

# Will Israel Survive?

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# Preface

BECAUSE ISRAEL HAS NEVER KNOWN A DAY OF PEACE, FIGHTING EIGHT military campaigns and a daily war against terror that as recently as July 2006 escalated into a war, it is not surprising that no one talks about Israel's future. Israel's present is seen as so fraught with danger that most discussions focus on a day, a week, or perhaps a month in advance. Whenever someone proposes longer-term plans, such as the road map for peace, they're usually dismissed as naïve at best, and fools at worst, because these plans have consistently failed.

Most books about Israel, therefore, focus on reviewing the past and describing the present predicament. No one wants to admit that no solution may exist to the conflict between Israel and its neighbors, and many people see themselves as having the secret to peace. This is not a book about my prescription for peace. Sure, I have some ideas about what is likely to happen that will be discussed later, but a basic fallacy this book is meant to expose is that the absence of peace is in any way related to the lack of proposals.

The ideas presented here are based on my study of Israel for more than 20 years and can be backed up with data and references I've used over that time. My goal is to illustrate the complexity of the issues and explain why Israel's survival is open to question.

I'm grateful to the many teachers and colleagues who have helped educate me over the years. I want to especially thank David Krusch, Jennifer Feinberg, Yariv Nornberg, Ariel Scheib and Joanna Sloame for their help, my agent Lynne Rabinoff for her support, and my editor Airié Stuart for her helpful suggestions and guidance.

Hopefully, it will be possible to write a sequel to this book in the near future titled, *The Thriving State of Israel: Truly a Light unto the Nations*.

# Chapter 1

## Israel's Past Is Prologue

FROM ALMOST THE BEGINNING OF HUMAN HISTORY, THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE faced threats to their survival and overcome them. The ancient Israelites built a state that repeatedly faced enemies and ultimately succumbed to their superior power. Even then, however, some Jews remained entrenched in their homeland, and those who were exiled dreamed of returning. When at last the Jewish people regained their independence and established the state of Israel, they were blamed for turmoil in a region that had been the subject of competing interests for centuries. The desire to bring stability to the Middle East, particularly in light of the interests of modern nations in oil and trade, has led the world to focus a disproportionate amount of attention on a tiny nation whose people have asked for little more than the chance to build a home and live in peace with their neighbors. That peace has proved unachievable because the causes of the threats to Israel's future are complex and cannot be ameliorated by greater attention, inspiration, or inventiveness.

This is why the title of this book has a question mark. You might have expected the title to be, "Israel *Will* Survive." Israel might be the only country in the world whose right to exist is debated and whose future is questioned. Can you imagine anyone asking whether the United States will survive or whether it should exist? Or anyone saying "no" if asked?

Even Israelis question their future. In a September 2006 poll, for example, Israelis were asked, "To what extent are you certain the state of Israel will exist in the long run?" Nearly one-fourth of the Israelis answered they were not certain. Three-fourths of Israelis said they were in a struggle for survival and 56

percent said the country is less secure than it was a decade ago. The following month another poll found that 54 percent of Israelis feared for the existence of the state.

Despite doubts about the future, the history of the Jewish people is a story of survival. After all, what were the odds against an agrarian people, enslaved for generations, escaping their tormentors, marching out of the desert, conquering the inhabitants of a remote land that they believed was promised to them by God, and forming a nation? The Israelites, the forebears of the Jewish people, did just that.

From the time that the Israelites set up their state, they had to fight for their lives and livelihood. Like today, the battle was not just with external enemies; it was often among themselves. A Jewish monarchy evolved after it became evident that the people needed a strong central leader and the tribes could no longer govern the masses. Internal conflicts led to a split in the powerful kingdom of the Jews. This weakened their hold on the land and led eventually to their defeat and exile for more than two thousand years.

For religious and secular Jews who understand the lessons of history, the internal strife that led to the dissolution of the Jewish state is a constant reminder of what can happen to Israel if the people do not remain strong and united. From the more religious point of view, it is also prophetic of what will happen if Jews turn away from their faith.

Much later the Jewish people would discover that their promised land may be a place of milk and honey but, unfortunately, those commodities are considerably less valuable than the oil beneath the unholy ground of their enemies. In the early days of independence, however, the more serious problem was that the Jews found themselves at one of the central meeting points for the armies of empires that competed over their land and its surroundings. The Jewish people held off their enemies and maintained an independent nation for nearly 400 years before succumbing to the mighty Roman empire. This small piece of territory, formerly called the Land of Israel, continues to be fought over today.

If not for the combination of internal strife and the imperial designs of its neighbors, Israel would today be one of the oldest nations in the world, celebrating more than 3,000 years of independence rather than a mere 59.

Even after most Jews were dispersed, communities remained in Jerusalem, Safed, Hebron, and Tiberias. Many Jews were massacred by the

crusaders during the twelfth century, but the community rebounded in the next two centuries as large numbers of rabbis and Jewish pilgrims immigrated to Jerusalem and the Galilee. By the early nineteenth century—years before the birth of the modern Zionist movement—more than 10,000 Jews lived throughout what is today Israel. While most Jews remained in the diaspora, they never gave up the dream of a return to Israel.

Despite the catastrophic loss of independence that lasted for centuries, it is the Jews who emerged as the victors over the long haul. It took more than 2,000 years for the Jews to regain power in their homeland, but Israel is now a prosperous nation of more than seven million citizens, while the mighty Assyrians, Babylonians, and other ancient powers that once dominated the region have been relegated to Marx's dustbin of history.

And it is not just ancient empires that the Jews have outlasted. In 1917, the Russian revolution led to the creation of a Soviet empire. That same year, the Balfour Declaration issued by Great Britain called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Now, 90 years later, the Soviet Union has disintegrated, but the state of Israel has survived. "The revolution that purported to redeem mankind failed miserably," Maoz Azaryahu noted, "whereas Zionism has succeeded in reformulating Jewish existence in geographical, national and cultural terms."<sup>1</sup>

During the long centuries of exile that preceded the reestablishment of Israel, the Jewish people learned from their mistreatment by Christians and Muslims, and ultimately from the Holocaust, the painful lesson of what can happen if they do not have a homeland of their own. Support for Israel became almost a religion for Jews (and many non-Jews) committed to the Jewish state's survival. As Shlomo Avineri observed, "to be Jewish today means, in one way or another, feeling some link with Israel."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, one reason for questioning Israel's future is the sense, reflected in polls of young American Jews, that this connection may be fraying.

Israel's survival also does not seem so certain when one realizes how many people would like to see the Jewish state disappear. Many view Israel as the greatest irritant to the Arab world, responsible for instability, terrorism, and rampant anti-Americanism. Without Israel, the critics suggest, the Arab world would have better relations with the United States and the region would be placid. History has shown, however, that U.S.-Arab relations have only gotten closer as American ties with Israel have grown stronger. Today, the

United States has good relations with every Arab state except perhaps Syria and Libya (and a slow thaw is even taking place with Muammar Qaddafi's regime). Moreover, the entire region is marked by inter-Arab and inter-Muslim conflicts unrelated to Israel. Border disputes exist, for example, between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, Iraq and Iran, and Iraq and Kuwait. Syria considers Lebanon a southern province it would like to control. Shiite and Sunni Muslims are in conflict throughout the region and are killing each other daily in Iraq while competing for power with Kurds. Christians, Muslims, and Druze fight for control over Lebanon. Hamas and Fatah fight for control over the Palestinian Authority. Iran and Iraq fought a bloody ten-year war unrelated to Israel. Iraq invaded Kuwait. If Israel disappeared tomorrow, the Middle East would still be in turmoil.

The hatred exhibited toward the United States usually has nothing whatsoever to do with Israel. The attacks on 9/11, for example, were conducted because of radical Muslims' hatred of Western values and the U.S. presence in Arab countries (in particular Saudi Arabia), and to further the Islamists' ultimate goal of the establishment of an Islamic empire. Similarly, the last two wars that the United States has fought in the Middle East with Iraq had nothing to do with Israel.

Impatience with the instability of the region and the conviction that America has the power to do something about it have led to persistent calls for U.S. engagement. But what can the United States do about the conflicts mentioned above? The answer is little or nothing. Consequently, the focus is on the one dispute in which the United States does exert some influence, namely, the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. A major Democratic Party theme of the 2004 presidential election, for example, was that President George W. Bush's failure to be more actively involved in peacemaking was largely responsible for the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli violence. That the violence began on President Bill Clinton's watch and was partly an outgrowth of the failure of his engagement was ignored (more about that later).

The idea of U.S. intervention is not a partisan one; rather, it is a cardinal tenet of the State Department. American officials have long believed that they can solve the Arab-Israeli conflict through diplomacy. Since the United States has influence on only one party to the conflict, Israel, any American plan necessarily focuses on pressuring Jerusalem to make concessions that the diplomats hope will satisfy the Arabs.

The United States has been pursuing diplomatic efforts in the Middle East for nearly six decades and the one thing they have in common is failure. Even President Bush, who said he wanted to avoid the pitfalls and mistakes of his predecessor, was dragged into Middle East diplomacy. He enunciated a plan in 2002 that gave way to the road map for peace (backed also by the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations) and, ultimately, neither plan brought the parties any closer to ending the conflict. This outcome was consistent with the past, as not a single U.S. peace plan has been successful, yet diplomats and other wishful thinkers continue to hold out hope that some comprehensive plan can be devised to bring about peace. You can't blame the diplomats for trying because it is their job to pursue negotiated solutions to problems, but you can fault them for their naïveté given their purported expertise on the region.

This naïveté is not unique to the United States. Others, including many Israelis, believe in the existence of a magic formula that will end the conflict. The implication is that we just need the Einstein of diplomacy to figure out the secret, but this is an illusion. The absence of peace has nothing to do with the inadequacy of previous plans.

I am not suggesting that it is a mistake to seek peace or to work toward ending the conflict; however, this approach is too simplistic. The job of diplomats is to devise political solutions to political problems, but the Arab-Israeli conflict is not a purely political dispute. If it were, a settlement could be reached to which all the parties could agree. President George H. W. Bush's secretary of state, James Baker, offered the best example of the naïve view that the difference between Arabs and Jews was no different than a disagreement between, say, the United Auto Workers and General Motors. Baker's great accomplishment was in convening a conference in Madrid where the Palestinians and several Arab states, including for the first time the Saudis, sat at the same table with Israel. Unlike a president handling a labor dispute, however, he couldn't force them to agree and little came out of the meeting.

The conflict between Israeli Jews and their Arab and Muslim neighbors has lasted now for more than a century because it is nothing like a management-labor negotiation. It is not even like most international conflicts, which are based largely on political and geographical disagreements. The Arab-Israeli conflict does indeed involve such elements, but it is also rooted in psychology, history, and religion. The inability to appreciate all these components is the

reason why American peace initiatives have consistently ended in failure and why Israel's survival cannot depend on them.

On one level, the entire conflict is really about geography. Two people, Jews and Palestinians, claim one piece of land as their own. Since neither the Jews nor the Arabs were prepared to allow the other to rule over them, the only logical solution to the antinomy anyone has ever come up with is to divide the land. The British suggested this first in 1937 when Lord Peel offered a plan to split Palestine. A decade later, the United Nations arrived at the same conclusion in proposing and adopting the partition resolution to create Jewish and Arab states in Palestine. In neither instance, or any negotiations since, have the Palestinians been prepared to accept a state in only part of what they claim to be their homeland. The Zionists reluctantly accepted the partition ideas because they were prepared to settle for half a loaf to insure they had any loaf at all. At root, the persistence of the geographic dispute boils down to the Palestinians' refusal from 1937 to the present to accept the idea of a Jewish state living beside a Palestinian state in Palestine/*Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel, as Jews prefer to call the pre-state area).

Beyond this basic point, however, geography is also a factor because it shapes the deployment of military forces, the availability of water, and the drawing of boundaries. Israel's view on these issues can be understood only if you appreciate the relative size of Israel vis-à-vis its enemies and the landscape of the area.

Because Israel attracts so much media attention, it is perceived to be much larger than it is. People who have not visited Israel often have a difficult time comprehending just how small and vulnerable the country is. Israel is actually the size of New Jersey, but that doesn't really capture the relationship between size and security. For example, before 1967, at its narrowest point Israel was just nine miles wide. President George W. Bush says driveways in Crawford, Texas, are longer than that.

To give another sense of the geography, on one of my trips to Israel, I toured a community called Gush Etzion. It is in the West Bank, so the rest of the world considers it a settlement (actually, it is a bloc of 18 communities), but it is less than a 15-minute drive, six miles south of Jerusalem. We stood on a hilltop and the guide said to look to the west. The tower we could see not far in the distance, he said, was the Crowne Plaza Hotel in the center of

Jerusalem. He then told us to look to the left of the hotel, farther in the distance. It was a bit hazy but, he said, that was Tel Aviv. We were literally looking across the width of the country. It would be as if you came to visit me in Washington, D.C., and I took you to the top of the Washington Monument and said, "Hey look, you can see San Francisco."

In 2005 I took a helicopter tour that lifted off from an airport along the beach of Tel Aviv. We flew all of seven minutes before we reached the 1967 border. It is said that President Bush's policy toward Israel was strongly affected by a similar helicopter tour of the area that Ariel Sharon gave him when Bush was still governor of Texas. Once you see the geography firsthand, it's easier to understand what Israelis mean when they talk about the need for secure and defensible borders.

Forget the nine miles across the midsection of Israel. If you go to Jerusalem, Jews and Arabs are separated by only a *few feet*. The Temple Mount, on which sits the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, is literally on top of the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. Around the corner is the church of the Holy Sepulchre. How do you draw lines between Jews and Arabs, Christians, and Muslims?

Israel's greatest weakness may be its size. It will never be geographically or demographically comparable to its neighbors. More worrisome, the military advantage it once had because of its size—short supply lines—has been largely erased by its enemies' acquisition of long-range missiles that can blanket the country. More ominously, its advantage is also threatened by the potential for an enemy with nuclear weapons to devastate the country with three bombs or fewer. In the missile age, it is questionable whether secure and defensible borders are still achievable.

Topography also matters. Travel up to the Golan Heights, a region Israel captured in 1967, which rises from 400 to 1,700 feet in the northeast corner of Israel, and overlook the Hula Valley, Israel's richest agricultural area. Prior to the Six-Day War, the Syrians controlled the region and used that vantage point to shell Israeli farmers below. Anyone who has been there immediately understands why Israel is reluctant to withdraw from this territory. North Carolina's long-time senator Jesse Helms, never regarded as a great friend of Israel, went to the Golan for the first time and said that he wished all of the other senators could see the landscape so they would understand why Israel can't give up that strategic high ground.

Geography is not relevant only to the dispute with the Palestinians. A peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians that settled their territorial issues would not end the threats against Israel. The mere presence of a Jewish state in the area considered by many Muslims to be Islamic land is sufficient provocation to maintain a state of belligerence, as is the perceived subservience of Muslims in Israel to Jews. Thus, for example, a resolution of the Palestinian issue would have no impact on Iran's rejection of Israel's right to exist. Israel doesn't "occupy" an inch of Saudi or Kuwaiti or Libyan land, yet these nations consider themselves enemies of Israel.

These geographic realities have a key impact on the psychology of the conflict as well. Though rarely discussed, relations between the parties are shaped by raw human emotions such as fear, shame, humiliation, honor, and revenge. For example, in June 1967, Israel defeated the combined military might of the Arab world in just six days. For the Arab world, this was not just a political or military defeat; it was also humiliating. How could this puny state of Jews, inferiors according to Islam, defeat the warriors of Allah? The Arabs were overwhelmed by a sense of shame and dishonor.

In 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. They undoubtedly hoped to destroy the Jewish state, but they knew this would be difficult, if not impossible, because of Israel's military strength and its support from the United States. What was more important, however, was to restore the Arabs' honor. The war accomplished this objective. Though Israel won the war, the Arabs, especially the Egyptians, saw it as a victory because they had surprised the Israelis and nearly defeated them. (Many people forget that Sadat was assassinated during a 1981 "victory parade" commemorating the success of the 1973 war.)

Some people claim the war could have been avoided altogether had Israel responded positively to peace overtures Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made in 1971. But Sadat was not talking like a man interested in peace when he threatened to go to war if a political solution was not achieved, and when he demanded Israel's complete withdrawal from the Sinai and a resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem while at the same time declaring he would never establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Moreover, those who want to blame Israel for the war that followed underestimate the psychological damage of the 1967 war. Sadat could not have made peace in 1971 because it would have been from a point of weakness and dishonor. In an

interview, Sadat told the *New York Times* about his childhood and how people would fight for 50 years over a meter of land: “our land . . . means our honor here . . . and one dies for this honor.” After 1973, having erased the stain of humiliation, it was possible for him to seriously discuss normalizing relations with Israel.

The psychological impact of the two wars on Israel was almost a mirror image of the effect on the Arabs. In 1967 Israelis came out of the war beating their chests and telling everyone how they were the toughest kids on the block. The country was in a state of euphoria and believed it had miraculously overcome the threat of annihilation. Israelis also believed they had proven the Arabs couldn't defeat them and assumed the Arab states would therefore feel compelled to make peace. It didn't happen. Six years later, Jewish Israelis were shocked on their holiest holiday, Yom Kippur, by an attack on their northern and southern borders by the armies of Syria and Egypt. Though they prevailed on the battlefield, they had come so close to defeat that the psyche of the entire nation was shaken (in fact, Prime Minister Golda Meir had contemplated suicide). From that point on, Israel assumed a fortress mentality and, even as the military grew stronger—it is sometimes misleadingly referred to as the fourth most powerful in the world—Israelis always have had in the back of their minds a little voice warning them that Israel could be destroyed. This subconscious fear shapes all Israeli negotiations.

This feeling is compounded by the even more deep-rooted trauma of the Holocaust. Two-thirds of European Jewry was murdered by the Nazis and the creation of Israel was prompted in part by that catastrophe. All decisions related to Israel's ultimate security are shaped by the fear of annihilation. Menachem Begin, a Polish-born Jew, for example, decided to order a preemptive strike to prevent Iraq from acquiring a nuclear capability that, he believed, Saddam Hussein could use to destroy Israel. Discussions of territorial compromise have also been influenced by this anxiety, as evidenced by Abba Eban's objection to demands that Israel withdraw to the 1967 borders; he said these were the “Auschwitz borders,” by which he meant Israel's existence would be endangered if it were to agree to such an insecure boundary.

In the most recent conflict during the summer of 2006, as in 1973, psychology again was evident in the claims of Hizbollah. Despite being defeated militarily in every battle, and despite the devastation of the surrounding countryside, the group's prestige was enhanced in much of the

Arab world because it inflicted severe pain (economic and physical) on the Israelis and seemed to have fought them to a draw. Hizbollah's willingness and ability to stand up to Israel was a source of pride for the Arabs and Muslims that contrasted sharply with what the "Arab street" viewed as the gutless behavior of Arab leaders who have done nothing to confront Israel in more than three decades.

One last example of the psychology of the Arab-Israeli conflict is perhaps more obvious: revenge. What does the terrorist group Hamas say after Israel assassinates one of its leaders? Does it announce the need to immediately sit down and negotiate? No; it declares its intention to exact revenge—a pure, nonpolitical, emotional reaction. The desire for revenge is very strong; Arabs can carry it with them for generations. Revenge is one way Arabs erase shame. Harold Glidden, a former member of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, observed that the Arabs feel it necessary to take vengeance "to restore to the Palestinian Arabs what was wrongfully taken" and "eliminate the shame that had been visited on them and on the other Arabs by their defeats by Israel."<sup>3</sup> Hussein Agha and Robert Malley also noted that Hamas reflected the Palestinians' "psychological condition" and came to power to "exorcize the disgrace" and to provide "revenge."<sup>4</sup>

Glidden explained why Israelis were wrong to assume that their victory in 1967 would compel the Arabs to make peace, an argument that applies as well to why militarily defeating Hamas or Hizbollah or any other terrorist group would be equally ineffective today in stimulating an interest in coexistence. Rather than prompting them to pursue peace, the adverse military balance "produces an emotional need for revenge, and this need is deepened rather than attenuated by each successive defeat." Like the Egyptians, the Palestinians feel shame must be eliminated. "This cannot be done by making peace," Glidden said, "before vengeance has been taken."

While a strong Israel helps deter Arab aggression, it also causes the Arabs to seek increased military power to compete with their enemy. "The Arabs fear a strong Israel," Glidden wrote, "because they cannot conceive that any strong state (whether Israeli or Arab) would not use its power and influence to dominate and control the others. . . . This felt danger from Israel is what lies behind the long-reiterated fears of Israeli expansion and Israel's alleged desire to take over the Arab territory 'from the Nile to the Euphrates.'" It doesn't matter that Israelis see themselves as peace loving and find such claims absurd, as

well as demonstrably false, given their withdrawals from Sinai, the Gaza Strip, and parts of the West Bank, which total approximately 94 percent of the territory Israel captured in 1967. As Israeli-Arab newspaper editor Bassam Jabber explained, Israel has to persuade the people in neighboring countries that it has no intention of conquering the whole region or plundering its resources.<sup>5</sup>

Westerners place peace high on their priority lists. But for Arabs, Glidden said, “the emotional need for vengeance to eliminate the ego-destroying feeling of shame” takes precedence. As an example, Glidden cited the Shiite chief Mujtahid of Iraq who said in August 1938, long before the creation of Israel, that a jihad for Palestine was everyone’s duty, and that if the Arabs lost they would suffer “humiliation, death and eternal shame.”

Jews do not have the same need for revenge, but Israel is not above pursuing enemies who are believed to merit punishment. In most cases Israel has sought to arrest terrorists, but it has also engaged in targeted killings and, most famously, sent Mossad hit teams after the perpetrators of the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

History also matters. Jews have lived in the land of Israel without interruption for at least 2,000 years. By comparison, the Arabs can claim an association of, at best, a little more than 1,000 years. The only independent state in the Land of Israel was a Jewish monarchy that lasted more than 400 years. What historical right do Palestinians have to independence given that they have never had a state in all of recorded history?

Even the term “Palestine” has nothing to do with the people who today call themselves Palestinians. The territory is believed to have been named for the Philistines, an Aegean people who, in the twelfth century B.C.E., settled along the Mediterranean coastal plain of what is now Israel and the Gaza Strip. In the second century C.E., after crushing the last Jewish revolt, the Romans first applied the name Palaestina to Judea (the southern portion of what is now called the West Bank) in an attempt to minimize Jewish identification with the Land of Israel. The Arabic word *Filastin* is derived from this Latin name.

Ironically, one local Palestinian Arab leader, Auni Bey Abdul-Hadi, told the British Peel Commission in 1937, “There is no such country as Palestine! ‘Palestine’ is a term the Zionists invented! There is no Palestine in the Bible. Our country was for centuries part of Syria.” The distinguished Arab-American

historian, Philip Hitti, testifying against partition before the Anglo-American Committee in 1946, said “There is no such thing as ‘Palestine’ in history.” Representatives of the Arab Higher Committee to the United Nations also submitted a statement to the General Assembly in May 1947 that said Palestine was part of Syria. A few years later, Ahmed Shuqairi, later the chairman of the PLO, told the Security Council: “It is common knowledge that Palestine is nothing but southern Syria.”

Given this history, one could argue the Jews were there first and have title to the land, and while Arabs have long been present, there’s no basis for the Palestinian demand to have a state. These historical facts play into the Israeli view of the merits of the Palestinian case, as do more recent developments, notably the evolution of a Palestinian national consciousness and a desire for self-determination. The recognition of these historical changes has gradually led the majority of Israelis, including former political hardliners such as Ariel Sharon, to accept the reality of Palestinian nationalism and the virtual inevitability of the establishment of the first Palestinian state.

Another example of how history influences policy is the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. Many Israelis argued the evacuation set a bad precedent because it was universally regarded in the Arab world as a retreat forced by the steadfast resistance of Hizbollah. The Palestinians took this as a model and thought they too could use terrorist tactics against Israel to force it to give up territory. After a five-year war marked by horrific suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks that took more than 1,000 Israeli lives, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip. While I would argue Israel’s withdrawal was not a direct result of the war, but was a wise strategic decision that saved lives and ameliorated the demographic problem (discussed in chapter 4), the Palestinians saw the disengagement as another example of how resistance could yield positive results.

In the case of both withdrawals, Israel thought that by ending its provocative occupation it would gain security. Israel did what the peace activists had campaigned for—namely trading land for peace. In reality, however, the trade yielded not peace but terror. After Israel left Lebanon, Hizbollah built up its arsenal and continued to launch rockets into Israel, culminating in the attack on July 12, 2006, in which three soldiers were killed and two taken hostage—a provocation that led Israel to again cross into Lebanon. A UN peacekeeping force deployed in Lebanon after Israel

withdrew in 2000 was supposed to prevent such attacks but did not. This was a repetition of the failure of the UN peacekeepers whose precipitous removal had contributed to the 1967 war and reinforced Israel's historical mistrust of the United Nations. Similarly, following the disengagement from Gaza, the Palestinians continued attempts to infiltrate terrorists into Israel and to fire rockets at civilian targets on an almost daily basis. When Hamas kidnapped an Israeli soldier days before the Hizbollah attack, it too precipitated an Israeli military response.

This recent history led Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to suspend the principal initiative on which he campaigned for office, namely, the unilateral withdrawal from a significant portion of the West Bank. The Israeli people have now had two case studies of what they get in exchange for ending occupation and are not about to make the same mistake a third time.

The historical roots of the conflict are also evident in discussions about Jerusalem. It is sometimes suggested that the city be internationalized, as envisioned in the original UN partition plan. After all, the argument goes, this is a holy city to three major religions, so why should it be under the sole control of Israel? The Palestinians also claim that the city should belong to them and it should be under their control.

The Israeli response is to look to history. The partition resolution did not see internationalizing Jerusalem as a permanent solution; nevertheless, for the first two years after the 1948 war the United Nations reiterated its position on the city but abandoned the idea of internationalization as Jordan tightened its hold on Jerusalem. It was only after Israel retook the city in 1967 that the world body regained interest in the city's fate. In the 19-year interim, while the UN stood silent, Jordan had occupied the city, desecrated synagogues and other holy places, and refused to allow Jews access to the Western Wall.

Israelis also see little merit to the Arab claims to Jerusalem since it was never the capital of any Arab state, and for most of Islamic history, it was considered insignificant, a neglected backwater town. The Palestinians certainly never had any special claim to the city. This history, along with the 3,000-year Jewish connection to the city King David built, helps explain the Israeli insistence that Jerusalem remain the undivided capital of Israel.

In suggesting a variety of factors that contribute to the conflict between Israel and its neighbors, I do not mean to imply that politics has no role to play. Clearly, politics is very important as the conflict is shaped by competing

nationalisms. Jewish nationalism—Zionism—holds that the Jews are a nation like any other, entitled to self-determination in their homeland, which is Israel.

Contrary to the smears of anti-Semites and the United Nations, Zionism has nothing whatsoever to do with racism. Anyone can be a Zionist. You can be black, brown, or yellow. You can be from the United States, India, Thailand, or Mars. In fact, if it were possible to quantify Zionism, I would argue that the most rabid Zionists are the black Jews from Ethiopia who for centuries looked forward to returning to their homeland, unaware that white Jews existed. And Israel's heroic rescue of these Jews constitutes a dramatic rebuttal to the racism calumny. As William Safire put it, "For the first time in history, thousands of black people are being brought to a country not in chains but in dignity, not as slaves but as citizens."<sup>6</sup>

On returning to their homeland, however, the Jews found other people living in the same area. Over time, Palestinian Arabs also developed a nationalistic view that they too were entitled to self-determination in Palestine. Palestinian Arab nationalism is largely a post-World War I phenomenon that did not become a significant political movement until after the 1967 Six-Day War and Israel's capture of the West Bank; nevertheless, today it is undeniable.

During much of the 1950s and 1960s, pan-Arabism also clashed with Zionism as Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to unify the Arab world. That worldview has been supplanted now by pan-Islamism, which brings me to the final and, perhaps most important factor in the current conflict—religion.

The Jewish people can base their claim to the Land of Israel on several grounds: uninterrupted Jewish settlement from the time of Joshua onward; the Balfour Declaration of 1917; the League of Nations Mandate, which incorporated the Balfour Declaration; the United Nations partition resolution of 1947; Israel's admission to the UN in 1949 and the recognition of Israel by most other states. Fundamentally, however, the reason that the Jewish homeland had to be in such an inconvenient place, surrounded by hostile neighbors and lacking the one valuable resource that made those neighbors relevant to the rest of the world, is the belief that this is the land promised to Jews by God Almighty. It is Jerusalem where Jews hope to perfect the world and bring about a peace that will usher in a messianic age. And the Muslims take Judaic theology seriously. That is why they closed the Golden Gate to the Old City,

where it is said the Messiah would enter Jerusalem. They also built a cemetery in front of the gate as a barrier because the Messiah is supposed to belong to the priestly caste that is prohibited from entering a cemetery.

The religious connection to Israel was crucial to the early Zionist movement. After all, if the goal was to find a haven from anti-Semitism, why did it have to be in the area that had come to be called Palestine? In 1903, after pogroms in Russia, Theodor Herzl himself had proposed creating a homeland in Uganda. That idea was rejected by the Zionist movement and Herzl maintained that he saw Uganda as only a temporary refuge from anti-Semitism until a homeland could be created in Israel. The fact is that Zionism has profound religious roots. Many prayers speak of Jerusalem, Zion, and the Land of Israel. The injunction not to forget Jerusalem, the site of the temple, is a major tenet of Judaism. The Hebrew language, the Torah, the laws in the Talmud, the Jewish calendar and its holidays all originated in Israel and revolve around its seasons. Religion, culture, and history make clear that it is only in the Land of Israel that the Jewish commonwealth could be built.

It is not only Jews, however, who have a religious attachment to the land. This is the same area where Jesus Christ was born and Christianity emerged. The papal desire to cleanse the region of infidels led to two centuries of bloody crusades (1095–1291), marking the last time Christians were dominant anywhere in the Middle East. Today, Israel remains a focal point of Christianity and the one place in all the Middle East where Christians can live and practice their faith freely. Some Christians also support a Jewish state because they believe the return of all Jews to Israel and their subsequent destruction in an apocalyptic battle will bring about the resurrection of their messiah.

Muslims also have a theological connection to the Land of Israel, although theirs is perhaps more tenuous. They believe that Mohammad took his night flight to heaven from the Temple Mount, and, other than Jerusalem, no other area of Israel holds much significance to Muslims. Even Jerusalem is of marginal importance. It is not mentioned in the Koran and was never a capital or major political center in the Islamic empire. Still, the presence of Jews in this land, and more important, their control over an Islamic holy place is anathema to them.

The Islamic religion has a more fundamental problem with the existence of a Jewish state, however, that derives from the Muslim view that the world

is divided into two realms, the House of Islam and the House of War, the Dar al-Islam and the Dar al-harb. The Dar al-Islam is all those lands in which an Islamic government rules. Non-Muslims may live there on Muslim sufferance and, strictly speaking, a perpetual state of *jihad*, or holy war, is imposed by the law. The outside world, which has not yet been subjugated, is called the House of War. It is then a religious obligation for Muslims to subjugate the infidels and it is unacceptable for non-Muslims to rule over Muslims or for non-Muslims to control Muslim territory. This is absolutely basic to understanding the intractability of the Israel-Islamic conflict. It is inconceivable that Hamas or Islamic Jihad or Hizbollah or any other fundamentalist group can accept the existence of a Jewish state in the body of the Islamic world. Israel is a cancer (a reference they often use) that must be excised, and there is nothing that anyone can do to change their minds. If Israel were to withdraw tomorrow from all of the West Bank, all of East Jerusalem, and give every inch of the Golan Heights to Syria, there still would be no peace, because the Islamists will not be satisfied with a return to the 1967 borders; they demand that the border be the Mediterranean Sea.

The Muslim antipathy to nonbelievers is not restricted, incidentally, to Jews. Small sects, such as the Baha'i, are ruthlessly persecuted. Most Christians have been driven out of the few Muslim countries where they lived and the radical attitude toward them is expressed in the popular saying, "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people."

When the conflict between Jews and Arabs and Muslims is viewed in its full geographical, psychological, historical, political, and theological complexity, there is no mystery why it has persisted for more than a century. The questions we still have to answer are whether it is possible to find an end to the conflict despite its complexity and whether Israel can survive even if this is impossible.