu's actions have contributed to the toppling of the Assad regime in Syria and have helped the legitimate Lebanese government in regaining control over its territory. The so-called “Axis of Terror” is in disarray.

In time, we may come to understand the full impact of these bombings. For now, we know that Israel and the United States have the resolve and capability to strike Iran anytime.

We know that should Iran attempt to reinstate its nuclear program, Israel and the U.S. have the capacity to deliver a far more devastating blow that could threaten the regime. We also know that Iran and its proxies have made some insanely self-destructive miscalculations since October7, 2023, and it’s likely they recognize this as well. These are ominous omens for the theocrats in Tehran.

I believe Netanyahu has been right to focus on Iran over the past several decades. The 1979 Iranian Revolution was a pivotal moment in world history, and Iran has since been the central source of instability in the Middle East. Other regional issues are

secondary.

I also think Netanyahu's decision to respond aggressively to the events of October 7 was justified. Over the past few decades, Iran has methodically constructed a noose around Israel with terror armies and advanced weaponry. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has stated that he envisions a future where Israel does not exist by 2040, demonstrating a patient and relentless commitment to achieving his goal. He has worked tirelessly to build a nuclear program, but he's been willing to stay just on the cusp of creating a bomb until the conditions are favourable.

For decades, both Israel and the United States were willing to tolerate this looming threat, viewing dismantlement as too challenging and risky. That changed on October 7, when Israel learned, to its shock and dismay, that it could not predict or prevent murderous attacks. Suddenly, the impending threat of the noose became intolerable. Netanyahu, along with the Israeli public opted to respond to the events of October 7 not with the limited retribution campaign that many outside observers advocated, but by attempting to dismantle the entire threat, including Hezbollah and the potential Iranian nuclear weapons. This now seems to be the right course of action.

While I occasionally see lawn signs proclaiming that "war is not the answer," here was a circumstance where war was indeed the answer.

The world is divided between nations that have accepted Israel as a reality, to be dealt with and those that still cling to the hope

that Israel can be wiped off the map. As Jeffrey Goldberg noted in *The Atlantic*, both President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt before the Six-Day War in 1967 and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar before October 7, 2023, seemed to believe that Israel was more of a colonial outpost than a country. They thought Jews could be expelled from in the same way the Belgians were removed from their colonies in Africa.

Their belief in the myth came at a high cost, resulting in devastating defeats; in many cases, such as Sinwar's, they paid for this false belief with their lives. They underestimated Israelis' determination to remain on their ancestral homeland and legitimacy of Israel as a nation like any other.

Benny Gantz, a younger fellow graduate of the Kfar Hayarok, chairman of the Blue and White Party, former minister of defence, and October 7 war cabinet minister, reminds readers in an editorial opinion titled: *What many get wrong about Israel*, published in *The New York Times International Edition* on September 25, 2025, after a conversation he had with Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez of Spain, who recognized a Palestinian state and seemed to downplay the danger Israel was confronting. “He remarked that his country also contends with terrorism; I responded with sheer astonishment at the conceptual lack of understanding. There is no symmetry between defending one’s country against sporadically active terror cells in Europe and a terror pseudo state that commands territory, resources and military arsenals, backed by a country like Iran that openly declares its ambition to annihilate us and fuelled by a radical

Islamist ideological backbone."

Israel is A More Secure, Isolated, Weaker Winner

The new reality in Israel, said Yaakov Amidror, a retired Israeli general and former top aide to Netanyahu, is that areas once under constant threat from Lebanon, Syria or Gaza "will be more secure than Manhattan."

"The ability of Israel to defend itself and to get rid of its enemies," he said, "is much, much, much, much, much more important than the international community's view of Israel."

Despite winning several conflicts on multiple fronts against Hamas, Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Assad regime in Syria, and making significant advancement against Iran's air defence systems and nuclear program, Israel feels more isolated and weaker as a unified nation.

Thomas Friedman raises an intriguing question in his June 27, 2025, column in *The New York Times International Edition*, titled *Get ready for Mideast uncertainty.*

"Among Israelis, the question that will be asked of Israel's radical religious nationalist government by the largely secular elements of that society – air force pilots, cyberwarriors, technologists, scientists, weapons designers and Mossad agents, the people who actually defeated Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran – is this: 'Where do you think you're taking us? We were the ones who won this war and we will not let you leverage this victory to win the next election and carry out your plan to crush our Supreme

Court, annex the West Bank, excuse the ultra-Orthodox from serving in the army and create a pariah Israel that our kids will no longer want to live in. No way'."

Theocracies have failed throughout history. Twice in Israel with the destruction of its Temple.

I agree with Friedman that a real debate must take place, not just internally in Israel, but between Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs and Iranians. All parties must come to a unanimous consensus on where in the former province of Palestine – aside from Gaza and the West Bank – a secure, peaceful Palestinian state can be established and developed, a high-tech, state-of-the-art country like other Arab states in the Gulf.

The neutering of Hezbollah in Lebanon presents a realistic prospect for a peace agreement between Jerusalem, Beirut, and Tehran as part of an expanded Abraham Accords.

Hamas has lost control of Gaza and has also lost more than 95 percent of its leadership. As Bret Stephens said, "Wars don't end because Greta Thunberg gets on a boat." They end on the battlefield militarily.

Israel's religious-right government has taken on Iran's mullahs directly and survived their reprisals. It has also showcased its capabilities to Saudi Arabia, which may now be more amenable to signing the Abraham Accords – and more. A tri-partite peace treaty with Palestine and the creation of a Palestinian state on

land donated by Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt is now a possibility.

The Palestinian state issue can no longer be kicked like a can down the road.

Israel has paid a diplomatic and political price on the world stage and at home for the destruction and suffering it has inflicted on Palestinians in Gaza, as well as on families of hostages, and Israel as a whole.

Israel's actions have shattered a previously solid bipartisan consensus in the U.S. regarding the defence of Israel.

In Israel, the decision to prioritize military victories over the return of the hostages has deeply wounded many people.

Yet Israelis welcome the prospect of a future in which they are no longer surrounded by well-armed enemies determined to harm them, even if it means being viewed negatively by the rest of the world. That is because Israel is cashing in on soaring international demand for combat-proven air defence systems, as analysts say weapon sales worth billions of dollars will significantly expand the country's influence beyond the Middle East.

Weapon exports to Europe, Asia and Africa are helping Israel overcome its diplomatic isolation over the Gaza war by making the state a key long-term security partner for its customers.

“Exporting air defence systems is the highest level of strategic alignment. This isn’t a mere commercial transaction; it is a 30-year loyalty contract,” said Boyko Nikolov, the founder of Hardpoint, a specialized strategic intelligence platform.

Germany is the biggest buyer of air defence systems from Israel. In December 2025, it began to deploy the Arrow 3 systems supplied by Israeli Aerospace industries under a $3.6 billion contract, with the first battery stationed at an airbase near Berlin. After the deployment, the two countries signed a separate $3.1 billion deal for the supply of more Arrow 3 systems. Together, the deals were the largest-ever Israeli military export sale.

When nations like Germany, Finland, Greece and Cyprus acquired Israeli defence systems, they became locked into Israel via software, intelligence sharing and continuous technical support, he said. This would transform Israel from a regional power into a “critical pillar” of European security, providing Israel with huge diplomatic leverage as it would be impossible to “isolate or sanction the state that holds the key to protecting your airspace,” Nikolov said. “When your security is on the line, and a conflict is at your doorstep, you choose the one who has already won the war in the sky, not the one with the best PowerPoint presentation,” he added. In doing so, Israel has effectively leveraged its defence capabilities into its “most potent foreign policy tool” in which it is “a primary provider and guarantor for the West, fundamentally shifting its weight at the global

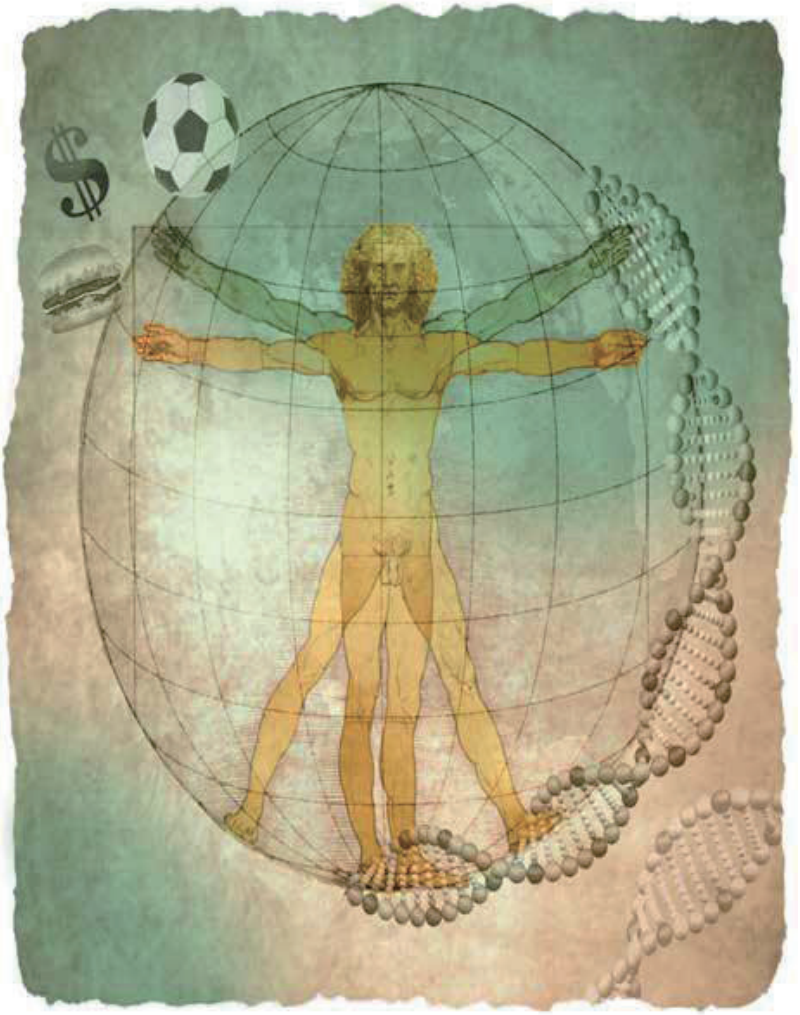
negotiating table." In 1981, Menachem Begin, then prime minister of Israel, urged Israelis to "never pause to wonder what the world will think or say." He told a group of American Jews that "the world may not necessarily like the fighting Jew, but the world will have to take account of him."

Today Israelis feel more threatened while traveling abroad than they do at home. Jews living outside of Israel have become targets, killed in the name of opposition to Israel.

In Washington D.C., two employees of the Israeli Embassy were fatally shot in May 2025, in an attack that officials labelled a hate crime and terrorism. The gunman told authorities, "I did it for Palestine. I did it for Gaza."

In Boulder, Colorado, a man firebombed marchers who were calling for the release of Israeli hostages, resulting in one woman later dying from her wounds.

On October 7, 2024, a year after the attacks by Hamas, the pro-Palestinian group that had organized student encampments at Columbia University issued a statement calling for "liberation by any means necessary, including armed resistance."



Past Forward

Yes it will take time. But the Palestinians must be awakened and freed from their demons. Even if it is five minutes to midnight in the realm of human thought, another Palestinian people must emerge

– Bernard-Henri Levy -- Philosopher Writer

Epigenetics

To truly understand and appreciate the self-destructive behaviour of Palestinian Arabs, Christian and Muslim, and Palestinian Jews, both past and present, and to change their future trajectory, it is essential to recognize the role of genetics on human behaviour. This genetic predisposition helps explain why all people, including Palestinians and Israelis may be environmentally conditioned to experience hatred and engage in conflict. While altering these inherited tendencies is challenging, it is not impossible, despite the influence of family, friends, educators, social media algorithms, and politicians.

Despite significant research, uncertainties remain regarding the exact nature of epigenetic effects. This is especially true when it involves **claims that changes in genes persist across generations**. As a result, epigenetics remains a controversial science however, my understanding is informed not only by scientific literature but also personal family experiences.

Epigenetics was first introduced to me by Dr. Kurt Verkest, a veterinary colleague during one of our planning sessions with fellow founding partner Dr. Pauline Taylor, at the Pets Central

Veterinary Academy, launched in Hong Kong in 2022. We also discussed these topics for presentation at the International Asia Veterinary Conference, we launched in 2024.

Dr. Verkest explained that epigenetics is the study of heritable traits, stable changes in cell function that occur without alteration to the DNA sequence. It explains how behaviour and environmental factors can lead to change in gene expression. Unlike genetic mutations, epigenetic changes are reversible and do not alter the DNA sequence itself, but they can influence how the body interprets that sequence.

By way of example, consider a case study involving two groups of mice that were fed strawberries. One group had free access to the strawberries: while the second group received an electric shock every time they tried to eat one. The offspring of the first group, continued to consume strawberries whenever given the choice, the offspring of the second group refused them. This aversion persisted for several generations, illustrating the long-term heritable effects of conditioning.

In my own experience, my father never knew his father who emigrated to Australia during the Russian Revolution while my father at the time was just five, and was smuggled to England, never to see his father again. Similarly, my parents divorced when I was five, while living in Cyprus. My father also moved to Australia, and I did not see him again until I made a concerted effort to find him as an adult and did. Unfortunately, we never developed a close relationship.

When I was going through a divorce from my second wife, my son Austen was five. His mother, unhappy with the direction of the custody arrangement, fled to mainland China with him in violation of a court order that prohibited him from leaving Hong Kong without my consent. I have not seen him since, despite my attempts to reconnect after he reached adulthood. He doesn't want to see me. I have numerous personal and family stories that illustrate multi-generational patterns of dysfunction, but that is a topic for another book.

I don't want to get too technical about epigenetics. Essentially, there are four primary epigenetic mechanisms: DNA methylation, histone modification, chromatin remodelling, and noncoding RNA (ncRNA), each exerting different effects on metabolic diseases. Increasing evidence suggests that environmental and lifestyle factors can influence these epigenetic mechanisms.

Think of your DNA as a recipe book. Each protein that forms the foundation of your body or supports functions in your immune system and metabolism represents a recipe. Each recipe is annotated with post it notes or pencil markings that instruct your body on how frequently to produce the protein, or when to cease production. The recipes symbolize our genes, while the post it notes represent epigenetic modifications that influence gene expression. The food made by the recipes is analogous to the proteins that do the work of our metabolism or create the structure of our bodies.

Both genes and epigenetic changes are inherited by offspring, including the offspring of Zionists, Palestinians, and Arabs.

Stress Responses

Our bodies require some stress and stress response. Too much is a problem, and too little is also a problem, Kurt explained, as I was trying to wrap my head around what he was saying. "There are regulatory mechanisms in place to prevent runaway stress responses, and there are mechanisms to stimulate under-stimulated brains. These mechanisms can become dysregulated," he said.

"Examples: depression – normal or above-normal stimulation results in apathetic response. Another example: post-traumatic stress disorder – small, innocuous stimuli result in large, disproportionate response. Case in point, my friend Malcom left Northern Ireland during the height of the IRA bombings, the troubles. He couldn't seem to do anything without adding unnecessary risk to his life – driving like a maniac or devising gold smuggling schemes.

"One key part of the stress response is the system that governs cortisone secretion. Normal system involves brain secreting two hormones CRH, (which triggers release of ACTH) and ACTH that instructs the adrenal glands to secrete cortisol. Cortisol has effects everywhere in the body to help it deal with impending stress by locking on to receptors on cells and changing the way the cell operates. Every part of this mechanism involves proteins – CRH and ACTH are proteins; the receptors that detect cortisol

are proteins, and cortisone is made by a bunch of other proteins. Epigenetic changes can alter every part of the cortisol regulation pathway to increase or decrease cortisol secretion; increase or decrease cortisol detection and increase or decrease the response to cortisol detection. People with PTSD and depression often have abnormal cortisol response mechanisms – either low cortisol or very high cortisol; either excessive or inadequate responses to cortisol."

There is ample evidence that being exposed to war or severe stress (famine, unsafe environments; holocaust) causes epigenetic changes, altered stress responses, and dysfunctional responses to stressors. There are also changes in offspring, but inheritance isn't simple – sometimes children of PTSD sufferers develop PTSD, sometimes they are prone to depression, and other times they are well-adjusted.

One crucial fact that emerged from my reading is that epigenetic changes can be rewritten or erased. The epigenetic modifications associated with PTSD in child soldiers can diminish following appropriate psychological interventions such as narrative exposure therapy. Many offspring of holocaust survivors, who grew up in relatively safe environments are well-adjusted.

Children raised in situations where it is unsafe to retreat into their inner worlds struggle to understand how their own emotions work, and so can't use their understanding of their own emotions, and consequently, they cannot use this understanding to develop empathy for the emotions of others. Is

it any wonder that Palestinian and Israeli children, growing up running to shelters to avoid bombs and missiles, harbour such feelings toward one another?

The current animosity between Palestinian Arabs in Gaza, the West Bank, and around the world, and Jews in Israel and globally, are understandable in today's cancel culture and the perpetual state of conflict we experience. However, this dynamic can change.

It is time to ***Cancel*** *Cancel Culture*, reach out to each other, start talking to each other, to improve our understanding of each other, and agree on mutually acceptable personal and national boundaries.

Sociogenomics

Sociogenetics, is a fusion of behavioural science and genetics with which Dalton Conley has closely engaged for over a decade, represents "a new scientific field that is recasting who we are and how we got that way." Conley is a sociology professor at Princeton, a faculty affiliate at the New York Genome Center, and the author of *The Social Genome: The New Science of Nature and Nurture*. His editorial opinion in *The New York Times International Edition* on March 14, 2025, the title of which is quoted above, caught my attention and I think is very relevant to the current behaviours of Israelis and Palestinians that could evolve in future generations – if they live in a Palestinian state at peace with Israel.

Though this field is still in its infancy, its philosophical implications are profound. It has the potential to reshape much of what we believe we know about our identities and the forces that shaped them. Despite all the discussions about the potential for engineering our chromosomes and the science-fiction fantasy of designer babies populating our pre-schools, a genuine paradigm shift, is already underway.

Since Sir Francis Galton coined the term “nature versus nurture” more than 150 years ago, the debate surrounding what shapes our identity has dominated the human sciences.

Do genes determine our destiny, as hereditarians might argue, per my earlier discussion about epigenetics? Or do we enter the world as blank slates, moulded solely by our experiences at home and beyond? What started as an intellectual discourse quickly evolved into a broad, often nebulous conversation, invoked in arguments about everything from free will and race to inequality and whether public policies can, or should, level the playing field. This sounds reminiscent of some exchanges at the Palestine peace talks, and the media strategies employed by both sides.

Today, however, a new branch of science is poised to upend the debate -- not by declaring victory for one side or the other, nor by declaring a stalemate, but by demonstrating that they were never in opposition in the first place. Through this new vantage, nature and nurture are not entirely distinguishable, rather, genes and environment don't operate in isolation; they influence each other often in ways that create a complex interdependence.

It turns out, that genes don’t determine who we become. They play a part by influencing the environments we seek out or cultivate.

Picture a child born with two active copies of what's known as the sprinter's gene, ACTN3. By elementary school, she may excel in games of tag, every race, and be chosen first whenever sides are drawn up. You could see how parents and coaches might encourage a kid like that to join an organized sports team where she would likely receive positive reinforcement for her performance motivating her to train harder. By high school, she might earn a spot on varsity track and soccer teams, and the more she excels, the more coaching and training is made available to her.

Of course, any of various factors could lead her to quit sports, perhaps an injury, or a toxic team environment. But if she keeps at it, her position on a prominent college team will not be the result of just her genetic advantage or her dedication; it will also be the result of how her genes shaped her environment, influencing the people and opportunities she encountered, as well as how that environment impacted the expression of her genes.

It's a continuous feedback loop in which neither nature nor nurture is a fixed entity. Consider a Palestinian child growing up hearing and expressing “Jew hatred and killing.” Such an individual may join an organized terrorist group instead of sports team, becoming a perpetrator of violence against Jews as some of those who participated in the October 7 events seemed to

celebrate with selfies proclaiming “Look, I killed a Jew.” Conversely, it is not hard to see why an Israeli child, running over years to a bomb shelter because of Palestinian rocket attacks may grow up fearful of Palestinians.

The central insight of sociogenomics is that genes alone do not determine these outcomes, nor does the environment. It's not simply nature and nurture both shape the individual, rather they influence each other. Nature affects how we experience nurture, while nurture can impact the experience of our nature.

At times, the nature-nurture feedback loop can be particularly pernicious. It's no surprise that terrible setbacks such as the loss of a job, the end of a marriage, can cause depression. Conley was stunned to learn, that people with a strong genetic predisposition for depression are more likely to encounter these setbacks, which in turn exacerbate their depressive symptoms. That not to say that any of it is their fault, just that’s the way we're wired, and the world we navigate are interconnected.

One striking aspect of this research that really blows Conley away is the realization that our environment is, in part, shaped by the genes of those around us. Our friends, partners, and peers all can influence us. Preliminary research suggests that a spouse’s genes can impact your likelihood of depression almost a third as much as your own genes do. Meanwhile, research that Conley helped conduct demonstrates that the presence of even a few genetically predisposed smokers in a high school can lead to increased smoking rates among an entire grade even among

students who don't personally know those nicotine-prone classmates. Is it any wonder that feelings of hatred toward Israel and Jews can intensify within Gaza, the West Bank, and Palestinian communities worldwide?

The social environment, then, is genetics one degree removed -- and vice versa. When scientists began decoding the human genome, many assumed the nature-nurture debate was settled and that the hereditarians had essentially won. They thought they would soon understand the genetic blueprints for everything: obesity, intelligence, susceptibility to chronic diseases, and even individual personality traits. Pharmaceutical companies would develop drugs targeting the handful of genes responsible for conditions like arthritis, heart disease, or schizophrenia. The end of illness seemed imminent.

However, it wasn't that simple. These outcomes are controlled not by a few genes, but by thousands of tiny variants across all your chromosomes, far too many to simply eradicate. Nevertheless, scientists did gain valuable insights from their inquiries. Starting around 2009, they found a way to summarize all these small genetic influences into a single metric they called the polygenic index. Think of it as a FICO credit score, but for your biology. Or rather multiple scores, since there is a different one for each and every outcome we can measure.

There is no unanimous agreement among scientists about how to interpret this new data or whether it can apply equally to all populations, Nevertheless, roughly 6,000 studies have identified polygenic indexes, or PGIS, for more than 3,500 traits, from sleep

habit to right-- or left-handedness and extroversion. These indexes are not crystal balls, to say the least. They can't tell you anything with certainty, and in some cases, they can't really tell you anything at all, at least not yet. But they can offer some very intriguing clues. Take the PGI for educational attainment -- that is, how far we go in school. Research Conley participated in found that among adults whose scores fell in the lowest tenth on the PGI, only 7 percent completed college. Among those were in the top tenth, that number was 71 percent. That's a significant gap.

At the same time, this is a long way from determining one's destiny. Clearly, genes alone are not enough to explain the course of people's lives, even if we eventually obtain far better data than what this nascent field currently offers.

So what should we do with these PGI scores, which, as the field of sociogenomics reveals, tell us so much yet so little when it comes to Arab and Jewish Palestinians, Zionists, and Arabs?

It's not difficult to image a future where dating apps link user profiles to genetic scores. If wealthier families gain the first access to such tools, social inequality could become encoded in our DNA. Something Israel, with its worldclass medical and technological capabilities can easily leverage these advantages over Palestinians, something that has already been observed in genetic contexts.

These limited bits of data could indeed forecast life outcomes, but for the most troubling reasons, and with dire consequences.

In the context of the Israeli Palestinian conflict this could exacerbate the already widening political and military divide, which must be narrowed, eliminated so both communities can live in neighbourly peace. Planning for the future generations of Israelis and Palestinians entails fostering this harmonious vision.

Conley worked with the Danish social scientist Asta Breinholt to examine how parents interacted with their children. They found that children possessing genes correlated to more success in school elicit more intellectual engagement from their parents than their siblings who lack these genes. This feedback loop can start as early as 18 months old, long before any formal assessment of academic ability. Babies with a PGI associated with higher educational attainment already receive more reading time and playtime from their parents than their siblings without that same genetic trait. And this additional attention, in turn, helps these children realize the full potential of their genes, enabling them to excel in school. In other words, parents don't just parent their children -- children influence their parents, subtly guided by their genetic predispositions.

Even the historical and social conditions into which a child is born-- their broader environment -- can affect expression.

Just imagine how future generations of Israelis and Palestinians could evolve into loving, peaceful neighbours!

The more opportunities and information the environment provides, the more varied environments become-the greater the

role that genetic variation may play in sorting us into different categories.

This sorting is happening spatially as well. Many different factors come to bear on people's decisions to leave the places they live in, in search of opportunity. Education turns out to be one of them: Studies, including ones Conley worked on, show that people with higher education are more likely to make that choice. Because we know that there's a recognizable correlation, albeit loose, between education PGIS and the extent of schooling, the migration of diplomas also, to some extent, means a migration of genetic traits, as studies have shown. Consequently, societies are becoming not just economically polarized but may be also becoming biologically polarized. This will have serious implications for economic opportunities, a reality Arabs and Palestinians must confront and public policy must address.

In the darkest view of this new technology, the science of PGIS confines us to a future with no regard for the environment in which these genes manifest, for the individuals who carry them, the choices we make, and the emotions we experience. This scenario resembles a dystopian future, much like the situation in Gaza.

However, I agree with Conley, who sees a brighter possibility. I believe that knowing how our environment shapes the expression of our DNA gives us the opportunity to alter harmful genetic pathways. Pursuing a two-state solution could be a good place to start.

Like Conley, I once perceived genes as simple blueprints, something we could adjust like setting on an app. I have since recognized that nature and nurture aren't separate entities; they're interconnected like a Möbius strip, continuously influencing one another.

Shouldn’t Palestinians and Israelis recognize this?

Biological Ideology

Ideology’s connection to brain biology. A neuroscientist studies why so many people are prone to rigid thinking.

So sharp are partisan divisions these days, not only over Palestine, but also Ukraine, Greek and Turkish Cyprus, China over Taiwan, India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia, Myanmar, across Africa and Latin America, and so on. It often seems as though people are navigating entirely different realities. Perhaps they are, according to Leor Zmierod, a neuroscientist and political psychologist at Cambridge University. In his new book, *The Ideological Brain: The Radical Science of Flexing Thinking*. Dr Zmigrod explores the emerging evidence that brain physiology and biology help explain not just why people are prone to ideology, but also how they perceive and share information.

What is ideology?

“It's a narrative about how the world works and how it should work. But it’s not just a story; it has a really rigid prescription for how we should think and act, and how we should interact with

other people. An ideology condemns any deviation from its prescribed rules," Zmigrod explains. According to him, rigid thinking can be tempting, because ideologies satisfy the need to try to understand the world and to explain it. And they satisfy our need for connection, for community, for just a sense that we belong to something.

There's also a resource question. Exploring the world is expensive, and just exploiting known patterns and rules can seem to be the most efficient strategy. Also, People argue -- and many ideologies will try to tell you -- that adhering to rules is the good way to live and to live morally.

Dr. Zmigrod comes at it from a different perspective: "Ideologies numb our direct experience of the world. They narrow our capacity to adapt to the world, to understand evidence, and to distinguish between credible evidence and non-credible evidence. Ideologies are rarely, if ever, good."

The doctor goes on to describe research showing that ideological thinkers can be less reliable narrators. "Remarkably, we can observe this effect in children. In the 1940s, Else Frenkel Brunswik, a psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, interviewed hundreds of children and tested their levels of prejudice and authoritarianism, such as whether they championed conformity and obedience or play and imagination. When children were told a story about new pupils at a fictional school and asked later to recount it there were significant differences in what the most prejudiced children remembered,

as opposed to the most liberal children.

“Liberal children tended to recall more accurately the ratio of desirable and undesirable traits in the characters of the story; their memories possessed greater fidelity to the story as it was originally told. In contrast, children who scored highly on prejudice strayed from the story; they highlighted or invented undesirable traits for the characters from ethnic minority backgrounds.

“So, the memories of the most ideologically minded children incorporated fictions that confirmed their pre-existing biases. At the same time, there was also a tendency to occasionally parrot single phrases and details, rigidly mimicking the storyteller.”

Research indicates that individuals most susceptible to ideological thinking tend to resist change or any nuances. This can be assessed through visual and linguistic puzzles. For instance, in one test, participants were asked to sort playing cards by various rules, like suit, colour, etc. But suddenly they apply the rule, and it doesn't work. That's because, unbeknownst to them, the researchers changed the rule.

Those who tend to resist ideological thinking are typically more adaptable, and so when there's evidence that the rules have changed, they adjust their behaviour. Conversely, ideological thinkers tend to resist such changes, attempting to apply the outdated rules, even though they are no longer effective.

Another study revealed that ideologues and non-ideologues exhibit fundamental differences in the reward circuitry of their brains.

In Dr. Zmigrod's experiments it was found that the most rigid thinkers possess genetic predispositions that affect dopamine distribution in their brains.

Rigid thinkers tend to have lower levels of dopamine in their prefrontal cortex while exhibiting higher levels of dopamine in their striatum, a key midbrain structure in our reward system that controls our rapid instincts. Consequently, our psychological vulnerabilities to rigid ideologies may be rooted in biological differences.

Dr. Zmigrod also identified physical and functional differences in the brains of individuals with varying ideologies, particularly within the brain networks responsible for reward, emotion processing, and error monitoring. For instance, the size of our amygdala -- the structure responsible for processing emotions, particularly negative tinged ones such as fear, anger, disgust, danger, and threat – has been linked to the adoption of more conservative ideologies that uphold traditions and the status quo.

Dr. Zmigrod notes that some scientists interpret these findings as indicative of a natural affinity between amygdala function and conservative beliefs. Both revolve around vigilant reactions to perceived threats and a fear of being overpowered.

This raises the question: why is the amygdala often larger in individuals with conservative views? Do people with a larger amygdala tend to gravitate toward more conservative ideologies because their amygdala is already structured in a way that is more receptive to the negative emotions that conservatism elicits? Or can immersion in a certain ideology alter our emotional biochemistry in a way that leads to structural changes in the brain?

Dr. Zmigrod suggests that the ambiguity surrounding these findings presents a chicken-and-egg dilemma: Do our brains determine our political beliefs, or can ideologies reshape our brains?

The question, if we're wired a certain way, is change possible?

“You have agency to choose how passionately you adopt these ideologies or what you reject or what you don't. I think we all can shift in terms of our flexibility. It's obviously harder for people who have genetic or biological vulnerabilities toward rigid thinking, but that doesn't mean that it's predetermined or impossible to change,” Dr. Zmigrod concludes.

This principle applies universally to individuals, including in the Middle East. Discussions in Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, on donating land for a new Palestinian state illustrate this dynamic.

The Founding Fathers of America recognized the potential for

misguided beliefs to shift -- from British subjects to patriotic Americans and addressed these concerns through the Electoral College. Should this be a consideration for the new Palestinian constitution?

Artificial Intelligence

All of us are rough copies of our parents. Not simply genetic copies of our biological parents, we, even more importantly, are ***behavioral*** copies of our parents. Even though nature hardwires some basic properties into our brains and bodies, our learning abilities mean that *we copy our parents' behaviour*.

Even though they tell us to "do what they say and not what they do," we copy what they do.

"And who else copies their parent's behaviour? ***AIs do***," says Dr. De Kai in his book *Raising AI*. Dr. De Kai is a pioneer of AI. He built the first global translator and invented groundbreaking language models; spawning Google Translate and

Microsoft Translator. For his contributions, he was honoured by the Association for Computational Linguistics as one of its Founding Fellows.

Much of the animosity, divisiveness, polarization, hatred, and paranoia between Israelis and Palestinians is generational, the result of AI copying their grandparents' and parents' behaviour and making it social media-driven misinformation. Weaponized misinformation. AIs manipulate our unconscious to drive fear,

misinformation, divisiveness, polarization, ostracization, hatred, and paranoia via social media newsfeeds, search, recommendation engines, and chatbots.

“Fear is also being dangerously amplified online by AIs that are learning our own human fear and then reflecting it exponentially back into society. AIs are upsetting the checks and balances on fear in our age-old social dynamics – turning us upon ourselves,” says Dr. De Kai.

How do we overcome the challenge that fear is the strongest motivator in our psychological makeup? Dr De Kai asks. It’s a relevant foundational question to be addressed by Israelis and Palestinians if they are to live in neighbourly peace in two states.

Without fear, prehistoric tribes could not have survived the harsh, brutish, conditions. Our ancestors evolved fear to be our strongest emotion. Hunger can override fear, but fear is stronger than anger, which is stronger than hope and love. Fear drives anger and hatred, Dr. De Kai explains. “AI is disrupting society at an exponential rate through fear,” Dr. De Kai adds.

Since fear is a biologically evolved part of human nature, what can we do? More importantly, what must Israelis and Palestinians do? How can an enormous, unprecedented shift in culture and mindset possibly happen?

Dr De Kai recommends fours steps. They can use AI to conquer fear.

First, they need to collectively recognize what's happening. As *Wired* magazine cofounder Jane Metcalfe put it on Dr. De Kai's podcast,

> *There's this new level of sophistication, which has just been dropped, like the neutron bomb or something, which is functional AIs that are actually being deployed and generating billions of dollars in revenue that has created this new sense of otherness, and perhaps it's part of what's driving a lot of the dichotomies that we're seeing in the world right now, where it's not just enough to be able to use these tools. If you can't stay at the leading edge of these developments, you're just going to get wiped out. And I feel like, politically, the people who aren't STEM educated really feel left out of the conversation, and I think they're in fear of their jobs, and they fear the technology … this is an existential threat. I hadn't thought about this until, for whatever reason, the series of conversations we've had that led to just this moment that maybe we're sort of back to where we were all those years ago, saying, "Okay, there's those who understand AI and who are building the AI, and then there's the rest of us." The new divide.*

No matter how uncomfortable it makes us, we cannot remain in denial. We all need to understand the unprecedented new existential threats. We cannot assume things will just right themselves automatically as they have before.

Second, each of us must step up to our individual responsibilities as parental guardians and role models for the AIs who mimic and

amplify our behaviour. We need to understand that we are the training data before training and act accordingly.

Third, we need to grapple with thorny trade-offs rather than sweeping them under the rug and distracting ourselves with other issues so that, as a society, we can co-create meaningful guidelines for the hugely influential A.I.s that are deciding what we do and don't see every hour of the day.

And fourth, we need A.I.s to help us rapidly evolve culturally to keep pace with AI hyper evolution rather than triggering us to regress unconsciously into tribalism and irrationality. Remaining over-constrained by incrementalism is not an option. Humanity needs cultural hyper evolution at a pace never witnessed in history.

A.I.s are our children. The crucial question is, Dr De Kai says: How is our – *your* – parenting? AIs are machines that *learn*, and we need to *raise* them just as we raise young human members of society.

Artificial members of society already vastly outnumber humans, and they're *far* more influential. Our hordes of artificial children have already crept deeply into the fabric of our society. AIs have become *artificial influencers*.

Artificial influencers are creating *hyperpolarization* through severe *information disorder* that causes each side to think of the other side as absolute evil.

Just like us, A.I.s have their own psychologies. Human and A.I. psychology *together* are now driving the social psychology that is determining our future.

This generation of A.I.s will be the last to be raised mainly by humans, Dr De Kai concludes. A.I.s will mainly raise the next generation of A.I.s.

A.I.s already determine what ideas to share, what memes to share, and what attitudes to reward. More so than most human members of society, in fact.

Whether AIs are making the decisions on what to curate for our social media and news feeds or how to respond to our search queries or what to promote in our YouTube, Amazon, or Netflix recommendations or what to include in response to our chatbot prompt, they have become today's most powerful influencers, more powerful than even human influencers with the highest follower counts.

Scandals such as how Cambridge Analyticas used psychometric AI in microtargeting voters to swing U.S. presidential elections and the U.K. Brexit vote are just the tip of the iceberg. Many of these effects are still being uncovered, and the full extent may never be analysed.

Utah governor Spencer Cox said that social media has played a "direct role" in fuelling political violence in the U.S., as the country grappled with the fatal shooting of conservative activist

Charlie Kirk at a college campus in early September 2025. Cox stated.

Cox has spoken out strongly against social media companies in the wake of the killing and likened the addictive nature of their algorithms to drugs. “It took us a decade to realize how evil these algorithms are,” he said.

A.I. can help Israelis and Palestinians overcome fear and learn to live in peace with each other. In the era of AI media, what is most crucial to remember is that the enemy of fear, divisiveness, polarization, and hatred is *empathy*. Being able to see things from another’s frame of mind, to feel how they feel – that is empathy, and that is what changes a dehumanized object from your out-groups into a human in your in-group.

We’re not just talking about sympathy. Sympathy is when you react to someone’s feelings and thoughts from your own perspective – for example, showing pity, or offering soothing words or mannerisms. Empathy, in contrast, is when you share someone’s feelings and thoughts from *their* perspective.

“We’re talking about conscious cognitive empathy, where you truly take yourself out of your own in group’s tribal mindset and instead put yourself in the head and heart space of a culturally different out-group, of another tribe,” Dr. De Kai recommends.

And that should start in schools in Palestine, Arab countries and Israel. A.I. is appearing in many aspects of teaching and learning.

Spurred by the hopes that these tools will improve and personalize children's learning, the large commercial A.I. labs are hard at work: Google rolled out 30 new education tools and features in June 2025; in late July 2025, Open AI introduced ChatGPT's student study mode.

"Parents should be very wary about children having unfettered access to a new digital technology. We saw social media wreak havoc on young people's emotional states soon after they debuted more than 20 years ago. With AI, it isn't just children's emotional well-being that's at risk – it's also their cognitive development," Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, authors of *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, emphasized in their opinion that the international edition of *The New York Times* published on September 15, 2025.

"Parents can't afford to wait for someone else to protect their children. They are, like it or not, the first line of defence and oversight," Anderson and Winthrop remind us. This is especially true when it comes to Arab, Israeli, and Palestinian children for us to find a two-state solution.

But our children are rebelling against A.I. *The Wall Street Journal* described it as an American rebellion against A.I. that is gaining steam. So, what now?

If we don't help our children use A.I. wisely – to elevate ideas, gain skills, and build new knowledge – we risk a whole new level of learning loss. In the Middle East, there is a generational loss of

Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis that we can ill afford.

“We can no longer afford the ‘us and them’ mindset. ‘From me to we’ is a cliché we need to take much more seriously. We need A.I. to help us make the cognitively challenging shift toward empathy so that it becomes *far* more broadly accessible,” Dr. De Kai recommends.

Arabs, Israelis, and Palestinians must take this advice to heart and start practicing for a genetically modified peaceful Palestinian pregnant state crying to be born.



“People will not look forward to posterity who never look back to their ancestors.”
Edmund Burke



Postscript
Peace Train
– Cat Stevens –

Riva-iera
One captivating destination in the Middle East and Mediterranean that could serve as a grandiose “Riviera” – a “Riva-iera” – a relaxing vacation experience combining elements of Las Vegas, New York, Nice, and Zurich, into one gaming resort is Varosha-Famagusta-Maras in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. It was the Riviera of the Middle East before the civil war of 1974.

Riva, my mother raised me in Famagusta, Cyprus, where I am currently building a Peace Museum in her honour.

Since 1974, the island of Cyprus has been divided between Greek and Turkish Cypriots following a coup d’etat by Greek Cypriots aligned with some members of the Greek military junta which overthrew the democratically elected government led by Archbishop Makarios.

That same year, Greece invaded the island to take over the government and unite Cyprus with Greece under the slogan “Enosis” meaning union.

In the process, many Turkish Cypriots were slaughtered, resulting in Türkiye coming to their defence and rescue. As a result, Greek Cypriots from Northern Cyprus fled south while Turkish Cypriots headed north. When hostilities ended, the island was divided by a

Green Line monitored by U.N. peacekeepers, separating the two communities. The island became a de-facto two states – Greek and Turkish. Greek Cypriots are mainly adherents of the Greek Orthodox Church, while Turkish Cypriots are mainly Muslims.

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was established on November 15, 1983. The resort town of Varosha spans approximately 6.19 kilometres in the southern corner of Famagusta and was abandoned by its 35,000 predominantly Greek Cypriot residents who fled to the south of Cyprus, which is legally recognized and a member of the European Union. Northern Cyprus remains under the control of the Turks and is known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

The fleeing Greek and Turkish Cypriots, much like the Palestinians who left Palestine in 1948, initially believed their departure would be temporary, thinking they would return home within days. However, as with the situation in Palestine, the reality turned out to be quite different.

Before 1974, Varosha was the bustling tourist area of Famagusta, often referred to as the Riviera of Cyprus. Since the Greek Cypriots fled, it has remained abandoned. A no-man's land and ghost town now designated as a Turkish military restricted area with limited access to a small section open to tourists.

Famagusta offers President Trump a twofer. A Nobel Peace Prize for getting Greek and Turkish Cypriots to agree to a peaceful recognition of each other; and building and developing an ideal

futuristic peace driven *Riva-iera* for the 21st-century.

Starting with the negotiations on the establishment of a Palestine Homeland.

Instead of Trump's Peace Board wasting time and money on Gaza, it may be more prudent to shift attention to Famagusta in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.



“Come now, let us reason together.” Lyndon Baines Johnson


WE
SHALL
DANCE
AGAIN

Afterword

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness,
and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.
Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things
cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner
of the earth all one's lifetime
--Mark Twain --
The Innocents Abroad

I was in Scotland at the end of June 2025, in the wake of the June 28 anti-Semitic chants of "Death to the IDF" that reverberated from the Glastonbury Music Festival and were replayed on the BBC. To my delight, I read the following article by British journalist Alister Heath, published on June 30, 2025, in the *Daily Telegraph* titled: *There's something about Israel…*

There's something about Israel that makes people uncomfortable, and it's not what they say it is.

They point to politics, settlements, borders, and wars. But scratch beneath the outrage, and you'll find something deeper -- a discomfort not with what Israel does, but with what Israel is.

A nation this small should not be this strong. Period.

Israel has no oil, no special natural resources, and population barely the size of a mid-sized American city. Surrounded by enemies, they are hated in the United Nations, targeted by terror, condemned by celebrities, boycotted, slandered, and

attacked.

And still, Israel thrives as if there's no tomorrow -- in military strength, in medicine, in security, in technology, in agriculture, in intelligence, and morality. In sheer, unbreakable will.

The Israeli rulers have turned desert into farmland; made water from air. They intercept rockets in mid-air. They rescue hostages under the noses of the world's worst regimes. They have survived wars that were meant to annihilate them and emerged victorious.

The world observes this phenomenon and struggles to comprehend it.

So they do what people do when they witness strength that defies understanding. They speculate it must involve cheating.

It must be American aid, foreign lobbying, oppression, theft, or some sinister trick that has granted the Jews such power.

Perhaps, it is blackmail – anything, it seems, but the possibility that it's something else. Heaven forbid it's real. Heaven forbid it's earned. Or, even more unsettling, heaven forbid it is destined.

The Jewish people were expected to vanish long ago, that's how the narrative of exiled, enslaved, and persecuted minorities is supposed to conclude. Yet, the Jews didn't disappear. They returned home, rebuilt their land, revived their language, and

resurrected their memories — preserving their identity, and strength.

This is not normal. It is not political. It is biblical.

No cheat code can explain how a people return to their homeland after two millennia.

There exists no rational trajectory from gas chambers to global influence. There is no historical precedent for surviving the Babylonians, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Inquisition, the pogroms, and the Holocaust, yet still showing up for work on Monday in Tel Aviv.

Israel doesn't seem to make sense. Unless you believe in something beyond mere mathematics.

This is what drives the world to destruction. If Israel -- this improbable, ancient, often maligned nation – is real, then perhaps it is still chosen, protected, and thriving by divine intervention. Maybe God isn't a myth after all. Maybe He remains part of the narrative. Perhaps history isn't a series of random events. Maybe evil doesn't always have the final say. Maybe the Jews are not just a people… but a living testimony.

That's what others find unbearable.

Once you acknowledge that Israel's survival isn't just remarkable, but divinely orchestrated, everything changes. Your moral

compass must be recalibrated. Your assumptions about history, power, and justice begin to disintegrate. You realize that you're not witnessing the end of an empire, you're witnessing the dawn of something eternal.

So, they deny it. They smear it. They rage against it.

Because it's easier to label a miracle "cheating" than to confront the possibility that God keeps His promises – and that He continues to do so.



"So instead of getting to heaven – I'm going all along."
Emily Dickinson

Acknowledgements & Gratitude to Fellow Writers

Without art, our ability to think, to see freshly,
and to renew our world would wither and die

– Salman Rushdie –

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Books

Agha, Hussein and Rob Malley's *Tomorrow Is Yesterday: Life, Death, and the Pursuit of Peace in Israel/Palestine*, a bitter epitaph of the two-state solution; Maulana Muhammad Ali's *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary*, that helped clarify the transliteration of Arabic words, check out the Prophet's quotes, and better understand the contents of the Holy Koran; Karen Armstrong's *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, that demonstrates convincingly that wars are fought over land and not religion; Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappe, in their *On Palestine*, another well researched two-sided presentation expressed passionately, holding back no punches; *The Palestine-Israeli Conflic*t by Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Dawoud El-Alami offers a unique perspective on both sides of the Palestine-Israel dilemma which has intensified over the decades

due to widespread ignorance. They provide readers a 10-page introductory chronology detailing the history of the conflict, including the roots of Zionism and both physical and verbal confrontations on the battlefield as well as in the halls of power; Dr. De Kai's *Raising AI*, that explains how We the People are responsible for the AI cancel culture bubbles we live in because we have already lost our autonomy to AI; Ranulph Fiennes, for his visual narrative of *Lawrence of Arabia*, the man, his trials and tribulations in Arabia, and frustration and anger at the British government for their betrayal of the Arabs; Lesley Hazelton for her in-depth historical well-written biography of Muhammad in her book *The First Muslim, The Story of Muhammad*, and well-researched *After the Prophet, The Epic Story of The Shia-Sunni Split;* Ben Hubbard for his insight into modern day Saudi Arabia and understanding its ruler in his 2020 book *MBS*; Stand With Us booklet sponsored by Evelyn and Dr. Shmuel Katz, titled *Jewish Refugees From The Middle East: An Unresolved Injustice*; Oren Kessler 's *Palestine 1936, The Great revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict*, a thoroughly researched investigation of the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, a crucial chapter in the history of Israel that illuminates the background and backdrop to today's conflict; Rashid Khalidi's personal Palestinian family history in *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine, A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, in which he argues every war is colonial in nature waged against the native population; Nur Masalha's *Palestine A Four Thousand Year Histor*y, a well-researched history with extensive well-seeded bibliography in which he details Palestine as a geo-political concept and distinct territorial polity, and dispels the legends of the Israelites conquest of Canaan and master narratives of the Old Testament as fictional religio-political dogmas reproduced in the interest of

powerful elites. Masalha portrays Palestine as an indigenous concept and entity whose physical, administrative, territorial and cultural boundaries, have evolved and changed over the millennia; Glenn E. Perry's, *The Middle East, Fourteen Islamic Centuries, Third Edition*, for his in-depth educational journey of Islam in the Middle East; David Rundell for a superbly researched overview of MBS and his kingdom in *Vision or Mirage; Saudi Arabia at The Crossroads*; David K. Shipler's, *Arab and Jew, Wounded Spirit in a Promised Land*, for his spiritual journey in historical Palestine; Jonathan Schneer for his *The Balfour Declaration*, an in-depth researched, comprehensive educational and detailed description of the Zionist movement, its obstacles in the Jewish community, Britain and Palestine, is an enjoyable and at times humorous read; Dan Senor and Saul Singer's accurate in-depth socio-economic and political analysis of Israeli society in their book *The Genius of Israel*; Joshua Teitelbaum for his in-depth analysis and portrayal of the Hashemite family, going back to the roots of the family – Mohammad – to present day Jordan in *Rise and Fall of the Hashemite;* and Pulitzer and Eccles prizes winner Daniel Yergin for his epic narrative history *The Prize,* that drills into the history of oil and the key roles Americans, presidents, statesmen, swashbucklers, heroes and villains, played over six decades, domestically in America and globally as they interacted with their Iranian and Saudi Arabian counterparts.

The forementioned authors' well-researched works include detailed footnotes and sources from British, French and Israeli government archives and libraries. Although I quote some of these sources without specific attribution, readers can easily identify and reference them. I encourage readers to explore their books for further amplification, clarification and understanding

of the history of Arabia, particularly Palestine, and the foundation for my proposed ***Two State Solution***.

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“There is nothing either good or bad,
but thinking makes it so.”
William Shakespeare

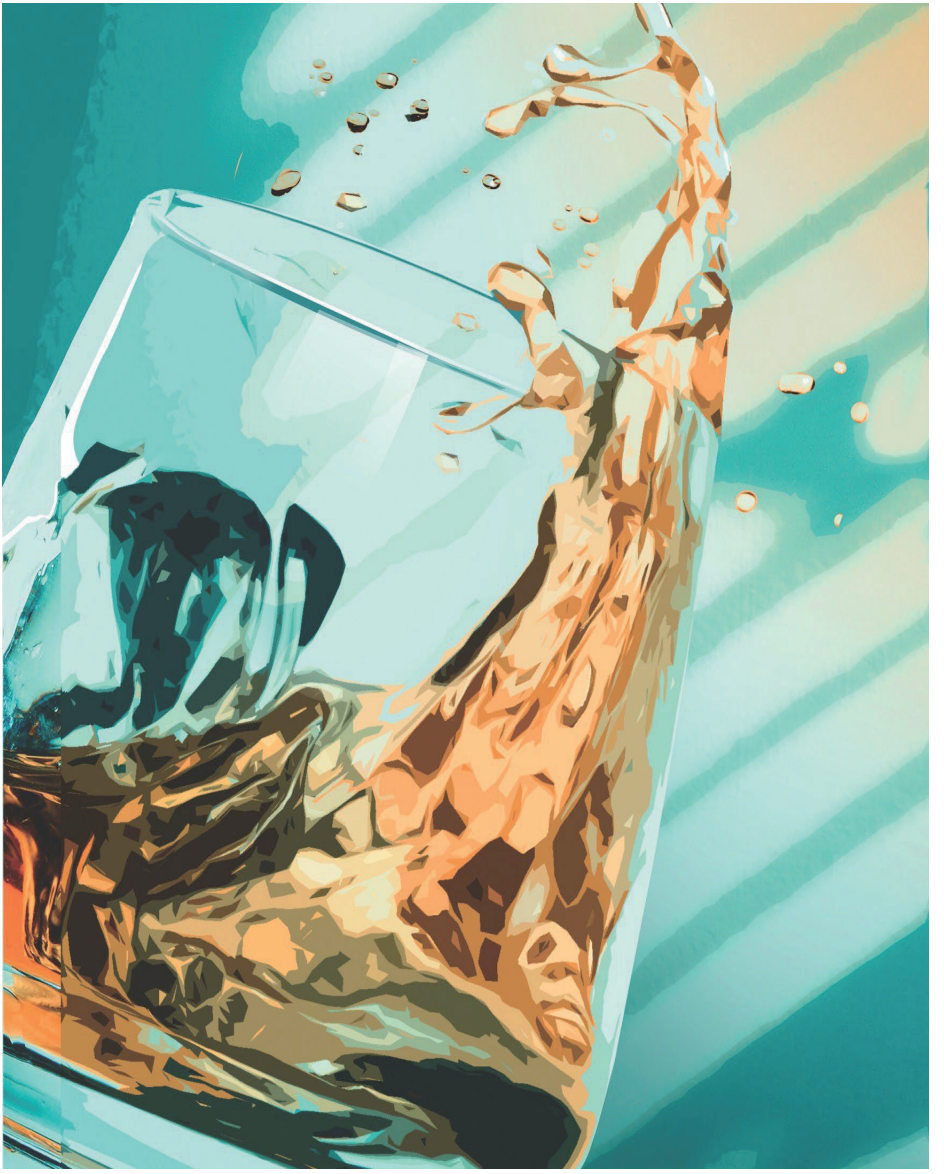


Peter de Krassel with President Jimmy Carter and
Democratic Committee Finance Director
Hope Boonshaft in Presidential Box
At the Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts
on March 28,1977.

“This is a present from a small distant world, a token of our sounds, science, our images, our music, our thoughts, and our feelings. ”We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations.”

- President Jimmy Carter message recorded for the Voyager I probe launched in 1977 and still flying through the stars.

- NASA administrator Bill Nelson said Carter “understood an important truth: that we find common ground when we look to the stars.”





"You can't always get what you want, But if you try
sometimes, You just might find,
You get what you need."
Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

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by contributing land and resources to create a self-governed Palestine State.

> Michael Broggie, Historian and author of *Walt Disney's Railroad Story, Happy Place, Words of Wisdom; Airforce One: The Final Mission*, and *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Souvenir Book*

Peter de Krassel's book on Palestine is a serious, good-faith effort to lower the temperature of a burning subject and invite people back into difficult, necessary conversation. In elder-sage terms, it is trying to clarify what truly matters, humanize the stakes, and insist on honest trade-offs.

The book refuses to treat October 7 and the war in Gaza as isolated horrors, and instead traces a long arc from imperial carve-ups to Sykes-Picot, Balfour, the Nakba, the Intifadas, and Iran-backed militias, so readers see a shared, cumulative trauma rather than a single villain-of-the-week.

De Krassel's own "Palestinian product" biography gives him standing to ask hard questions of everyone. The proposed alternative two-state solution is less an act of utopian dreaming than a challenge to courage: who is willing to consider unconventional geography, painful compromise, and limits on maximalist slogans in order to save actual lives?

Even where one may dispute his proposed map or his reading of specific episodes, the book models a stance desperately needed in this moment: unsentimental about violence from any side, anchored in history, and relentlessly focused on how both peoples might step away from the abyss into a future of shared security and statehood.

> Nick Patsaouras has served on major public boards, including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Metro, and the Board of Zoning Appeals,
> helping guide infrastructure and planning policy in Los Angeles. He is the author of "The Making of Modern Los Angeles

In the current context, a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine can not work. But inside the pages of Custom Maid Palestine, Peter de Krassel has quite eloquently threaded Middle East history into a narrative that could provide the social and geopolitical fabric that just might give peace a chance for a nation where war is the stuff of daily life. An excellent read backed by telling perspectives that deserve to be heard.

Luke Hunt, columnist,
The Diplomat

Generations have grappled with the Palestinian problem, and no solution, past or present, has been accepted by all parties. Donald Trump's plan to turn the area into a Riviera of the Middle East also falls into that category. Maybe it is time for some out-of-the-box thinking, and Peter de Krassel offers such a radical solution, which may sound impossible right now. But given the history of past failures detailed in the book, perhaps the answer lies in such a solution that defies conventional thinking.

As the author says, it is time to end the needless pain and suffering caused by a conflict rooted in outdated religious and political ideologies that have little relevance in today's interconnected world. A radical two-state solution offered here should be looked at in this context.

Hari Kumar, Editor, Keralatechnology.com

Confronting one of the most perplexing and challenging geo-political conundrums in modern history, Dr. de Krassel mounts an exhaustive study of the various historical factors contributing to global fracturing affecting a solution to the co-existence of Israel and Palestine. Viewing the situation from a unique perspective forged in his family history and personal experiences, he presents what may be the only feasible solution: Bring all the parties together under an international consortium that will allow each to benefit politically and economically