

The Palestinian National Movement Has Reached a Point of Crisis

By Elliott Abrams

weeklistandard.com

May 18, 2018

The real Nakba.

As Israel celebrated the 70th anniversary of its independence and the move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, Palestinians last week commemorated their 70th “Nakba Day.” The Nakba, or catastrophe, in question is meant to be the founding of the state of Israel, but this year Palestinians had a real Nakba to occupy them: the degeneration of their national movement into dictatorship, corruption, violence, and extremism.

There were two signal manifestations of this decline in the past week. The first was staged by Hamas, the largest of the Palestinian Islamist terrorist groups, which has ruled Gaza since 2007. Last week Hamas organized masses of protesters (and according to Israel sent dozens of operatives armed with pipe bombs and grenades) to storm the border fences with Israel. Hamas has failed in governing Gaza, which is mired in poverty and suffers shortages of water, electricity, and employment opportunities for its 1.8 million people, two-thirds of them under the age of 25. The unemployment rate in Gaza is 44 percent and even higher among youth. Hamas and those it rules are caught in a trap the terrorist group has created: Its ideology prevents peace with Israel but its circumstances have apparently persuaded its leaders that another major conflict would lead only to more devastation. So instead it sacrifices Palestinian lives in border attacks that produce no benefit whatsoever for the people of Gaza.

In fact the main achievement of those border attacks is to remind Israelis—who left Gaza in 2005, abandoning their military bases and settlements there—that Hamas considers all of Israel’s borders illegitimate. The dispute with Hamas isn’t over settlements or the “occupation” or Gaza itself. It is over Israel’s existence. In Gaza, the Islamist part of the Palestinian national movement does nothing to advance Palestinian interests, instead isolating its people from Egypt, Israel, the West Bank, and the rest of the world.

Hamas offers violence and nihilism, funded by Iran and dedicated to the fantasy of “return” to Israel across those border fences. But even using all the pressure it could muster, it could not gather more than 40,000 at the fences, significantly under its goal of 100,000. Nor was the reaction in the West Bank (which saw demonstrations of fewer than 2,000 people spread over a dozen or more sites) and in the Arab world as great as Hamas might have anticipated. The month of Ramadan began May 16 and may see a continuation of violence, and even perhaps expansion into another round of war between Israel and Hamas. But the underlying situation will not change: Hamas has turned Gaza into a prison for those it rules. It cannot achieve peace, or decent and normal lives for the people of Gaza, through violent confrontation with Israel.

The second manifestation was staged by the secular part of the Palestinian national movement, which is dominated by Yasser Arafat’s Fatah party. Fatah rules in the West Bank and controls both the Palestinian Authority and the PLO. Over the decades, Fatah has morphed from a terrorist group fighting to destroy Israel, into a terrorist group fighting for Palestinian statehood, then after Arafat’s death in 2004 into a political group struggling against Hamas and other terrorist organizations, and more recently into a plain dictatorship whose only goal seems to be protecting the privileges of its own ruling elites.

The event that demonstrated Fatah’s decline most clearly occurred on April 30, when Palestinian Authority president and PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas called a meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO’s legislative body. There he delivered himself of a three-hour speech replete with explanations that the Jews have no real historical tie to the Middle East and that European anti-Semitism was caused by the Jews’ “social behavior, [charging] interest, and financial matters.” The speech was reminiscent of his January 14 tirade, in which he explained that Zionism “did not begin 100 years ago. It did not begin with the Balfour Declaration. . . . It began in 1653 when Cromwell ruled Britain. . . . He came up with the idea of transferring the Jews from Europe to the Middle East.”

At this PNC gathering Abbas had himself reelected by acclamation; there was no voting. The entire scene—the length of his speech, the sometimes bizarre and sometimes plainly anti-Semitic content, the election by applause—was a throwback to Castro or Ceausescu and left many Palestinian observers in despair. Israel is celebrating 70 years in freedom, prosperity, and strength, the U.S. embassy is moving, the “occupation” that began in 1967 shows no sign of ending, there are no peace negotiations—and the leader of the Palestinians is crushing dissent, elevating cronies, and discussing Oliver Cromwell.

Repression in the West Bank is growing steadily. Judicial independence has been reduced. Civil society organizations that violate “national unity” or threaten the “social fabric” face closure, and their leaders face jail. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, led by Khalil Shikaki, the best-known Palestinian pollster, may go out of business this year. In just this fashion Abbas worked in 2015 to close down an NGO founded by former prime minister Salam Fayyad, seizing its funds and closing its bank accounts. Like Hamas in Gaza, the Palestinian Authority arrests and detains journalists who criticize Fatah and its leaders. Corruption is rife. At the PNC meeting, election or exclusion depended not on service to the Palestinian cause or integrity but on fealty to Abbas.

Under the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, what were supposed to be embryonic democratic institutions were created. After Arafat's death these hollow shells were briefly filled; free elections were held for president in 2005 and for parliament in 2006 (the latter won by Hamas). But there has been no election in the Palestinian territories since January 2006, and the legitimacy of the leadership is in very steady decline. The one-party rule by Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank reflects the worst of Arab political culture.

Nor does either organization, Fatah or Hamas, offer Palestinians a practical program for national independence. The alignment of Israel and most Sunni states against Iran means those states are less likely to fund Hamas, whose violent rhetoric and conduct and whose absolute rejection of Israel's existence reflect instead Iranian policy. In December, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar boasted of his contact with Qassem Suleimani, head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, and of Suleimani's pledges of support.

On the West Bank side, since the first Oslo agreement a quarter-century ago, the Fatah/PLO program has ostensibly been a negotiated deal with Israel that would lead to true independence—the “two-state solution.” But there has been no progress in a decade: Abbas rejected a peace offer from Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert in 2008 and refused all of the Obama administration's efforts to get him back to the negotiating table.

Israelis debate how much Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could offer in a real negotiation, because he presides over a right-of-center coalition that might be split by any compromises. But Bibi won't be put to the test, because Abbas is past the point of considering serious negotiations and serious compromises. He lacks the legitimacy to do so, and his recent fulminations and crackdowns suggest a man who, at 83, is long past the ability to lead to peace. He is in no mood to undertake a debate with Hamas and others who will call him a traitor for any deal he makes. He appears to have decided what his legacy must be: “steadfastness,” meaning that, like Arafat, he said no to everything. He would rather be seen as a stalwart leader who held high the banner of Palestinian nationalism and refused to bargain with the Zionists than undertake the undoubtedly painful compromises that peace would entail. In 2003 (when the United States and E.U. forced Arafat to accept him as prime minister) Abbas looked like an alternative to Arafat and a potential Israeli peace partner. Fifteen years later those hopes are long gone, which helps explain why the Trump administration has not yet released its peace plan: Abbas would reject it instantly.

All this leaves Palestinians high and dry, with no way forward at all. Whatever the criticism of the “occupation,” Israelis will certainly not abandon the West Bank to chaos or to a possible Hamas takeover. Today the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state is simply too dangerous to Israel and to Jordan to be contemplated. With Hamas in control of Gaza, and Iran and its proxies seizing large parts

of Syria and dominating Lebanon, who would control such a state in the West Bank? How likely is it that Israel, now battling against Iranian control of southern Syria, will open up opportunities for further Iranian incursions? And how can such matters be discussed seriously between Israelis and Palestinians (and for that matter, with Americans and Jordanians) when the leader of the PA and PLO will not return to the table and instead indulges in bizarre rants about Jewish and British history?

The great likelihood is that five years from today, that situation will be fundamentally unchanged. Perhaps Abbas will be gone, but his successors will be Fatah stalwarts and in any event will need years to consolidate power sufficiently even to contemplate leading Palestinians into the difficult compromises of a peace settlement. There is growing desperation among Palestinians that neither Fatah nor Hamas represents their hopes—or can fulfill them. There are only two other options. The first is the “one state solution,” meaning union with Israel, but that is a nonstarter Israel will reject no matter who is its prime minister. The other option is some kind of eventual link to Jordan.

In polite diplomatic society, and in Palestinian public discourse, such a link cannot be mentioned. But younger people who visit there, Palestinians have explained to me, can see a society that is half Palestinian and functions as an independent nation with a working system of law and order. Jordanians travel freely, rarely suffer from terrorism, and have an Islamist (Muslim Brotherhood) party, the Islamic Action Front, that participates in the political system and sits in parliament. There are elections, even if power is ultimately concentrated in the royal palace. The kingdom has close relations with all the Sunni states and the West, and is at peace with Israel.

The fundamental question all this raises is what, in 2018, the nature and objective of Palestinian nationalism is. Is the goal sovereignty at all costs, no matter how long it takes and even if it is increasingly divorced from peace, prosperity, and personal freedom? Is “steadfastness” the greatest Palestinian virtue now and forever? These questions cannot be debated in either Gaza or the West Bank. But as Israel celebrates 70 years and the “occupation” is now more than a half-century old, how much longer can they be delayed?

Today's desperate Palestinian situation is largely the work of Fatah, the party that led it down a dozen blind alleys, embraced terror, lost an election to Hamas, and at least twice (2000 and 2008) rejected offers of peace from Israel. It may well be that the window for a sovereign Palestinian state was open from 1991 to 2008 but has now closed. Certainly there is no prospect of an early deal with Israel, and in Arab capitals, enthusiasm for the Palestinian cause is clearly declining. At the conferences in the Arab world that I attend, the “centrality” of the Palestinian issue continues to be argued—but more and more often it is raised only by people who are 70 or 80 years old.

The catastrophic mishandling of Palestinian affairs by generations of leaders from Haj Amin al-Husseini (the

pro-Nazi mufti of the British Mandate period) to Yasser Arafat and now to Mahmoud Abbas has been the true Palestinian Nakba.

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Hamas, Netanyahu and Mother Nature

By Thomas L. Friedman

nytimes.com

May 22, 2018

Princess Diana once famously observed that there were three people in her marriage, “so it was a bit crowded.” The same is true of Israelis and Palestinians. The third person in their marriage is Mother Nature — and she’ll batter both of them if they do not come to their senses.

Let’s start with Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist organization that rules the Gaza Strip. If there were an anti-Nobel Peace Prize — that is, the Nobel Prize for Cynicism and Reckless Disregard for One’s Own People in Pursuit of a Political Fantasy — it would surely be conferred on Hamas, which just facilitated the tragic and wasted deaths of roughly 60 Gazans by encouraging their march, some with arms, on the Israeli border fence in pursuit of a “return” to their ancestral homes in what is now Israel.

While the march idea emerged from Palestinian society in Gaza, Hamas seized on it to disguise its utter failure to produce any kind of decent life for the Palestinians there, whom Hamas has ruled since 2007.

You hear people say: “What choice did they have? They’re desperate.” Well, I’ll give you a choice — one that almost certainly would lead to an improved life for Gazans, one that I first proposed in 2011.

What if all two million Palestinians of Gaza marched to the Israeli border fence with an olive branch in one hand and a sign in Hebrew and Arabic in the other, saying, “Two states for two peoples: We, the Palestinian people of Gaza, want to sign a peace treaty with the Jewish people — a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, with mutually agreed adjustments.”

That would have stimulated a huge debate within Israel and worldwide pressure — especially if Hamas invited youth delegations from around the Arab world to launch their own marches, carrying the Arab Peace Initiative. That kind of Palestinian movement would make Israelis feel strategically secure but morally insecure, which is the key to moving the Israeli silent majority.

Hamas chose instead to make Israelis feel strategically insecure and therefore morally secure in killing scores of Hamas followers who tried to breach the border fence.

Gaza is built on the exact same sand as Jaffa/Tel Aviv, where many Gazan families originally came from. Israel ended its occupation of Gaza in 2005. If Hamas had chosen to recognize Israel and build a Palestinian state in Gaza modeled on Singapore, the world would have showered it with aid and it would have served as a positive test case for the West Bank. Hamas chose otherwise.

I appreciate the Gazans’ sense of injustice. Why should they pay with their ancestral homes for Jewish refugees who lost theirs in Germany or Iraq? The only answer is that history is full of such injustices and of refugees who have reconciled with them and moved on — not passed on their refugee status to their kids and their kids’ kids. It’s why so few Arabs, so few Europeans, so few anybody, rose to Hamas’s defense. People are fed up with it.

O.K. So much for the “bad” Palestinian leadership. What’s Israel’s approach to the secular, more moderate Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, whose security forces have cooperated with Israel for years to vastly reduce violence coming from the occupied territories? Answer: nothing.

Actually, worse than nothing, because Bibi Netanyahu’s government has steadily implanted more settlers deep inside Palestinian-populated areas of the West Bank — now 100,000 — beyond the settlement blocs that Israel might keep in any two-state peace deal. It makes separating Israelis and Palestinians increasingly impossible and therefore an apartheidlike situation increasingly likely.

So, yes, I get why Israel has no choice but to defend its border with Gaza with brute force. But I find it a travesty that a country with so much imagination in computing, medicine and agriculture shows so little imagination in searching for secure ways to separate from the Palestinians in the West Bank to preserve its Jewish democracy.

It’s because Netanyahu, like Hamas, also wants it all. And with President Trump and the U.S. Congress writing him blank checks, Bibi thinks he can have it all. So why bother making any concessions for peace?

This is where that third person in the marriage comes in: Mother Nature — i.e., demographics and ecosystem destruction. She doesn’t recognize lines on maps, either.

In March Reuters reported from Jerusalem: “The number of Jews and Arabs between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River is at or near parity, figures cited by Israeli officials show, raising questions whether Israel can remain a democracy if it keeps territory where Palestinians seek a state.”

There are now about 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank, 2 million in Gaza and 1.84 million Israeli Arabs, for a total of about 6.5 million. That is roughly the same as the number of Jews living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. If current birthrate trends continue, the Jews will likely become a minority, with all of the negative governing consequences that will entail.

Palestinians Must Accept That They Will Never Be Granted a “Right of Return”

By David Horowitz

timesofisrael.com

May 17, 2018

The world must disabuse them of fantasies of destroying Israel.

After Monday’s terrible violence and loss of Palestinian life on the Gaza border, the world owes the Palestinians some painful but simple truths.

Weeks of Hamas-spurred “March of Return” rallies — with their accompanying riots, bids to cut through the border fence in order to carry out attacks inside Israel, dispatch of blazing attack kites, trashing of the Gaza aid infrastructure at the Kerem Shalom crossing, et al — are not going to work. Just like terror tunnels, and rocket fire, and suicide bombings, car rammings and drive-by shootings haven’t worked.

The Hamas strategy won’t work, no matter how successfully it captures the international narrative of what is playing out here. Anguished by the loss of life, Israel will nonetheless defend its borders.

What the terror group calls “Palestine” — i.e. Israel — is not going to be “liberated.” Majority-Jewish Israel isn’t going anywhere. Most specifically, given the current Hamas tactic for bringing Gazans to the border, the “refugees,” in their ostensible millions, are not going to “return.”

After another awful day like Monday — especially after a day like that — the world owes it to the Palestinians to make that clear.

In recent weeks, we’ve seen this latest tactic of mass protests and violence led by Hamas members at the border widely and falsely described internationally as constituting opposition to the Israeli occupation of Gaza. There is immense suffering within the Hamas-run Strip and highly restrictive security without, but there is no Israeli occupation; Ariel Sharon forced the thousands of Jewish settlers there to leave in 2005, and brought the army out with them.

We’ve also seen the protests described as nonviolent — including by a Hamas leader, Khalil al-Hayya, on Monday night. Words fail.

We’ve seen the protests described as aimed at seeking an end to the “blockade” on access to and from the Strip. In fact, the security blockade is a function of Hamas rule, and would end if Gaza’s leaders were ever to stop trying to terrorize Israel. Hamas has exploited every crack in that security envelope to try to import weaponry in its relentless, avowed struggle to destroy Israel. It wants to build up the kind of force in the Strip that Hezbollah has accumulated in Lebanon — 140,000 missiles, all aimed at Israel. Israel is not about to freely open access to Gaza, when the inevitable immediate consequence will be the import of rockets, missiles and other weaponry to be used for our intended elimination.

And since Monday, we’ve seen the protests described as opposition to the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem and as marking “Nakba day,” when the

Palestinians mourn what they call the “catastrophe” that befell them with the establishment of modern Israel — the revived Jewish state that the Arab armies tried in vain to kill at birth.

Now we’re getting closer to what this is actually all about.

In truth, as their organizers made plain from day one, the mass border protests are being mounted not against the “occupation” of Gaza, or the blockade on Gaza. For all the misreporting, they were planned and are being held with the undisguised goal of putting an end to the State of Israel, the world’s only Jewish state, whose legitimacy in any borders Hamas rejects. Hence the particularly large mobilization in outraged opposition to the legitimizing of Israeli Jerusalem as signified by the new US embassy; hence the particular resonance of Nakba day.

“March of Return.” It’s right there in the name. The people of Gaza are being mobilized by their terrorist rulers for a “return.” They are being assured by their leadership that this “return” is imminent. That their “homeland” will soon be restored. That the Nakba will be reversed. And that those of them who lose their lives in violence at the border in the cause of that “return” will find their place in paradise as martyrs to their divinely blessed struggle.

The world owes it to them to shatter this illusion. And there’s a straightforward means of doing so.

The current unique UN definition of ‘Palestinian refugees’ enables millions of Palestinians to assert, to dream of, to follow cynical leaders who champion, and in some cases to risk their lives for, an unfounded ‘right’ of ‘return’

Unlike every other refugee population on this planet, the UN extends refugee status not only to those Palestinians who lived in what is today’s Israel and fled or were forced from their homes 70 years ago. It also, with ongoing counterproductive consequence, extends refugee status to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and onward into eternity.

And in so doing, the international community — via the UN’s Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) — perpetuates the very Israeli-Palestinian conflict it ostensibly seeks to solve. It skews a refugee dispute that should relate to the few tens of thousands of actual refugees who are still alive today, and instead enables millions of Palestinians to assert, to dream of, to follow cynical leaders who champion, and in some cases to risk their lives for, an unfounded “right” of “return.”

The “right” of “return,” demanded by Yasser Arafat and then by Mahmoud Abbas, has helped doom all efforts to date to negotiate a two-state solution. The assertion of a “right” of “return,” right now by Hamas, is bringing ever greater suffering to Gaza. The Palestinians’ unwavering insistence on a “right” of “return” has all but killed off belief inside Israel that a two-state solution can ever be attained.

The world owes it to the Palestinians to correct its definition of Palestinian “refugees” — and it can do so, incidentally, without in any way impacting any aid assistance it provides for Gaza and the West Bank.

It owes it to the Palestinians to make clear that Israel will not be required or pressured to commit national suicide as a Jewish state by absorbing millions of descendants of Palestinians who used to live in what is today’s Israel. Just as Israel, following the division of Mandatory Palestine by the UN in 1947 and independence in 1948, built a thriving state in its revived historic home, including by absorbing hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Middle Eastern and North African countries, so the Palestinians should be encouraged to build a thriving Palestinian state alongside and in true peace with Israel as the home to their millions — a first ever Palestinian state, in a framework that was spurned by the Arab world 70 years ago and that they tragically continue to reject.

The world owes it to the Palestinians to push for a genuine two-state solution — for a Palestine at peace with today’s majority Jewish Israel, not for a Palestine that simultaneously insists on destroying Jewish Israel. To help both sides move toward a genuine two-state solution that would give the Palestinians independence and enable Israel to maintain its democracy and Jewish character — a negotiated separation.

Want to alleviate the ongoing tragedies of Gaza? Want to prevent the endless repetition of horror days like Monday? Make plain to the Palestinians that they have no “right” of “return.” Tell them that they deserve leadership that doesn’t lie to them and abuse them. And make it clear that their independence can only be achieved through a genuine readiness for coexistence, alongside majority-Jewish Israel.

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Toward an Iran Policy That Looks at the Big Picture

By Ray Takeyh, Mark Dubowitz

foreignpolicy.com

May 21, 2018

Ending the artificial separation of Tehran’s nuclear program from its adventurism.

Ever since President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Iran nuclear deal earlier this month, the commentariat has been aghast at the lack of a new plan. Critics said that the administration was all instinct and no insight, and that coercion without purpose was its only strategy. On Monday, in one of the most important speeches on Iran ever delivered by a secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, in his first major policy address since taking the role, put that criticism to rest as he laid out an aggressive plan for defanging the theocratic regime. The United States today has a strategy, one that is expansive in its ambitions, justified in its tactics, and judicious in its assessments of Iran.

Pompeo’s most impressive intellectual breakthrough was to transcend the paradigm that has guided Washington’s Iran policy for nearly two decades. For too long, a peculiar consensus has suggested that it is possible to isolate the nuclear issue from all other areas of contention and resolve it in a satisfactory manner. The subsidiary theme embedded in this logic is that despite the bluster of Iran’s rulers, it is governed by cautious men, who if offered sufficient incentives and soothing language would respond with pragmatism. No one embraced this notion more ardently than former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who crafted an accord whose deficiencies are apparent to all but the most hardened partisans.

The lure of continuity and the need to be praised by polite society could have easily tied Pompeo to the Washington consensus. But instead, in his maiden speech as secretary of state, he identified the problem: a regime that is bent on extending its imperial frontiers, developing nuclear arms, and abusing its citizens. All of these issues are connected, as the guardians of the theocracy believe

that their revolution succeeds only if it is relentlessly exported. This, after all, was said to be a revolution without borders. Nuclear arms are an indispensable instrument of Iran’s revisionist revolution. To negate Iran’s challenge, one has to have a comprehensive agenda. Pompeo outlined steps to deplete Iran’s treasury, bolster local alliances, and assist the Iranian people in their persistent quest to emancipate themselves from the clutches of the clerical tyranny.

The speech is likely to upset the arms controllers — a category of analysts who believe that all problems are mere technical disagreements and all solutions can be detected by the right physics formula. “Iran must stop uranium enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing,” Pompeo said. Critics might say that this is an impractical diversion from a prudent course laid out in the Iran nuclear deal. In fact, the speech is a necessary correction of the deal’s radical departure from five decades of counterproliferation norms that have guided successive U.S. administrations.

In 1965, as then-President Lyndon B. Johnson became alarmed about the proliferation of nuclear arms, he commissioned his deputy secretary of defense, Roswell Gilpatric, to carefully study the problem. The ensuing Gilpatric commission’s report laid the foundation for arms control policy for decades to come. The United States was now committed to denying other nations dangerous nuclear technologies, such as the ability to enrich uranium and reprocess plutonium. Since then, those standards have at times attenuated, as the country looked the other way when a number of its allies, such as Japan, mastered those capabilities. But the United States did not grant all of its allies such dispensations — when the Shah of Iran wanted enrichment technologies, U.S. President Gerald Ford’s administration said no. In one of the strange ironies of

history, Kerry offered the mullahs what former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger refused the shah. The Iran deal was indeed a landmark agreement, as it was the first time that the United States conceded an indigenous enrichment capability to an adversarial nation. It is this principle that Pompeo has now reclaimed. Iran, a country that only set out to enrich uranium for the purpose of developing a reliable nuclear arsenal, must be coerced into giving up those capabilities.

Those who discuss geopolitics and nuclear fusion often forget that the primary victims of the theocracy are Iranians. Those who discuss geopolitics and nuclear fusion often forget that the primary victims of the theocracy are Iranians. Too often, Western policymakers look at the ongoing struggle for freedom in Iran as episodes of protest that inevitably die down. In one of the most memorable passages of the speech, Pompeo, quoting Trump, said, "We stand in total solidarity with the Iranian regime's longest-suffering victims: its own people. The citizens of Iran have paid a heavy price for the violence and extremism of their leaders. The Iranian people long to reclaim their country's proud history, its culture, its civilization, its cooperation with its neighbors." Iran is not the sturdy, stable government that its enablers like to depict. It is a regime that has forfeited its legitimacy, is drowning in corruption, and rests its power on security organs that it fears will prove unreliable in a crunch.

The United States today has a robust Iran policy. A regime as dangerous as the Iranian one requires no less than a comprehensive strategy to counter it. This means

exploiting all of its vulnerabilities, increasing the costs of its foreign adventures, draining its economy, and aiding our allies. Most importantly, the United States must find a way of connecting itself to domestic opposition that continuously haunts the mullahs. Washington should no longer settle for an arms control agreement that paves Iran's path to a bomb but rather a restrictive accord that ends its nuclear aspirations. The United States should not implore its allies to share the Middle East with Iran, as former President Barack Obama did, but partner with them in defeating the clerical imperialists. And most importantly, the United States should never forget that its most indispensable ally is the Iranian people.

On Monday, Pompeo laid out an impressive strategy, which is sure to face criticism in the echo chamber. All arms control agreements create their own constituency, and the Iran nuclear deal has a powerful one in the form of those in the United States for whom this was the only Obama foreign-policy legacy that they could try to defend with a straight face. Some in the bureaucracy will resist this new path, and the administration lacks enough political appointees to police the system on behalf of the secretary. All of these are formidable obstacles that will try to nudge and pull the administration away from its contemplated course. The challenge for Pompeo now is to implement with precision what he has laid out with eloquence.

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On Jerusalem, Trump shows that the emperor had no clothes

By Evelyn Gordon

jns.org

May 8, 2018

Recognizing the capital of the Jewish state—and considering the possible move of international embassies there—is now openly being debated in regions of the globe where Israel has faced considerable hostility in recent years.

After President Donald Trump announced in December that he was moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, a friend lamented that the move would have less impact than it should because Trump was so widely disdained both in America and overseas. Yet since then, I've heard more foreign acknowledgments of Jerusalem as Israel's capital than I can ever remember before.

So far, only one other country is definitely moving its embassy—Guatemala, whose Jerusalem embassy is slated to open two days after America's does. But at least four other countries—two in Latin America and two in Europe—are actively discussing an embassy move. And even if none actually happens, the very fact that this issue is now openly being debated in regions of the globe where Israel has faced considerable hostility in recent years is a remarkable change.

In both the European Union and most of Latin America, official policy has long been that eastern

Jerusalem should be the capital of Palestine, while western Jerusalem should be . . . well, nothing. Few countries in either region have ever said that any part of Jerusalem should be Israel's capital; in fact, some still explicitly declare the city a corpus separatum. In other words, they think Palestinians should get the eastern half while the western half should be an international city.

But now, a decades-old taboo has been broken. Suddenly, several other countries are where America was 20 years ago, with different branches of government actively arguing over Jerusalem's status.

On April 12, the Honduras National Congress voted to move its embassy to Jerusalem by a sizable majority (59-33), though the decision hasn't yet been approved by the executive branch. Later that month, Paraguay's president said he'd like to move his country's embassy before leaving office in mid-August, though buy-in from the rest of the political system is uncertain.

On April 19, Israeli Independence Day, Romania broke an even more significant psychological barrier by becoming the first European country to announce plans to move its embassy. The president of Romania's Chamber of Deputies told a Romanian television station that the

decision had been made the previous evening. Whether it will actually happen remains unclear; the country's president opposes the move, and the cabinet hasn't yet approved it. But the prime minister has formally asked the cabinet to do so.

And in the Czech Republic—whose parliament passed a resolution urging its government to promote “respect” for Jerusalem as Israel's capital by a vote of 112-2 seven months before Trump's announcement—the Foreign Ministry broke with E.U. policy by declaring, the day after Trump's announcement, that it recognizes “West Jerusalem” as Israel's capital. President Milos Zeman wants to move the embassy as well, but Prime Minister Andrej Babi refuses to defy E.U. policy to that extent.

There has also been a notable change in the conversation even in countries where an embassy move isn't on the table.

In March, for instance, Belgian Secretary of State Philippe de Backer (whose position is equivalent to a deputy cabinet minister) told the local Jewish paper *Joods Actueel*: “There is no doubt that Jerusalem is Israel's capital. It's clear; it's reality. There's no discussion on this issue.”

Former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls—who, admittedly, was the most pro-Israel member of former President François Hollande's otherwise hostile government—made similar statements that same month in an interview with the *Times of Israel*. “I am very clear on this subject: Jerusalem is the capital of the Jews and of Israel—historically, religiously, and politically,” he said. “It's at the heart of the foundation of the State of Israel.”

Neither statement heralds an imminent change in official policy. As De Backer explained, action isn't possible now because “we're in a political context where Europe sees Jerusalem as subject to negotiations toward a two-state solution.” But the very fact that current and former senior European officials suddenly feel they can openly acknowledge Jerusalem as Israel's capital is new.

Another intriguing example is Russia, which actually preceded Trump in recognizing “West Jerusalem” as

Israel's capital. A statement issued by Russia's Foreign Ministry in April 2017 said that while Moscow continues to believe that eastern Jerusalem should be the capital of a Palestinian state, “we must state that in this context we view west Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.” Yet after Trump's December announcement, Russia voted to condemn the U.S. decision in both the U.N. Security Council and the General Assembly, making it seem that the April decision had either been rescinded or was meaningless.

Then, in March 2018, Russia's embassy in Israel issued a statement praising “the wise position of West Jerusalem” on a recent controversy (the poisoning of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Britain, which Israel condemned, but without specifically mentioning Russia). Though it's common to use a nation's capital as a metonym for the country (“Washington” for the United States or “Moscow” for Russia), I can't recall any use of “Jerusalem” to refer to Israel; that has always been taboo. So Russia is apparently sticking by its recognition; it just isn't willing to give Trump any credit on the issue.

Obviously, Jerusalem isn't going to be flooded with new embassies anytime soon, for reasons having little to do with Trump, as the Czech case makes clear.

But the more acceptable it becomes for people to admit that Jerusalem is and always will be Israel's capital, the harder it becomes for others to maintain their decades-old denialism. And Trump has played an important role in moving this process forward.

In that sense, he's like the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale “The Emperor's New Clothes.” A young child obviously isn't a respected role model for the adults around him, yet it was only after that little boy publicly declared the emperor naked that the adults could bring themselves to admit the same.

Andersen's point was that telling the truth has a power of its own, regardless of the speaker. And Trump's truth-telling on Jerusalem is already demonstrating a similar power, regardless of the speaker's flaws.

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Gaza erupts: How to end the endless conflict between Israel and the Palestinians

By The Economist

economist.com

May 17, 2018

Israel must answer for this week's deaths in Gaza. But it is time for Palestinians to take up genuine non-violence.

Gaza is a human rubbish-heap that everyone would rather ignore. Neither Israel, nor Egypt, nor even the Palestinian Authority (PA) wants to take responsibility for it. Sometimes the poison gets out—when, say, rockets or other attacks provoke a fully fledged war. And then the world is forced to take note.

Such a moment came on May 14th. Tens of thousands of Palestinians massed near Gaza's border fence,

threatening to “return” to the lands their forefathers lost when Israel was created in 1948. Israeli soldiers killed about 60 protesters—the bloodiest day in Gaza since the war in 2014 (see Briefing). In a surreal split-screen moment, the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, was exulting over the opening of America's embassy in Jerusalem, calling it a “great day for peace”.

Many countries have denounced Israel; a few have recalled diplomats. Some people accuse it of war crimes. Others blame President Donald Trump for causing the clashes by moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to

Jerusalem. It is surely right to hold Israel, the strong side, to high standards. But Palestinian parties, though weak, are also to blame. Seven decades after the creation of Israel as a thriving democracy, there is a better way than endless conflict and bloodshed.

How much blood is proportionate?

Every state has a right to defend its borders. To judge by the numbers, Israel's army may well have used excessive force. But any firm conclusion requires an independent assessment of what happened, where and when. The Israelis sometimes used non-lethal means, such as tear-gas dropped from drones. But then snipers went to work with bullets. What changed? Mixed in with protesters, it seems, were an unknown number of Hamas attackers seeking to breach the fence. What threat did they pose? Any fair judgment depends on the details.

Just as important is the broader political question. The fence between Gaza and Israel is no ordinary border. Gaza is a prison, not a state. Measuring 365 square kilometres and home to 2m people, it is one of the most crowded and miserable places on Earth. It is short of medicine, power and other essentials. The tap water is undrinkable; untreated sewage is pumped into the sea. Gaza already has one of the world's highest jobless rates, at 44%. The scene of three wars between Hamas and Israel since 2007, it is always on the point of eruption.

Many hands are guilty for this tragedy. Israel insists that the strip is not its problem, having withdrawn its forces in 2005. But it still controls Gaza from land, sea and air. Any Palestinian, even a farmer, coming within 300 metres of the fence is liable to be shot. Israel restricts the goods that get in. Only a tiny number of Palestinians can get out for, say, medical treatment. Israeli generals have long warned against letting the economy collapse. Mr Netanyahu usually ignores them.

Egypt also contributes to the misery. The Rafah crossing to Sinai, another escape valve, was open to goods and people for just 17 days in the first four months of this year. And Fatah, which administers the PA and parts of the West Bank, has withheld salaries for civil servants working for the PA in Gaza, limited shipments of necessities, such as drugs and baby milk, and cut payments to Israel for Gaza's electricity.

Hamas bears much of the blame, too. It all but destroyed the Oslo peace accords through its campaign of suicide-bombings in the 1990s and 2000s. Having driven the Israelis out of Gaza, it won a general election in 2006 and, after a brief civil war, expelled Fatah from the strip in 2007. It has misruled Gaza ever since, proving corrupt, oppressive and incompetent. It stores its weapons in civilian sites, including mosques and schools, making them

targets. Cement that might be used for reconstruction is diverted to build underground tunnels to attack Israel. Hamas all but admitted it was not up to governing when it agreed to hand many administrative tasks to the PA last year as part of a reconciliation deal with Fatah. But the pact collapsed because Hamas is not prepared to give up its weapons.

Israel, Egypt and the PA cannot just lock away the Palestinians in Gaza in the hope that Hamas will be overthrown. Only when Gazans live more freely might they think of getting rid of their rulers. Much more can be done to ease Gazans' plight without endangering Israel's security. But no lasting solution is possible until the question of Palestine is solved, too. Mr Netanyahu has long resisted the idea of a Palestinian state—and has kept building settlements on occupied land.

It is hard to convince Israelis to change. As Israel marks its 70th birthday, the economy is booming. By “managing” the conflict, rather than trying to end it, Mr Netanyahu has kept Palestinian violence in check while giving nothing away. When violence flares Israel's image suffers, but not much. The Trump administration supports it. And Arab states seeking an ally against a rising Iran have never had better relations with it.

Israel is wrong to stop seeking a deal. And Mr Trump is wrong to prejudge the status of Jerusalem. But Palestinians have made it easy for Israel to claim that there is “no partner for peace”, divided as they are between a tired nationalist Fatah that cannot deliver peace, and an Islamist Hamas that refuses to do so. Palestinians desperately need new leaders. Fatah must renew itself through long-overdue elections. And Hamas must realise that its rockets damage Palestinian dreams of statehood more than they hurt Israel.

The only way to stop fighting is to stop fighting

For all their talk of non-violence, Hamas's leaders have not abandoned the idea of “armed struggle” to destroy Israel. They refuse to give up their guns, or fully embrace a two-state solution; they speak vaguely of a long-term “truce”. With this week's protests, Hamas's leaders boasted of freeing a “wild tiger”. They found that Israel can be even more ferocious.

If Hamas gave up its weapons, it would open the way for a rapprochement with Fatah. If it accepted Israel's right to exist, it would expose Israel's current unwillingness to allow a Palestinian state. If Palestinians marched peacefully, without guns and explosives, they would take the moral high ground. In short, if Palestinians want Israel to stop throttling them, they must first convince Israelis it is safe to let go.

Israel Is No Longer David the Shepherd but David the King

By Robert Nicholson

providencemag.com

May 14, 2018

Christians should move from supporting Israel to being its partner.

The proclamation of Jewish independence on May 14, 1948, may have been the most epic reversal of history ever

recorded.

Eighteen centuries after the Romans expelled their forefathers and only three years after the Holocaust, a tiny group of 750,000 Jews—less than half the current Jewish population of New York City—declared sovereignty in their ancestral homeland against a tidal wave of opposition and Arab invasion from all sides. Rarely in history does one find a cause so evidently moral. Israel's founding was at once a victory for justice, a triumph for freedom, and a crushing blow to antisemitism. It was a story of David against Goliath.

But 70 years later, things are different. Israel isn't David anymore. Though still tiny, this nuclear state and regional hegemon is one of the most successful and dynamic countries on the planet. New facts demand a new approach, and too few voices are taking the next chapter of the State of Israel seriously.

Hundreds of millions of people around the world still loathe the Jews and the Jewish state. A thousand miles from Jerusalem, the Iranian ayatollahs are working hard to achieve Israel's immediate destruction. One hundred miles away in Lebanon and just 50 miles away in Gaza, Hezbollah and Hamas are doing their best to assist. All around the world, agents of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement are trying to isolate and weaken the Jewish state through nonviolent, but no less insidious, means.

Israel will have enemies for the foreseeable future, but that old fear of being "wiped off the map" has faded and has been replaced by an unshakable confidence. This new national confidence is a source of both consternation to her enemies and occasionally concern to her allies. Israel's allies, who are accustomed to caring for the poor and endangered Jew, are adjusting to the new reality that David can fend for himself. David the weak shepherd has become David the mighty king, and many of his best friends still don't know what to do with that.

The most obvious conceptual revolution has been Israel's status in the Arab world. In recent years, as a consequence of shared concern over Iranian expansion, Israel has established a growing network of friendly ties with Arab neighbors. Since 1979, Israel has made peace with Egypt; since 1994, with Jordan. One year before that, Israel began working with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to create the Palestinian National Authority, the first experiment in Palestinian self-determination in all of history.

Anyone who remembers the events and rhetoric of 1948 would be shocked by the change of tone among Arab leaders toward Jerusalem. Last September, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi stood before the UN General Assembly and inveighed against Palestinian leadership, calling on them "to overcome [their] differences and not to lose opportunities and to be ready

to accept co-existence with the other, with Israelis in safety and security."

In late April of this year, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman reportedly told an assembled group of Jewish-American leaders, "In the last several decades the Palestinian leadership has missed one opportunity after the other and rejected all the peace proposals it was given. It is about time the Palestinians take the proposals and agree to come to the negotiations table or shut up and stop complaining."

Just last week, as Iranian missiles fell from Syria onto northern Israel, Bahrain Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa went on Twitter to support Israel's "right" to defend itself.

Clearly, this is not the world of universal Arab opposition into which Israel was born.

Beyond the Arab world, things are looking also looking up. In his first year in office, President Donald Trump has spurred the United States to become more pro-Israel than ever, moving its embassy to Jerusalem, canceling the Obama-era Iran Deal, and launching retaliatory missiles at Israel's enemies in Syria. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meanwhile is working hard to forge deeper ties with Russia, China, India (even going so far as to spark up a budding bromance with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi), and many key African and European countries. On the diplomatic and cultural fronts, Israel has never been more accepted than it is today. The selection of Israeli singer Netta Barzilai as the winner of the Eurovision song competition on Saturday only underscores a general opening toward Israel from countries around the world.

Israel's external displays of strength are equally matched by its internal fortitude. No longer is it the struggling, resource-poor country of hungry immigrants that it was in 1948. Today Israel's economy is one of the most dynamic in the world, on track to grow by around 3 percent through the end of 2019. Unemployment is lower than it has been in years. Life expectancy is up. Unlike many developed countries, Israel's population growth is well above replacement rate. Israel has recently discovered and begun exploiting a massive natural gas field offshore, and its pioneering work in desalination, irrigation, and wastewater treatment has taken the country from water shortage to water surplus in just a few years.

In just one lifetime, the Jewish state has gone from rags to riches. So how should we think about engaging Israel in light of such dramatic changes?

First, we need to keep in mind what Israel actually is. Outsiders often reduce the country to two-dimensional images of the "Holy Land" or the "frontline against terror" that ignore the 8.5 million people who actually live there. Israel is, above all else, an exercise in Jewish self-determination and security; we support Israel because we support the Jewish people, not the other way around. Israel is also home to almost two million non-Jews, a

myriad assortment of Arab, Druze, Aramean, Armenian, and Syriac citizens who care just as deeply about its future as the Jews do. Our friendship with Israel means understanding Israel's essential humanity.

Second, we should recognize that hatred of the Jewish state remains strong in many quarters. The war isn't over, and the timeless reality of antisemitism demands constant vigilance. Hubris, self-deception, and destruction lie in wait for those who mistake calm for capitulation.

Third, we should begin looking at Israel as a model of entrepreneurial ingenuity that can benefit others through its hard-won knowledge. Much has been made about Israel as the "start-up nation" whose innovative economic techniques can be adopted by other developing countries. Less talked about has been Israel's success in the social and governmental realms. How to manage the problems presented by immigration, poverty, and post-traumatic stress? How to ensure freedom and pluralism amid deep ethnic, religious, and ideological differences? How to uphold rule of law against the corruption and capriciousness of political leaders? How to balance the demands of liberalism and democracy with the need to preserve cultural mores? These are all challenges that Israeli leaders have studied and, in many cases, met with incredible solutions. As Middle Easterners look for a way out of their current quagmire, and as we in the West seemingly move toward a post-liberal future, we should be examining these case studies and looking for models that work.

Fourth, we Christians should see Israel as a gateway to the Hebraic tradition that lies at the root of our faith, a tradition that often gets buried beneath our denominational preferences and ultra-modern sensibilities. Though hardly a religious country—only 20 percent of its people identify as orthodox—Israel nevertheless serves, through its history, geography, and demography, as a point

of departure for Christianity and Western culture more broadly. If "saving the West" involves any kind of return to the transcendent vision that first made our civilization great, then Israel and its people offer an obvious entry point, a living link that helps us reclaim the original context of our faith.

Lastly, we need to get beyond the old paradigm of "supporting" Israel and explore the possibilities of partnering with the Jewish state to advance shared values and interests. Of course, we support Israel—that's a given. But the most interesting way to engage Israel in the future won't be face-to-face, reaching down to give the Jews a hand; it will be side-by-side, standing shoulder-to-shoulder as we work to address each other's challenges, promote pluralism in the Middle East, and act out that old adage that Jews and Christians take so seriously: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

It may be hard for those raised on the constant alarmism of the Israel-in-crisis narrative to cope with the fact of Israel's success. But wise friends will see that the Jewish state's most exciting years still lie ahead. In one of its more aspirational paragraphs, the Israeli Declaration of Independence reads:

We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

Seventy years on, thanks to Israel's growing strength and acceptance, these aspirations actually have a shot at becoming reality.

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#L'Chaim: The secrets of Israelis' long, satisfying lives

By Israel21c Staff

israel21c.org

April 1, 2018

National Geographic Travel reveals the likely reasons why Israel ranks 5th for healthy longevity as cited in the UN World Happiness Report 2018.

The combination of a Mediterranean-style diet, low alcohol consumption, strong family and cultural values, and an excellent healthcare system could be the main factors that put Israel in fifth place worldwide on the longevity scale, according to National Geographic Travel.

As of 2015, the longest average healthy lifespan is enjoyed in Japan, Korea, Switzerland, Italy and Israel, in

that order.

This ranking was one of the aspects noted as significant by the authors of a newly issued UN report on the level of happiness in 156 countries.

In the overall happiness ranking, Israel came in 11th behind Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden and Australia. The Jewish state was in 12th place in terms of happiness among foreign-born citizens.

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