

## End of the Exodus Era

By Daniel Gordis The Jerusalem Post

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I no longer recall who told me to read *Exodus* when I was a kid. But I was transfixed by the book, and a few years later, when I saw the movie, I was enthralled. I probably saw it only once back then (this was long before VHS), but that was more than enough to form a lasting impression of Israel. As if it were lifted out of the Hanukka liturgy, Israel seemed a tale of the triumph of the weak over the mighty, the few over the many, the righteous over the wicked. It was a story imbued with moral clarity, a sense of purpose and mission. It was, quite simply, the Israel I deeply believed in before I ever saw it.

Many years later, at the start of the decade now just ended, we'd moved to Israel. One day, two of our kids were home from school. The intifada was raging; they were young and confused, hurting and frightened. So I decided that renting *Exodus* was just what they needed.

But almost as soon as we started the film, I could tell that my planned educational moment had failed. They were bored silly by the movie, appalled by its primitive technology. The story line seemed saccharine, insipid. But even more damning, the movie didn't reflect the complexity of the conflict in which they were living. I made a feeble attempt to get them to stick with it, but to no avail. In truth, even I could scarcely bear the appalling lack of nuance. We didn't finish watching it; I mumbled some sort of apology for wasting their time, and returned the movie with no fanfare.

It's been years since I'd thought of that failed parenting moment, but it all came back with great clarity last week when I read of the death of Ike Aharonovitch, the captain of the *Exodus*. The ship's commander, Yossi Harel, had died a year or two earlier. Leon Uris, the novel's author, had died in 2003, and Paul Newman, who had played Ari Ben-Canaan in the movie version, passed away in 2008. Thus, with Ike's death, the *Exodus* era had ended.

To my surprise, I found myself much sadder than I would have imagined.

For if I grew up on *Exodus*, my kids have grown up on *Munich* and on *Waltz with Bashir*. I grew up with an idyllic, Ari-Ben-Canaan-like image of Israel, formed from afar. Our children, though, were raised here. And this decade-just-ended, in which they became adults, began with the second intifada, proceeded to the disengagement and then to the highly problematic Second Lebanon War, and is now ending with a Schalit stalemate, a looming Iran and

unprecedented international condemnation of the very fighting force that *Exodus* unabashedly held in such high esteem. Ike's death is thus the perfect metaphor - his passing is a reminder that the world in which I was raised is almost totally gone.

Our kids are busy these days. One's in law school and getting married, one's in the army and hardly ever awake on the days that he's home, and one's working on matriculation exams, thinking about what he'll do when he gets drafted. In many ways, they know a lot more than I do about this country; they're no longer inclined to set aside time for their father's carefully scripted educational moments.

Yet I'm actually tempted to try again. It will never happen, but I still imagine some moment, when for old times' sake, perhaps just to humor their aging parents, the kids sit down with us and watch *Exodus*. I'd tell them to cease the sniggering at the old-Hollywood-style love story, to try not to laugh at the images of the noble Arab in his robe and keffiyeh on the rear terrace of the King David Hotel, and to suspend their incessant political commentary on the obvious oversimplification of the conflict.

Why bother? Because despite the oversimplification and the saccharine overdose, *Exodus* reminds us of a world that used to exist, but doesn't anymore. It's a reminder of the days when young American Jews instinctively knew that the story that was unfolding across the ocean in Israel was also theirs - something we can no longer take for granted. It brings us back to those days when American Jews, and their Israeli counterparts, knew that the story was complicated, but also knew, with every fiber of their being, that the Jewish future depended on Jewish sovereignty. It was an era when Jews across the world still believed in the possibility of genuine leadership, when Jewish masses could speak without embarrassment of the fundamental justice of our cause.

Our kids, and most of their close friends, still believe those things. But they've learned that most people don't; in much of the world, those convictions are considered naïve, or worse. *Exodus* is a vestige of an era when the world was different. Moviemaking has changed, and so has the world. Because of that, peace and justice are more elusive now than they were then.

Like our times, Ike Aharonovitch was complicated. Were it not for Harel, he probably

would have gotten the ship sunk and its passengers killed. We, too, are prone to extremes. But his legacy matters because he believed in the Jews, in their still-emerging state and in the fundamental justice of their cause.

None of us would write Leon Uris's novel today; but that's no excuse for having no story to tell. Ike's memory demands that we recapture the narrative - perhaps with more nuance, but with no apology for insisting on the fundamental justice of our cause.

## The Deadly Price of Pursuing Peace

By Evelyn Gordon    Commentary Magazine    January 2010

When the Oslo process began in 1993, one benefit its adherents promised was a significant improvement in Israel's international standing. And initially, it seemed as if that promise would be kept: 37 countries soon established or renewed diplomatic relations with Israel; a peace treaty was signed with Jordan; five other Arab states opened lower-level relations.

But 16 years later, it is clear that this initial boost was illusory. Not only is Israel's standing no better than it was prior to the famous handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat on the White House Lawn in September 1993, it has fallen to an unprecedented low. Efforts to boycott and divest from Israel are gaining strength throughout the West, among groups as diverse as British academics, Canadian labor unions, the Norwegian government's investment fund, and American churches. Israeli military operations routinely spark huge protests worldwide, often featuring anti-Semitic slogans. References to Israel as an apartheid state have become so commonplace that even a former president of Israel's closest ally, the United States, had no qualms about using the term in the title of his 2007 book on Israel. European polls repeatedly deem Israel the greatest threat to world peace, greater even than such beacons of tranquility and democracy as Iran and North Korea. Courts in several European countries, including Belgium, Britain, and Spain, have seriously considered indicting Israeli officials for war crimes (though none has actually yet done so). And in October, when the United Nations Human Rights Council overwhelmingly endorsed a report that advocated hauling Israel before the International Criminal Court on war-crimes charges, even many of Jerusalem's supposed allies refused to vote against the measure. In academic and media circles, it has even become acceptable to question Israel's very right to exist—something never asked about any other state in the world. None of these developments was imaginable back in the days when

They won't watch the movie, though. So I'll say it to them here. We're in Ike's debt, and in the debt of his contemporaries. So, as a new decade dawns, our obligation to him is simple. Somehow, we have to find once again the courage and the fortitude to believe, and to bring to fruition the dream his generation lived and bequeathed to us all.

**The writer is senior vice president of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem. He is the author, most recently, of *Saving Israel: How the Jewish People Can Win a War That May Never End* (Wiley, 2009).**

Israel refused to talk to the Palestine Liberation Organization, had yet to withdraw from an inch of "Palestinian" land, and had not evacuated a single settlement.

Yet even today, conventional wisdom, including in Israel, continues to assert that Israel's international standing depends on its willingness to advance the "peace process." That invites an obvious question: if so, why has Israel's reputation fallen so low despite its numerous concessions for peace since 1993?

The answer is unpleasant to contemplate, but the mounting evidence makes it inescapable: Israel's standing has declined so precipitously not despite Oslo but because of Oslo. It was Israel's very willingness to make concessions for the sake of peace that has produced its current near-pariah status.

Why should this be so?

There are several reasons. First, Oslo led Israel to sideline its own claim to the West Bank and Gaza, which all Israeli governments (and international Jewish leaders) had stressed to some extent before 1993. Though there had long been a lively debate as to whether Israel ought to hold on to these territories in practice, until 1993 all sides were ready to assert that it had a valid claim to them in principle. The argument in favor of Israel's right to sovereignty there was simple: these territories are the historic Jewish homeland, the heart of the biblical Jewish kingdom. They were explicitly allotted to the future Jewish state by the 1922 League of Nations Mandate, which was never legally superseded. Although the 1947 UN partition plan allotted part of the land to a putative Arab state—a plan that Palestinians and other Arabs rejected as a matter of principle—it was merely a nonbinding "recommendation" (as its own language stated). Thus once the Arabs rejected it, the measure had no more validity than any other unsigned deal. Nor did any sovereign state ever replace the Mandate on this territory: though Jordan and Egypt conquered the

West Bank and Gaza, respectively, in 1948, neither conquest was ever internationally recognized. Legally, therefore, the territories remained stateless lands whose ownership is disputed; over time, the Palestinians simply replaced Egypt and Jordan as the Arab claimants.

None of this precludes an Israeli cession of these areas; countries often waive territorial claims to secure peace agreements. But only if Israel has a valid claim can the act of ceding these lands be a “painful concession” that could arouse sympathy and admiration from the world. If Israel has no claim, it is nothing but a thief. And no one would admire a thief for returning some, but not all, of his stolen property, or for offering to return some, but still not all, of the rest if granted sufficient compensation. Such behavior would be universally condemned. Indeed, if Israel has no claim to this land, even conditioning withdrawal on an end to Palestinian terror becomes harder to justify. If the land is Israel’s, Israel can obviously refuse to cede it unless it receives peace in exchange. But if the land belongs to the Palestinians, many might argue that it should be returned unconditionally.

This latter notion, however, is precisely the picture Israeli discourse has increasingly painted since 1993. Perhaps because pro-Oslo Israelis viewed Israel’s own rights as too self-evident to need restating, they inevitably focused on defending the Oslo accord’s new and domestically controversial claim: that Palestinians, too, have “legitimate and political rights” in the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, for instance, Labor party chairman (and later prime minister) Ehud Barak said in a 1998 television interview that had he been a Palestinian, he would have joined a terrorist organization, because “there is legitimacy for a Palestinian to fight.” Such claims were rarely heard from mainstream Israelis prior to 1993: while the moderate Left had always favored ceding territory, it historically framed this as a necessity of peacemaking rather than a matter of Arab rights.

Moreover, as repeated Israeli concessions brought only more Palestinian terror, making them harder to justify in the name of peace, even right-of-center Israeli leaders increasingly justified them in the language of Palestinian rights. Then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, for instance, stunned the Knesset in 2003 by declaring, “I think the idea that it is possible to continue keeping 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation—yes, it is occupation, you might not like the word, but what is happening is occupation—is bad for Israel, and bad for the Palestinians.”

But if Palestinians have “legitimate rights” to this land, it must belong to them. And if Israel is “occupying” the land, it must not belong to Israel. That, in plain English, is what “rights” and “occupation” mean.

The problem was exacerbated by Sharon’s unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005 and Ehud Olmert’s election the following year on a platform of unilaterally quitting most of the West Bank. Until then, Israel had deemed evicting settlers from their homes a personal and national tragedy that merited sympathy and compensation. But then two successive Israeli prime ministers declared that for both demographic and security reasons, uprooting settlements was an Israeli *interest*. A plurality of Israelis even endorsed this view in a national election. And if so, dismantling settlements cannot be a “painful concession” for which Israel deserves to be rewarded.

Granted, much of the world was disposed to accept the Palestinian claim even before Oslo. But as the sage Hillel famously said 2,000 years ago, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” Oslo marked the moment when Israel stopped defending its own claim to the West Bank and Gaza and instead increasingly endorsed the Palestinian claim. And with no competing narrative to challenge it any longer, the view of Israel as a thief, with all its attendant consequences, has gained unprecedented traction.

This alone would be devastating to Israel’s image. But the problem has been compounded by another unanticipated consequence of Oslo: the territorial withdrawals it entailed have resulted not only in more dead Israelis but also in more dead Palestinians. Nothing undermines a country’s image more quickly than pictures of bleeding victims recycled endlessly on television and computer screens. That is precisely why worldwide protests against both the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and Operation Cast Lead in Gaza last January—operations aimed at halting terror launched from territory Israel had evacuated to the last inch—drew far larger crowds than protests against Israel’s ongoing occupation of the West Bank. Death causes more outrage than occupation.

Statistics compiled by B’Tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) clearly reveal the correlation between withdrawals and increased Palestinian fatalities. During the first intifada, from 1987 through 1993, when Israel controlled the territories, Israeli forces killed 1,070 Palestinians. That is only slightly more than the 1,015 killed in a single year (September 2001 to August 2002) of the second intifada, which erupted after the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had already left much of Gaza and the West Bank, and less than 30 percent of the 3,713 killed during a six-year period of the second intifada. Indeed, it is fewer than the number killed in just three weeks in the January 2009 Gaza war: the lowest estimate of Palestinian fatalities, which comes from the IDF, is 1,166.

Moreover, Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank, which peaked at 667 in the second intifada's second year (September 2001 to August 2002), dropped dramatically after Israel reoccupied this territory in Operation Defensive Shield in April 2002. They plunged by almost two-thirds in the third year, to 242, then to 199 in the fourth, 105 to 125 in each of the next three, and 52 in the eighth, which ended in September 2008 (B'Tselem has yet to publish statistics for 2009). In Gaza, by contrast, Palestinian fatalities soared after Israel withdrew in August 2005. In fact, the second intifada's eighth year, which produced the lowest number of West Bank fatalities since the fighting began, produced the highest number of deaths in Gaza—532, almost 100 more than the previous worst year. And the following year was worse yet: the number of Gazans killed during the January 2009 war alone—1,166 (at least)—is *seven times* the 162 killed in Gaza's single worst month until then.

This data flies in the face of conventional wisdom, which holds that a continuous IDF presence increases the likelihood of deadly encounters. But when the IDF controls an area, it can usually arrest suspected terrorists rather than kill them. Israel cannot arrest suspects in territory it has ceded to Palestinian control. Thus the only way to fight terror emanating from territory the IDF has quit is by military means—namely, killing the terrorists. And military action inevitably involves collateral civilian casualties as well. That is true even of the most civilian-friendly form of military action, precision aerial bombing. *Haaretz* reported that by 2007, the IDF had reduced collateral civilian deaths to less than 3 percent of all those killed in Israeli air strikes. Yet, since human beings are imperfect, some mishaps will always occur: faulty intelligence will leave the army unaware of nearby civilians, or pilot error might send a bomb off course. And ground operations are far deadlier: just as the Gaza war was the worst month of the intifada for Gazans, so was Israel's April 2002 incursion into the West Bank for residents of that territory, with a Palestinian fatality level 50 percent higher than in the second-worst month.

Clearly, withdrawals would not have required military action, with its resultant Palestinian casualties, had the Palestinians not turned every bit of territory they received into a launching pad for terror attacks. But that is exactly what they have done. In the first two and a half years after Oslo, Palestinian terrorists killed more Israelis than they had in the preceding decade. In 2000-04, according to the Shin Bet security service, Israel's terror-related casualties exceeded those of the preceding *53 years*. And between the mid-2005 disengagement from Gaza and the 2009 war, Gazan terrorists fired almost 6,000 rockets and mortars at southern Israel, according to the Intelligence and Terrorism

Information Center. Hence, every withdrawal has faced Israel with a stark choice: sit with folded hands while its citizens are attacked, or take military action that will inevitably produce Palestinian casualties and consequent international outrage.

Israeli withdrawals have also had another unintended consequence: they have energized anti-Israel radicals who, despite their small numbers, have contributed greatly to the anti-Israel climate by propelling the boycott and divestment movement. Because groups such as labor unions and churches are generally viewed positively, when a wide variety of such groups throughout the West all start targeting one particular country for boycott and divestment, people without any prior knowledge of the facts might naturally assume that the accused country must indeed be guilty to merit such treatment. What those people fail to realize is that boycotts and divestments are usually approved not by an organization's full membership but by a handful of activists, which enables a few radicals to hijack the debate. When the British lecturers' union, NATFHE, approved an academic boycott of Israel at its annual conference in May 2006, for instance, the *New York Times* noted that only 198 of its 67,000 members actually voted, and of those, a bare majority—106—voted in favor. Theoretically, these delegates represent the members. In practice, few members choose delegates based on their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; most have more pressing concerns.

And while boycott initiatives are popularly viewed nowadays as a response to Israeli "war crimes," not only did most such boycotts predate the major military operations of 2006 and 2009, but many were launched during periods when Israel was seemingly moving rapidly toward withdrawal. After Israel removed every last settler and soldier from Gaza in August 2005, for instance, Ehud Olmert ran for prime minister on a platform of doing the same in most of the West Bank. Polls showed him winning the March 2006 election handily, which he did. Hence, until the Second Lebanon War erupted in July 2006, one might have expected the boycotters to rest on their laurels. Instead, this period witnessed an unprecedented spate of high-profile boycott activity, including an article headlined "Boycott Israel" in the prestigious magazine published by the Davos World Economic Forum, a cover story in the *Guardian* entitled "Israel and Apartheid: A Special Report," the adoption of a commercial boycott by the Canadian Union of Public Employees' Ontario chapter, and the British academic boycott.

This seemingly counterintuitive behavior has a simple explanation: among anti-Israel radicals, Israel's increasingly frantic pursuit of peace has aroused not admiration but rather the instincts of a predator scenting blood. Over the past 16 years, even as Palestinian positions have remained

unchanged, Israel has repeatedly ditched red lines that enjoyed massive consensus pre-Oslo, including no negotiations with terrorist organizations, no Palestinian state, no concessions on Jerusalem, no negotiations or withdrawals under fire, and no unilateral pullbacks. Worse, these retreats occurred in exchange for ever diminishing returns, and often in response to pressure. This convinced the radicals (and Palestinians as well) that Israel could be pressured into abandoning *any* red line if the heat was turned high enough. Hence the Ontario boycott, for instance, is explicitly designed to continue until Israel grants a Palestinian “right of return,” thereby requiring Israel to commit demographic suicide.

The retreats from Israel’s previous positions began the minute Oslo was signed. The last Israeli cession of territory—the return of Sinai to Egypt in 1982, and the subsequent handover of the Taba resort seven years later—followed a nine-year cease-fire and a full-fledged peace treaty backed by international guarantees, including a multinational force in Sinai. In contrast, Israel’s 1994 handover of Gaza and Jericho to the PLO came in the wake of six years of terrorist violence (the first intifada) and a mere interim agreement, with no international guarantees. The Palestinians promptly violated their side of the Oslo deal, which was to end terror: in the 30 months after Oslo, as previously noted, Palestinian terrorists killed more Israelis than they had during the entire preceding decade. Yet in 1995-97, due in part to American pressure, Israel transferred six more West Bank cities to the Palestinian Authority (PA), in exchange for nothing but renewed Palestinian pledges to end violence. In July 2000, Israel offered the Palestinians some 88 percent of the territories, including most of East Jerusalem. The Palestinians responded by launching the second intifada. But despite this gross violation of Oslo, Israel capitulated to American and international pressure and offered *more* territory, including the Temple Mount, in Washington in December 2000 and at the Taba talks in January 2001.

Over the next four years, Palestinian terror claimed more Israeli victims than in all the years from 1947 through 2000. Yet international pressure for Israeli concessions continued, and Israel again capitulated: in August 2005, it evacuated 25 settlements—something it had previously conditioned on a full-fledged peace treaty—for no recompense at all. And when the Palestinians responded with daily rocket fire from evacuated Gaza, as well as with a landslide electoral victory for Hamas, *Israel* responded by electing Olmert, who campaigned on a promise of unilaterally quitting most of the West Bank and evicting some 80,000 settlers (10 times the number removed from Gaza). Finally, when the ongoing barrages from Gaza and the Second Lebanon War combined to kill that plan,

Olmert’s response was to sweeten Israel’s final-status offer. He proposed a withdrawal from 94 percent of the West Bank; territorial swaps to compensate for the remainder; international Muslim control over Jerusalem’s holy sites; and the resettlement of several thousand Palestinian refugees in Israel.

To Israelis, these ever growing concessions with no quid pro quo reflect the depth of their desire for peace. But to their enemies, they signal panic—a conclusion reinforced by verbal declarations like Olmert’s famous 2005 statement to the Israel Policy Forum that Israel “desperately needs” peace because “we are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies.” Or his even more shocking statement to *Haaretz* in November 2007 that if “the two-state solution collapses the State of Israel is finished.” If Israelis wrongly believe that their country’s survival depends on reaching a deal, they are clearly vulnerable to being pressured into concessions that really *will* endanger its survival. Sixteen years of unrequited concessions have convinced anti-Israel radicals that Israel is indeed vulnerable to this kind of pressure. Thus Israel’s very pursuit of peace has spurred its enemies to go for the jugular.

Yet this desperate quest for peace also failed to win Israel points among the general public, because each new initiative raised new hopes of a peace that was in fact never achievable. And it is human nature to be angrier over disappointed hope than over having never hoped at all. What is worse is the very fact that whenever negotiations broke down, it was Israel, rather than the Palestinian side, that came back with a better offer, created the impression that both sides thought peace *would* be achievable if Israel just gave *enough*. Thus the lack of peace must be Israel’s fault.

In fact, though, it became clear almost immediately after the Oslo deal was signed that peace was unachievable, because Israel’s initial territorial concessions produced such a sharp rise in terrorist violence. Whether this stemmed from Yasir Arafat’s unwillingness to control terror or his inability to do so was irrelevant: if ceding land for peace instead produced war, there were no grounds for believing that ceding more land, as Oslo required, would produce anything but more war.

Nor did this pattern change after Mahmoud Abbas replaced Arafat in 2004. Even during Abbas’s year in sole control of the PA, before Hamas triumphed in the Palestinian elections in 2006, terror continued. According to the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, Palestinians killed 54 Israelis and wounded 484 that year (2005), while nonfatal attacks numbered in the thousands, including 1,059 rockets and mortars fired at Israel from Gaza. The rocket attacks are particularly significant, because the IDF left Gaza in August

2005, which meant Abbas could not accuse Israeli forces of impeding his efforts there. Yet not only did he never order his own forces to stop the attacks, he explicitly and repeatedly declared that he never would do so. Indeed, he began cracking down on Hamas only in 2007, after the Islamic group's takeover of Gaza made him realize that it threatened his own power, and has repeatedly offered to reverse this crackdown as part of a proposed reconciliation with Hamas (which Hamas has so far rejected). Again, it makes no difference whether he was genuinely reluctant or merely felt powerless: Israel cannot cede land if that land will become a base for terror attacks against it.

Equally important, however, is that Palestinian negotiating positions preclude any deal. While it was initially plausible to believe that these positions would eventually moderate, a decade and a half with no movement whatsoever has proved otherwise. No Israeli government, for instance, could sign a deal forfeiting all Israeli connection to the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, to which Jews have prayed three times a day for millennia. To do so would be cultural and spiritual suicide. But even worse is the Palestinians' insistence on a "right of return" to Israel for 4.7 million descendants of Palestinian refugees (according to the UN's almost certainly inflated figure). Added to Israel's 1.5 million Arab citizens, these "refugees" would outnumber its 5.6 million Jews and could thereby simply vote the Jewish state out of existence. That would not be cultural and spiritual suicide but actual physical suicide. And how can peace even be seriously negotiated with someone who insists that its price is your disappearance from the map?

Yet rather than stating clearly that peace is not and never will be possible unless the Palestinians end terror and stop insisting that any deal result in the Jewish state's eradication, Israeli prime ministers never stopped assuring their fellow citizens and the world that a deal was possible. It began with Yitzhak Rabin, who instead of acknowledging that the upsurge in terror proved Oslo a failure began incanting a mantra about fighting terror as if there were no negotiations, and negotiating as if there were no terror. The implication was clear: terror is *not* an insurmountable obstacle; peace is still achievable.

In his first go-round as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu continued the illusion: he not only campaigned in 1996 on a slogan of bringing "peace with security," again implying that peace was possible, but he continued negotiating with, and ceding territory to, Arafat. These would have been reasonable moves in the context of a viable peace process, but would be senseless if peace were actually unachievable and territorial concessions only produced more terror. To the uninformed, the obvious conclusion was that peace *was* achievable—

in which case Netanyahu's visible distaste for both negotiations and concessions would certainly be an impediment.

Similarly, when Palestinians responded to Prime Minister Ehud Barak's July 2000 offer with the second intifada, Barak did not declare peace unachievable; he went to Washington and Taba and offered additional concessions. Again, the implication was that he still thought peace was possible if he offered *enough*—so if peace remained elusive, the fault must lie with Israel's stinginess. Then, despite Abbas's failure even to respond to Olmert's far-reaching offer of September 2008 (Abbas remained mute for nine months, until long after Olmert had left office—finally telling the *Washington Post* that the offer was unacceptable), Olmert nevertheless told *Haaretz* in September 2009 that Abbas was not to blame for the talks' failure and was still a partner. And today, in his second stint as prime minister, Netanyahu is again paying lip service to the idea that peace is achievable.

American and European leaders are also guilty of endlessly proclaiming that peace is achievable, even though they know better (this knowledge explains why most European leaders are less hostile to Israel than their publics). But they cannot be more Catholic than the pope. As long as Israel's government maintains this fiction, other world leaders can do no less. And so the world is constantly being told that peace is around the corner only to be constantly disappointed, which inevitably produces frustration and rage. And even worse, Israel's very efforts to achieve peace—its refusal to acknowledge that peace is unachievable, its habit of responding to every failure with a better offer—has led the world to conclude that Israel is to blame for the endless disappointments.

Reversing the devastating damage Israel's international standing has suffered since 1993 will be difficult at best. But it will not be possible at all unless Israel and its friends overseas understand that the desperate pursuit of peace is not the solution but the problem. Only then can Israel and its supporters halt the destructive behavior of the past 16 years and start doing what is needed to reverse the decline.

First, Israel and its supporters must reiterate Israel's own claim to the territories at every opportunity. While many have grown accustomed to disavowing Israel's right to this land, Israelis of all political stripes were outraged by President Barack Obama's Cairo speech, in which the only justification for the existence of a Jewish state was assumed to be the Holocaust—while the Jews' historical claim to the land of Israel was thrown down the memory hole. By taking this stand, Obama may have unwittingly provided the impetus for reviving a broad-based assertion of Jewish rights. For instance, on July 17, the left-wing *Haaretz*'s star columnist Yoel Marcus wrote that Obama's

“disregard of our historical connection to the land of Israel” was “extremely upsetting.” Marcus concluded that “as a leader who aspires to solve the problems of the world through dialogue, we expect him to come to Israel and declare here courageously, before the entire world, that our connection to this land began long before the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Holocaust, and that 4,000 years ago, Jews already stood on the ground where he now stands.” If even a hard-core Oslo supporter such as Marcus can be provoked into reasserting Israel’s claim to the land, then there is hope for reviving such sentiments across the Israeli political spectrum.

Second, Israel must cede no more land until the Palestinians prove they can and will keep it from becoming a base for anti-Israel terror. And if rocket fire from Gaza resumes, Israel will have to consider reoccupying it, as that may be the only alternative to periodic wars that inevitably cause heavy Palestinian casualties. There is not currently much of an appetite for such a course of action within Israel, but that could easily change if the rocket barrages resume, just as Israelis’ initial reluctance to return to the West Bank was swept aside by escalating terror from that territory in the early part of this decade. And while a return to Gaza would certainly cause an initial wave of outrage abroad, so did Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, when Israeli troops returned to Palestinian cities in the West Bank following a wave of deadly suicide bombings. Yet that criticism died down fairly quickly, and today Israel hears very few complaints about the IDF’s ongoing total control over the West Bank. What it does hear complaints about, on an almost daily basis, from both world leaders and human-rights activists, is evacuated Gaza—not just Israel’s military operations there but also the blockade, another defensive measure aimed at compensating for the absence of troops. So it seems reasonable to assume that a reoccupation of Gaza would follow the same pattern: initial outrage that would gradually die down as the Palestinian death toll dropped and life in Gaza improved, thanks to the end of the blockade, resumption of trade across the border, and improved employment opportunities.

Third, Israel and its supporters must start telling the truth about the impossibility of peace at

present—and about the reasons for the impasse. This is by far the hardest task for those seeking to change the “peace process” culture. And that is true not just for the international arena but for Israeli domestic opinion as well. Most Israelis know perfectly well that peace is not currently possible, and why, but they still think it is essential to speak as if this were not true. Nevertheless, Netanyahu’s leadership represents a unique opportunity because, in marked contrast to most Israeli politicians, serving as the national explainer is something at which he excels. Both his speech at Bar-Ilan University in June 2009—where he outlined his approach to the peace process—and his address to the United Nations General Assembly in October struck a real chord with mainstream Israelis. Netanyahu is capable of explaining, in a way Israelis can readily understand, why his country’s national discourse about peace needs to change. The same principle applies to overseas opinion; in 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, Netanyahu was not even a member of the government, but he was still one of the most sought-after, if not the most sought-after, Israeli interviewees by the foreign media. This is a moment in history when someone must finally start telling the world the truth about the situation, and the prime minister is uniquely qualified to do it.

Finally, Israel must stop projecting a sense of panic, through both words and deeds, which merely emboldens its enemies. Israel has not only survived for 61 years despite the absence of peace; it has thrived. Its population has increased more than seven-fold; its per capita income has risen nine-fold; it has maintained a strong democracy in a region where democracy is otherwise unknown. And it can continue surviving and thriving without peace for as long as necessary.

That is, unless its own mistakes destroy it. Right now, that is what is happening: Israel’s growing pariah status poses a far more serious long-term danger to its survival than any extant military threat. Yet because this pariah status is largely due to its own actions, Israel has the power to reverse the trend.□ That process must begin with recognizing where the problem truly lies.

## The Forgotten Palestinian Refugees

By Daniel Schwammenthal The Wall Street Journal December 28, 2009

**Even in Bethlehem, Palestinian Christians are suffering under Muslim intolerance.** Meet Mr. Ibrahim (a pseudonym to protect him from reprisals), a 23-year old Palestinian refugee living in the West Bank. Unlike those descendents of refugees born in United Nations camps, Mr. Ibrahim fled his birthplace just two years ago. And he wasn't running

away from Israelis, but from his Palestinian brethren in Gaza.

Mr. Ibrahim's crime in that Hamas-ruled territory was to be a Christian, a transgression he compounded in the Islamists' eyes by writing love poems.

"Muslims tied to Hamas tried to take me twice," says Mr. Ibrahim, and he didn't want to find out

what they'd do to him if they ever kidnapped him. He hasn't seen his family since Christmas 2007 and is afraid even to talk to them on the phone.

Speaking to a group of foreign journalists in the Bethlehem Bible College where he is studying theology, Mr. Ibrahim describes a life of fear in Gaza. "My sister is under a lot of pressure to wear a headscarf. People are turning more and more to Islamic fundamentalism and the situation for Christians is very difficult," he says.

In 2007, one year after the Hamas takeover, the owner of Gaza's only Christian bookstore was abducted and murdered. Christian shops and schools have been firebombed. Little wonder that most of Mr. Ibrahim's Christian friends have also left Gaza.

On the rare occasion that Western media cover the plight of Christians in the Palestinian territories, it is often to denounce Israel and its security barrier. Yet until Palestinian terrorist groups turned Bethlehem into a safe haven for suicide bombers, Bethlehemites were free to enter Israel, just as many Israelis routinely visited Bethlehem.

The other truth usually ignored by the Western press is that the barrier helped restore calm and security not just in Israel, but also in the West Bank including Bethlehem. The Church of the Nativity, which Palestinian gunmen stormed and defiled in 2002 to escape from Israeli security forces, is now filled again with tourists and pilgrims from around the world.

But even here in Jesus' birthplace, which is under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Christians live on a knife's edge. Mr. Ibrahim tells me that Muslims often stand in front of the gate of the Bible College and read from the Quran to intimidate Christian students. Other Muslims like to roll out their prayer rugs right in Manger Square.

Asked about why Muslims would pray so close to one of Christianity's holiest sites, Pastor Alex Awad, dean of students at the Bible College, diplomatically advises me to pose this question to the Muslims themselves. Mindful of his community's precarious situation, he is at pains to stress that

whatever problems Christians may have with their Muslim neighbors, it's not the PA's fault.

"Muslims and Christians live here in relative harmony," he tells reporters, only to add that Christians "feel the pressure of Islam . . . There is intimidation and fanaticism but these are little instances and there is no general persecution."

Samir Qumsieh, the founder of what he says is the holy land's only Christian TV station, also stresses that there is no "Christian suffering" and that the Christians' problems are not orchestrated by the PA. Yet his stories of land theft, beatings and intimidation make one wonder why, if the PA doesn't approve of such injustices, it is doing so little to stop it?

Christians have only recently begun to talk about how Muslim gangs simply come and take possession of Christian-owned land while the Palestinian security services, almost exclusively staffed by Muslims, stand by. Mr. Qumsieh's own home was firebombed three years ago. The perpetrators were never caught.

"We have never suffered as we are suffering now," Mr. Qumsieh confesses, violating his own introductory warning to the assorted foreign correspondents in his office not to use the word "suffering."

Always a minority religion among the predominantly Muslim Palestinians, Christians are, Mr. Qumsieh says, "melting away," even in Bethlehem. While they represented about 80% of the city's population 60 years ago, their numbers are now down to about 20%, a result not just of Muslims' higher birth rates but also widespread Christian emigration. "Our future as a Christian community here is gloomy," Mr. Qumsieh says.

Palestinian plight not attributable to Israel barely seems to register in the West's collective conscience. As Christians around the world remember Jesus' birth, perhaps we can think of Mr. Ibrahim and those Christians still suffering in Gaza and Bethlehem.

**Mr. Schwammenthal is an editorial writer for The Wall Street Journal Europe.**

## Israeli settlements are more than legitimate

**By Eric Rozenman The Los Angeles Times December 11, 2009**

Critics may assail them on other grounds, but no one can deny that they are legal. In fact, the 1922 Mandate for Palestine encourages them.

President Obama asserts, seconded by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, that "America does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements" in the West Bank. Both have praised the 10-month freeze on new residential building -- excluding eastern Jerusalem -- that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced late last month.

Netanyahu now calls for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to resume negotiations or take the blame for lack of progress when the "one-time-only" freeze expires. Abbas' precondition -- adopted after Washington's pronouncements -- is that all Israeli construction, including in eastern Jerusalem, must cease permanently.

Too bad international diplomacy doesn't have a replay button. If it did, the parties could look back at history, which would show that Israeli settlements

not only are legitimate under international law but positively encouraged.

The basic relevant provision, the League of Nations' 1922 British Mandate for Palestine, Article 6, encourages "close settlement by Jews on the land, including state lands and waste lands not required for public use." Most Israeli settlements in the West Bank have been built on land that was state land under the Ottomans, British, Jordanians and, after the 1967 Six-Day War, under the Israelis, or on property that has been privately purchased.

The United States endorsed Article 6 by signing the 1924 Anglo-American Convention, a treaty stipulating acceptance of the mandate. The League of Nations is long gone, but Article 6 remains in force. The United Nations' 1945 Charter, Article 80 - - sometimes known as "the Palestine article" -- notes among other things that "nothing in the charter shall be construed to alter in any manner the rights whatsoever of any states or peoples or the terms of existing international instruments."

Eugene Rostow, U.S. undersecretary of State for President Lyndon Johnson -- who is an authority on international law and the coauthor of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, which outlines requirements for Arab-Israeli peace -- reaffirmed this principle. In 1990, he said: "The Jewish right of settlement in the West Bank is conferred by the same provisions of the mandate under which Jews settled in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem before the state of Israel was created."

As for Resolution 242's call for "secure and recognized boundaries," according to Rostow in 1991 in another piece, a careful look at the wrangling over the resolution in 1967 makes it clear that it did not mandate Israeli withdrawal from all of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sinai peninsula to the post-1948 armistice lines.

Many who allege that Jewish communities in the West Bank violate international law cite the 4th Geneva Convention, Article 49. It states that an

occupying power "shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." But Julius Stone, like Rostow a leading legal theorist, wrote in his 1981 book, "Israel and Palestine: An Assault on the Law of Nations," that the effort to designate Israeli settlements as illegal was a "subversion ... of basic international law principles."

Stone, Stephen Schwebel, a former judge on the International Court of Justice, and others have distinguished between territory acquired in an "aggressive conquest" (such as Nazi Germany's seizures during World War II) and territory taken in self-defense (such as Israeli conquests in 1967).

The distinction is especially sharp when the territory acquired had been held illegally, as Jordan had held the West Bank, which it seized during the Arab states' 1948-49 war against Israel. Further, Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention was intended to outlaw the Nazi practice of forcibly transporting populations into or out of occupied territories to labor or death camps. Israelis were not forcibly transferred to the West Bank, nor were Palestinian Arabs forced out of it. Two years after President Carter's State Department determined that Israeli settlements violated international law, President Reagan said flatly that they were "not illegal."

One can argue, as Reagan did and Obama does, that Israel's establishing towns in the disputed territories after 1967 obstructs diplomacy, or, as some Israeli critics do, that building Jewish communities near Palestinian Arab population centers disperses the country's Jewish majority too widely. But one cannot accurately declare the settlements illegal.

**Eric Rozenman is Washington director of CAMERA, the Boston-based Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America.**

## A Captive Soldier Becomes an Israeli Cause

By Joshua Mitnick The Wall Street Journal December 23, 2009

**Amid Talks With Hamas to Free Sgt. Gilad Shalit in Exchange for 1,000 Palestinian Prisoners, Fears of a Security Threat**

Hope for the release of Sgt. Gilad Shalit, held by Hamas since 2006, has become enough of a cause célèbre to bring Israel near the edge of a trade long considered taboo: releasing as many as 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in return.

The deal still may not happen. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been holding marathon meetings this week with half-a-dozen cabinet ministers to discuss a possible swap to end the 3 1/2-year ordeal of the captured soldier, now 23 years old.

On Tuesday, Israel sent Hamas a revised proposal through German intermediaries, saying it was prepared to meet some conditions on the exchange but not others.

The Saga of Gilad Shalit Such a lopsided swap of prisoners would be momentous for Mr. Netanyahu, who has long taken a hard line in dealings with Hamas. The six cabinet ministers with whom the prime minister is consulting are reported to be divided on the matter.

Many Israelis still are concerned about the danger of releasing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, many of them convicted of violent crimes

against Israelis. Shachar Srur, a 37-year old lawyer in Tel Aviv, said he was wavering.

"The release of terrorists leads to one conclusion -- that a lot of people will die in the coming months and years," he said. "On the other hand, everyone in Israel looks at his family and sees their point of view."

Hope for Sgt. Shalit's release has surged quickly here since September, when Hamas released a "proof of life" video, showing an apparently healthy Sgt. Shalit with a current newspaper. The government exchanged 20 female Palestinian prisoners just for the video. The move seemed to launch recent negotiations over a wider release of detainees.

A large swath of Israel's 7.5 million people -- who are subject to compulsory military service -- have transformed Sgt. Shalit into a national son and brother, rather than a prisoner of war.

Israelis are haunted by the memory of Maj. Ron Arad, an Air Force navigator taken prisoner of war in southern Lebanon in 1986. Successive Israeli governments never sealed a deal for his release, and today Maj. Arad is widely believed to be dead, though Israel's official position is that he is still alive.

To help avoid a repeat, the Shalit family established "The Army of Friends of Gilad" -- a grassroots campaign of volunteers, advertising executives and a public-relations strategist.

The soldier's supporters have pitched a tent outside Mr. Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem. They also have put images of Sgt. Shalit on billboards; for months, one stood across from the military's headquarters in Tel Aviv.

A story Mr. Shalit wrote in school, nine years before he was captured, has been turned into a children's book and an art exhibit. A year after his capture, a teacher rediscovered the story, about a shark and a fish who overcome mutual fear to strike up a friendship.

Israeli demonstrators held banners depicting captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit during a protest calling for his release outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem on Sunday.

Lee Rimon, an artist who runs a gallery here, commissioned artists to illustrate the book, titled "When the Shark and the Fish First Met." Published two years ago, it became a bestseller. Ms. Rimon helped guide an exhibit of illustrations from the tale, through 11 Israeli cities and the Israeli parliament in Jerusalem.

"The main thing is that Gilad's name should always be in the public consciousness," Ms. Rimon says.

Swapping Palestinian prisoners accused or convicted in militant attacks doesn't bother her, she says.

"I'm not at all logical" about the prisoner swap, she says. "I consider Gilad as part of my family."

One recent morning at a public library in Netanya, a coastal city 20 miles north of Tel Aviv, a group of sixth-graders on a field trip viewed the exhibition about Sgt. Shalit's book and listened to an explanation about his life. "We have a social mission" to tell people about Sgt. Shalit, said library director Lea Alon. "He is everyone's soldier. We don't get into the question of price."

Lapid, a village halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, recently held a vigil for Sgt. Shalit, with events for all ages. A puppeteer performed Sgt. Shalit's tale for children.

Later, teens and adult demonstrators in shirts reading "Gilad is still alive" lit candles and sang.

"He was defending us, and we need to bring him back," said Mor Etzioni, a 10th grader who was selling bumper stickers and T-shirts promoting Sgt. Shalit's release. "We want them to close the deal as quickly as possible."

**As many of you have been aware, I have been through successful major brain tumor surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore less than two weeks ago and I am resting home comfortably. The outpouring of love, concern and prayer from all parts of the community has been uplifting and a major part of my healing process. The return of the Israel Newsletter is another part of my continued long-term recuperation. (ed)**

If anyone would like to receive this newsletter by a weekly e-mail, please drop us a note at [sheldonb@rsfchart.com](mailto:sheldonb@rsfchart.com) and we will be glad to add you to our growing list of subscribers.

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Join Nefesh B'Nefesh and Philip Stein, CPA for an informative seminar on taxes in Israel. Learn about new Israeli Tax Laws, Personal tax planning, Pensions and Social Security, and starting your own business in Israel. Park Heights JCC, 5700 Park Heights Ave, Baltimore on January 12, 2010 from 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm.