



## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel  
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of  
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to break out throughout the world is for the US and its allies to quit clinging to their guns and religions and start apologizing for their rudeness. In furtherance of this goal, Obama has devoted himself to putting the screws on US allies, slashing America's

defense budget and embarking on a worldwide tour apologizing to US adversaries.

The basic reality that the US is being led by a radical ideologue who clings to his views in the face of overwhelming proof of their falsity is the most fundamental fact that world leaders must reckon with today as they formulate policies to contend with the Obama administration. This is first and foremost the case for Israel.

Since the Netanyahu government took office three months ago, the Obama administration has placed inordinate pressure on Jerusalem in a bid to coerce it into making massive concessions to the Palestinians. These concessions are demanded not for peace, but simply for the sake of placing pressure on Israel. Obama wishes to pressure Israel to show his good intentions to the Arabs and Iran.

To date, Obama's loudest demand has been to officially prohibit all Jewish construction in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Although the demand is intrinsically bigoted, illegal and immoral, and although the consequences of the expulsion of all Jews from Gaza in 2005 show that Israeli land giveaways and ethnic cleansing bring war not peace, the Netanyahu government has opted not to get into an open confrontation with the administration on the issue.

Instead, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his government have sought to treat Obama's offensive as a routine disagreement between otherwise close allies. Rather than defending the principles of Jewish national, legal and human rights and the country's right to security, Netanyahu has sought to reach an accommodation with Obama by reducing the discussion to a conversation about the inevitable natural growth of Jewish communities due to expanding families.

But what Obama's slavish devotion to his radical world view shows is that Netanyahu's decision to seek an accommodation is not simply an exercise in futility, it is a recipe for disaster. Obama and his advisers do not care that Jewish fertility rates are the fastest rising in the world. They do not care that by arguing for a complete halt in "natural" growth, they are effectively adopting a eugenics argument the likes of which no US policy-maker has dared to advance since before the Holocaust. They are looking to fight because they believe that the US is best served by fighting with its allies - particularly with Israel. Any concession Netanyahu makes will just form the basis for the next round of demands.

Far from seeking an agreement with Obama, Netanyahu should realize that given the president's ideological rigidity, there is no agreement to be had. Instead of trying to resolve the issue, Netanyahu's goal should be to prolong discussions until Obama finds someone else to pick on.

Rather than making wrongheaded concessions to Obama on Jewish population growth in the vain hope of mollifying him, Israel should go on the offensive on issues where it has something to gain from a confrontation. Two specific issues - aside from Iran's nuclear program - should be raised in this regard.

First, in recent months the Obama administration has applied massive pressure on Israel to remove its military forces from Judea and Samaria, curtail its counterterror operations and allow US-trained, anti-Israel Palestinian military forces to deploy in the towns and cities. Rather than openly oppose these demands, in the interests of cultivating good relations, the Netanyahu government has gone along with the program. This it has done in spite of the fact that the Palestinian forces now deploying throughout the areas have a history of participating in and supporting terror attacks against Israel as well as terrorizing their own people.

Last week the government quietly announced that the IDF is pulling

## Commentary...

### Avoiding an American Ambush By Caroline Glick

It works out that US President Barack Obama is a man of heartfelt, long-held principles. It also works out that his principles are divorced from reality and unresponsive to any facts that contradict them.

This much was made clear by a New York Times report on Sunday which discussed a recently "rediscovered" 1983 article Obama published in a student magazine on the subject of nuclear disarmament when he was an undergraduate at Columbia University.

Obama's article, "Breaking the war mentality," was ostensibly a feature story showcasing two student organizations that advocated a freeze in the US's nuclear arsenal. But the young Obama didn't hesitate to use his platform to make his own, even more radical views known to his readers. As he put it: "The narrow focus of the Freeze movement, as well as academic discussion of first- versus second-strike capabilities, suit the military-industrial interests, as they continue adding to their billion-dollar erector sets."

Citing a Rastafarian reggae musician as his foreign policy authority, Obama ruminated, "When Peter Tosh sings that 'everybody's asking for peace, but nobody's asking for justice,' one is forced to wonder whether disarmament or arms control issues, severed from economic and political issues, might be another instance of focusing on the symptoms of a problem, instead of the disease itself."

As one of the freeze advocates explained gently, contending with "the disease itself" was an unachievable goal since "you're not going to get rid of the military in the near future."

There is nothing shocking about Obama's embrace of radical politics as a college student. Particularly at Columbia, adopting such positions was the most conformist move a student could make. What is disturbing is that these views have endured over time, although they were overtaken by events 20 years ago.

Just six years after Obama penned his little manifesto, the Iron Curtain came crashing down. The Soviet empire fell not because radicals like Obama called for the US to destroy its nuclear arsenal, it fell because president Ronald Reagan ignored them and vastly expanded the US's nuclear arsenal while deploying short-range nuclear warheads in Europe and launching the US's missile defense program while renouncing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

On Monday Obama arrived in Moscow for a round of disarmament talks with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. According to most accounts, while in Moscow Obama plans to abandon US allies Ukraine and Georgia and agree to deep cuts in US missile defense programs. In exchange, Moscow is expected to consider joining Washington in cutting back on its nuclear arsenal just as the likes of Iran and North Korea build up theirs.

Of course, even if Russia doesn't agree to scale back its nuclear arsenal, Obama has already ensured that the US will slash the size of its own by refusing to fund its modernization. In short, Obama is working to implement the precise policy he laid out as an unoriginal student conformist 26 years ago.

By now of course, none of this is particularly surprising. Since entering office seven long months ago, Obama has demonstrated that his guiding philosophy for foreign affairs is that the US and its allies are to blame for their adversaries' hostility toward them. All that needs to happen for peace

out of most Palestinian population centers and turning the keys over to these hostile US-trained forces. This was a mistake.

In the weeks to come, the government should bluntly and publicly discuss and protest Fatah political and military leaders' continued support for terrorists and terrorist attacks against Israel. Netanyahu and his government should also detail human-rights abuses Fatah personnel routinely carry out against Palestinian journalists, businessmen and other civilians. The administration should be forced to defend its decision to empower these corrupt, terror-supporting brutes at the expense of Israel's security, and to force US taxpayers to foot the bill for its cockamamie priorities.

The second issue is US military aid. For years Israel's detractors have pointed to this aid as "proof" that Israel is a strategic burden for America. But in recent years, and particularly since the Obama administration took office, it is becoming increasingly clear that US military assistance may be a greater burden for Israel than for the US.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that the Pentagon has forced Israel Aerospace Industries to back out of a joint partnership with a Swedish aerospace company to compete in a multi-billion dollar tender to sell new multi-role fighters to the Indian air force. And as the Post reported, this is the second major deal the Pentagon has forced Israel to withdraw from in the past year. Last summer it was forced to bow out of a \$500 million tender to supply the Turkish army with a new main battle tank. In both cases, US firms were competing in the tenders and the Pentagon threatened that Israeli participation would risk continued US-Israeli cooperation.

Today the Israel Air Force faces the prospect of not having a new-generation fighter. The Pentagon has placed so many draconian restrictions on its purchase of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and raised the price so high, that it makes little strategic or economic sense to purchase it. So too, last week the Israel Navy announced it has decided to explore the option of building its own warships rather than buy one of two competing US naval platforms as planned because the US contractors' costs have gone up so high. The Navy is also taking into consideration the fact that by building domestic platforms, it will provide needed employment to shipyard workers.

All in all, both in terms of pure economics and in terms of the massive and constantly escalating restrictions the Obama administration is now placing on Israeli use of US technologies and munitions, maintaining US military assistance makes less and less sense with each passing day.

Were Israel to initiate a conversation about cutting back on this assistance, it would be able to ensure that the talks take place on its terms. Moreover, given the fact that Israel may indeed be best served by simply ending its military assistance package, the risk involved in such discussions would not be particularly earth shattering. Finally, by making clear that it is not dependent on Obama's kindness, it would be expanding its maneuvering room on other issues as well.

What Obama's radicalism tells us is that he is not a man who is moved by rational discourse. He is not a man who is willing to be convinced that he is mistaken. But even in these dire circumstances, Israel is not without good options for securing its interests vis-à-vis Washington.

To do so, Jerusalem must first understand that it gains nothing from making concessions to a president bent on picking a fight with it. Then it must recognize that there are issues where a confrontation with Obama can serve its interests. Finally it must pursue those issues with energy and passion. (Jerusalem Post Jul 6)

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### **The Secret Of Failure** By Ze'ev B. Begin

Even in the era of fast-flowing information that tickles curiosity, the failure of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 2008 did not arouse public discussion. But as the international diplomatic peace effort revives once again, it is vital to try and understand the reasons for this failure, based on the known facts.

Never had conditions been so conducive to the attainment of a permanent solution between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority as in 2008. The Oslo agreements were defined from the outset as interim, and the blame for the failure of the permanent-status negotiations in 2000 could be put on Yasser Arafat, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who never changed his spots. However, in 2008 negotiations were held between PLO leaders known to be very moderate and an Israeli government known

for its readiness to walk an extra mile on the road to peace. Indeed, Hamas took over Gaza in June 2007, but even this did not divert the negotiators from their goal; the decision was to try to reach an agreement between Israel and the PLO and to then shelve it until it was ripe for execution.

Since the failure of these negotiations was not regarded as a public scandal, it did not arouse public discourse or any attempt to deeply explore its reasons; only lately have some disturbing reports surfaced. The Washington Post on May 25 reported that according to PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), prime minister Olmert accepted the principle of the "right of return" for Arab refugees and offered to resettle thousands in Israel. Abbas also said that Olmert offered him 97% of Judea and Samaria (after Israel had already withdrawn from Gaza in 2005). In addition, last week Newsweek reported that Olmert had told them that he proposed that Israel would give up its sovereignty in the "Holy Basin" in Jerusalem and suggested that it be jointly administered by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the PLO, Israel and the United States; this was confirmed by PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat.

Why, then, didn't the moderate PLO leadership embrace such an extreme Israeli offer? The answer given by Abbas to The Washington Post surprised many: "The gaps were wide." However, it is also quite surprising that a full month has elapsed since that interview was published and yet no public discussion has taken place attempting to explore the meaning of that statement and to understand what is left for Israel to do to fill those gaps and contribute to a successful outcome of the negotiations.

The truth is, of course, that nothing more can be done on the part of Israel. Unintentionally, Olmert took the veil of moderation off the face of the PLO. When the claim is raised that the PLO would actually suffice itself with a symbolic gesture concerning the thorny refugee issue, its refusal to accept Olmert's proposals proves that the PLO truly intends to apply the "right of return" of refugees to their original homes in Haifa and in Jaffa, in Lod and Beersheba. PLO leader Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala) explained lately to Haaretz that "it's not fair to demand that we recognize you [Israel] as the state of the Jewish people because that means... a predetermination of the refugees' future, before the negotiations are over. Our refusal is adamant." To prevent misunderstanding, Mahmoud Abbas, in his Washington Post interview, rejected the possibility that the PLO recognizes Israel as a Jewish state because it would imply renunciation of any large-scale resettlement of refugees.

Although the Arab Peace Initiative includes two articles explicitly dealing with the "right of return," it should be recognized that the resettlement of refugees in Israel is not the goal but the instrument. All signs indicate that the goal is the cancelation of Israel as a sovereign state in Palestine, and that this is the source of the PLO's adamant refusal to accept Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. Hence, even Israel's withdrawal to the 1949 armistice demarcation line - even that which runs through Jerusalem - and even its agreement to assume responsibility for the plight of the refugees and resettle thousands of them in Israel, will not bring about the termination of the struggle, but will rather lead to the next chapter of prolonged hostility.

The real dispute does not concern the natural growth of Ariel (in Samaria) but the natural right of the Jewish people to sovereignty in Carmiel (in the Galilee).

This is not a futile theological debate but a practical and vital issue. Its severe significance was proven last year, when in the course of talks PLO negotiators were explicitly asked whether, after an agreement is reached to their satisfaction, they would agree to include in it a specific article stating that this puts an end to the dispute and terminates all further claims. The government did not bring to the public's attention the fact that to this simple question, the PLO leadership ominously answered in the negative.

The necessary conclusion therefore is that the moderate organization for the liberation of Palestine from Jewish sovereignty is not interested in the "two- state solution" but rather in a "two-stage solution." In the first stage, an Arab state is to be established alongside Israel and in the second stage, following the resettlement of refugees within Israel, one Arab state is to be established, stretching from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea.

In an attempt to test this conclusion to the utmost and to refute it, Israeli governments have resorted to all possible political experiments. All excuses have by now been used up. In other words, as a mechanism for establishing permanent peace west of the Jordan River, the "two-state solution" cannot be realized. There will be no end to this dismal hundred-

years dispute so long as the position of the Arab leadership in Samaria, Judea and Gaza does not fundamentally change. (Jerusalem Post Jul 2)  
*The writer is a Likud cabinet minister.*

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### **He Doesn't Get It** By Melanie Phillips

The American lawyer Alan Dershowitz is one of the most prolific, high-profile and indefatigable defenders of Israel and the Jewish people against the tidal wave of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish feeling currently coursing through the west. So a piece by him in the Wall Street Journal giving expression to the rising anxiety being felt about Obama by American Jews naturally arouses great interest.

But just like the majority of American Jews, getting on for 80 per cent of whom voted for Obama, he is a Democrat supporter who is incapable of acknowledging the truth about this President. For most American Jews, the horror of even entertaining the hypothetical possibility that they might ever in a million years have to vote for a Republican is so great they simply cannot see what is staring them in the face -- that this Democratic President is lethal for both Israel and the free world. And in this article Dershowitz shows that he too is just as blind.

Acknowledging the anxiety among some American Jews about Obama's attitude to Israel, Dershowitz concludes uneasily that there isn't really a problem here because all Obama is doing is putting pressure on Israel over the settlements, which most American Jews don't support anyway. But this is totally to miss the point. The pressure over the settlements per se is not the reason for the intense concern.

It is instead, first and foremost, the fact that Obama is treating Israel as if it is the obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Obama thus inverts aggressor and victim, denying Israel's six-decade long victimisation and airbrushing out Arab aggression. The question remains: why has Obama chosen to pick a fight with Israel while soft-soaping Iran which is threatening it with genocide? The answer is obvious: Israel is to be used to buy off Iran just as Czechoslovakia was used at Munich. Indeed, I would say this is worse even than that, since I suspect that Obama -- coming as he does from a radical leftist milieu, with vicious Israel-haters amongst his closest friends -- would be doing this to Israel even if Iran was not the problem that it is.

In any event, the double standard is egregious. Obama has torn up his previous understandings with Israel over the settlements while putting no pressure at all on the Palestinians, even though since they are the regional aggressor there can be no peace unless they end their aggression and certainly not until they accept Israel as a Jewish state, which they have said explicitly they will never do. On this, Obama is totally silent. So too is Dershowitz. That's some omission.

Next, Obama is pressuring Israel to set up a Palestine state -- within two years this will exist, swaggers Rahm Emanuel. But everyone knows that as soon as Israel leaves the West Bank, Hamas -- or even worse -- will take over. The only reason the (also appalling) Abbas is still in Ramallah, enabling Obama to pretend there is a Palestinian interlocutor for peace, is because the Israelis are keeping Hamas at bay. Yet Dershowitz writes: "There is no evidence of any weakening of American support for Israel's right to defend its children from the kind of rocket attacks candidate Obama commented on during his visit to Sderot."

So what exactly does he think would happen if Israel came out of the West Bank and the Hamas rockets were down the road from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv (literally: many in the west have absolutely no idea how tiny Israel is). It's not a question of Israel's 'right to defend its children'. If Obama has his way, Israel would not be able to defend its children or anyone else, because Obama would have removed its defences by putting its enemies in charge of them. It is astounding that Dershowitz can't see this.

Then there was Obama's appalling Cairo speech -- which I wrote about here -- in which he conspicuously refrained from committing himself to defending Zionism and the Jewish people from the attacks and incitement to genocide against them, but committed himself instead to defending their attackers against 'negative stereotyping'. On this, Dershowitz has nothing to say.

Worse still, by falsely asserting that the Jewish aspiration for Israel derived from the Holocaust, Obama effectively denied that the Jewish people were in Israel as of right and thus endorsed the core element of the

Arab and Muslim propaganda of war and extermination. On this, Dershowitz has nothing to say.

Obama drew a vile -- and telling -- equivalence between the Nazi extermination camps and the Palestinian 'refugee' camps. On this, Dershowitz has nothing to say. Obama's statement that the Palestinians 'have suffered in pursuit of a homeland' was grossly and historically untrue, and again denied Arab aggression. On this, Dershowitz has nothing to say. Equally vilely, Obama equated genocidal terrorism by the Palestinians with the civil rights movement in America and the resistance against apartheid in South Africa. On all of this, Dershowitz has nothing to say.

Dershowitz also grossly underplays the terrible harm Obama is doing to the security not just of Israel but the world through his reckless appeasement of Iran. In the last few weeks, this has actively undercut the Iranian democrats trying to oust their tyrannical regime, and has actually strengthened that regime. All the evidence suggests ever more strongly that Obama has decided America will 'live with' a nuclear Iran, whatever it does to its own people. Which leaves Israel hung out to dry.

But even here, where he is clearly most concerned, Dershowitz scuttles under his comfort blanket -- Dennis Ross, who was originally supposed to have been the US special envoy to Iran but was recently announced senior director of the National Security Council and special assistant to the President for the region. It is not at all clear whether this ambiguous development represents a promotion or demotion for Ross. Either way, for Dershowitz to rest his optimism that Obama's Iran policy will be all right on the night entirely upon the figure of Dennis Ross is pathetic. Ross, a Jew who played Mr. Nice to Robert Malley's Mr. Nasty towards Israel in the Camp David debacle under President Clinton, is clearly being used by Obama as a human shield behind which he can bully Israel with impunity. American Jews assume that his proximity to Obama means the President's intentions towards Israel are benign. Dazzled by this vision of Ross as the guarantor of Obama's good faith, they thus ignore altogether the terrible import of the actual words coming out of the President's mouth.

The fact is that many American Jews are so ignorant of the history of the Jewish people, the centrality of Israel in its history and the legality and justice of its position that they probably saw nothing wrong in Obama saying that the Jewish aspiration for Israel came out of the Holocaust because they think this too. Nor do they see the appalling double standard in the bullying of Israel over the settlements and what that tells us about Obama's attitude towards Israel, because -- as Dershowitz himself makes all too plain -- they too think in much the same way, that the settlements are the principal obstacle to peace.

Many if not most American Jews have a highly sentimentalised view of Israel. They never go there, are deeply ignorant of its history and current realities, and are infinitely more concerned with their own view of themselves as social liberals, a view reflected back at themselves through voting for a Democrat President.

Whatever else he is, however, Dershowitz is certainly not ignorant. Which makes this lamentable article all the more revealing, and depressing. (The Spectator (UK) Jul 3)

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### **If You Will It, David Grossman Will Bring Peace**

By Daniel Doron

David Grossman, one of our finest writers, is angry. In a recent article he said he feels Israelis accept with indifference "our stuck-up lives, devoid of all hope..." He believes we "coddle ourselves... in anxieties, lassitude and self-righteousness," give in to "self abnegation" and seek escape in "the sweet stupor of nationalism, militarism and victimhood." We deny, he avers, "the legitimate needs and just claims of the Palestinians." We refuse to understand that reality "requires flexibility, daring and vision." We, Grossman charges, refuse to take "any real step that will lead to a true change of consciousness," and bring about peace.

One could expect that Grossman, a sensitive writer and bereaved father, would not take out his frustration over the absence of peace by a blanket condemnation of most of the Israeli public. One would expect insights on why we have lost "the ability to achieve peace," as he claims, and what we must do to achieve his "true change of consciousness."

What change does he expect? Is giving in to "the legitimate needs and just claims of the Palestinians," no matter what danger this poses to our

survival, what he has in mind? Please spell it out, dear distinguished writer. Please teach us how to deal with the dangers that may result from your "vision" - or do you think the possibility of a Hamas takeover in the West Bank is plain fantasy?

One could also expect that Grossman would not make do with complaining that Israelis and Palestinians "do not really understand, deeply, what peace means," but would try to describe to the stiff-necked inhabitants of this land the "option of true peace" he envisions. Is there any chance his vision would be accepted by most Palestinians? Would it make them abandon the militant "vision" of Hamas which most of them voted for?

This could be tested if Grossman and his fellow peace seekers - such as Shulamit Aloni, Yossi Beilin, Yossi Sarid, Yuli Tamir, most of the Haaretz publicists and many other prominent literary figures - would formulate an up-to-date, improved version of the Geneva peace initiative. We could then find out what we would be forced to give up and what kind of peace we would get in return.

Would it be a cold peace like the one with Egypt, which never misses an opportunity to undermine the State of Israel? As importantly, we would find out how many Palestinian and Arab leaders are willing to endorse an offer of peace that would meet most, but not all of their "legitimate needs and just claims" (like the right of return and a Judenrein West Bank?) as Grossman recommends. Would it be more than the very few who were willing to endorse the Geneva Initiative? If not, will Grossman and his ilk stop charging that we are peace resisters because we refuse to share their well-intentioned illusions?

Grossman complains that we cannot transcend the conflict in the new peace spirit of US President Barack Obama. He might want to consider the possibility that this is because he and his fellow visionaries on the Left simply keep reiterating the mantra of "peace now," while dismissing the harsh realities. They keep ignoring the failure of all the instant peace initiatives they have advocated, from the Oslo agreements through the Ami Ayalon-Sari Nusseibeh "understandings," from the far-reaching concessions offered by Ehud Barak at Camp David and Taba to the Beilin Geneva Initiative. All these overtures were never accepted by the Palestinians, and therefore resulted only in greater bloodshed.

Grossman and his friends must also explain why, as zealous guardians of human rights, they seem so obsessed with Palestinian self-determination while remaining indifferent to the Palestinians' basic human rights? Why are they working for the establishment of what will surely become an Iran-style state led by Hamas that will cause its citizens only increasing misery, both social and economic?

How can they call for the establishment of a regime that will oppress women and children, devoting all its energies to jingoism? How can they support the creation of a state whose leaders are committed to the destruction of Israel? Is the right of political self-determination so supreme that it trumps all else?

Only time will tell, of course, whether our "anxieties" are realistic or imaginary, whether Grossman grasps reality or whether he indulges in fantasies. The record seems to advise caution. If a Palestinian state is irredentist and warlike, it will be a great tragedy for both the Palestinians and for us. (Jerusalem Post Jul 8)

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### **Linkage: The Mother of all Myths**

By Dennis Ross and David Makovsky

*Book excerpt*

Of all the policy myths that have kept us from making real progress in the Middle East, one stands out for its impact and longevity: the idea that if only the Palestinian conflict were solved, all the other Middle East conflicts would melt away. This is the argument of "linkage." Neoconservatives have always rejected it, given their skepticism about Arab intentions and their related belief that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved. While realists have been the most determined purveyors, this myth transcends all others and has had amazing staying power here, internationally, and in the Middle East. In fact, few ideas have been as consistently and forcefully promoted - by laymen, policymakers, and leaders alike.

One need not look too far for examples of linkage's pervasiveness. Note the words of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in early 2008 when, standing next to George W. Bush at a joint press conference following their

talks in the Sinai resort town of Sharm al-Sheikh, he recounted their conversation: "I emphasize that the Palestinian question, of course, is the core of problems and conflict in the Middle East, and it is the entry to contain the crisis and tension in the region, and the best means to face what's going on in the world, our region - I mean by that, the escalation of violence, extremism and terrorism."

King Abdullah of Jordan made much the same argument during an interview with an American television network in 2006: "I keep saying Palestine is the core. It is linked to the extent of what's going on in Iraq. It is linked to what's going on in Lebanon."

Not only Middle Eastern leaders see the Palestinian issue at the heart of all other regional problems. Brent Scowcroft, former national security advisor to Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush, echoed this basic point of view in an essay published in early 2007:

A Vigorously renewed effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict could fundamentally change both the dynamics in the region and the strategic calculus of key leaders. Real progress would push Iran into a more defensive posture. Hezbollah and Hamas would lose their rallying principle. American allies like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states would be liberated to assist in stabilizing Iraq. And Iraq would finally be seen by all as a key country that had to be set right in the pursuit of regional security.

Similarly, the Iraq Study Group, co-chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, placed special emphasis on the idea of linkage: "To put it simply, all key issues in the Middle East - the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Iran, the need for political and economic reforms, and extremism and terrorism - are inextricably linked.

Such bold statements are rarely qualified. In effect, they are guided by a central premise: that ending the Arab-Israeli conflict is prerequisite to addressing the maladies of the Middle East. Solve it, and in doing so conclude all other conflicts. Fail, and instability - even war - will engulf the entire region.

The major problem with this premise is that it is not true. There have been dozens of conflicts and countless coups in the Middle East since Israel's birth in 1948, and most were completely unrelated to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, the Iraqi coup of 1958, the Lebanon crisis of 1958, the Yemini civil war of 1962-68 (including subsequent civil wars in the 1980s and '90s), the Iraqi Kurdish revolt of 1974, the Egyptian-Libyan Border War of 1977, the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 (including Iraqi Kurdish and Iraqi Shiite revolts of the same year), the Yemeni-Eritrean and Saudi-Yemeni border conflicts of the mid-1990s, and the US-Iraq War, begun in 2003.

Many of these conflicts were long, bloody, and very costly. The Iran-Iraq War alone lasted eight and a half years, cost in the hundreds of billions of dollars, and took between six hundred thousand and one million lives. Yet this conflict, like the others listed above, would have taken place even if the Arab-Israeli conflict had been resolved.

Since the origins of so many regional tensions and rivalries are not connected to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is hard to see how resolving it would unlock other regional stalemates or sources of instability. Iran, for example, is not pursuing its nuclear ambitions because there is an Arab-Israeli conflict. Sectarian groups in Iraq would not suddenly put aside their internal struggles if the Palestinian issue were resolved. Like so many conflicts in the region, these struggles have their own dynamic.

In addition, as tragic as the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has become, it has not spilled over to destabilize the Middle East. There have been two Palestinian Intifadas, or uprisings, including one that lasted from 2000 to 2005 and claimed the lives of 4,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis - but not a single Arab leader had been toppled or a single regime destabilized as a result. It has remained a local conflict, contained in a small geographical area. Yet the argument of linkage endures to this day, and with powerful promoters. Why does it persist? And why has it been accepted among top policymakers as if it is factually correct?

(NY Times Jul 8)

*Excerpt from Myths, Illusions, and Peace by Dennis Ross and David Makovsky (Viking/Penguin 2009).*

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