

ISRAELIS and PALESTINIANS : A CLASH OF IDENTITIES

As a hiatus follows the May, 2021 ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, violence has spread throughout the west. We are seeing yet another spillover of anti-Israel hatred and violence against Jews across Europe and North America. The numbers of attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions so far this year are unprecedented,

We live in extremely troubled times in which feelings are a quick substitute for knowledge and thought. When Israel was attacked in 1948 and in later wars, she was David and the Arabs were Goliath. These roles have been reversed. There are two significant reasons for this unrestrained explosion of hate. The first is lack of public education, education that teaches history designed around critical analysis, not political correctness. Education that merely stresses tolerance is useless.

The second contributor to this explosion of hate lies in telescopic media coverage. In a 24/7 media environment there simply isn't time for broadcast and print journalists to examine context. Examining the context of this conflict requires exposure to history, politics, international law, religion and culture. Given the limitations of the 24/7 news cycle, media concentration on the images of war is unsurprising.

While we make our way through this hiatus before the inevitable next outbreak, here are several issues to ponder. Why is it that shortly after the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181 in 1947 dividing Palestine into a Jewish part and an Arab part, Israel declared statehood and set about building a functioning modern country? Why is it that Palestinian Arabs did not take up the opportunity to declare their own state either then or later? The simple answer is that the Arab world rejected the idea of a Jewish state in the Muslim Middle East that was explicit in resolution no 181. In doing so, they denied themselves statehood. Engaged in opposition, they did nothing

to advance Palestinian interests. Their attempts to stop the clock failed while Israel moved from success to success. Each of the four Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 was rooted in opposition. The Palestinian template was stagnation. It remains their template.

While fending off attacks from five Arab nations that began on day two of her existence, Israel made time to build democratic, representative institutions. Her founding politicians were all educated in Europe. They understood the role of representative political, social and economic institutions. They understood the need for infra-structure. Israel immediately set about building roads, modest homes for Jewish emigrants coming from all over the world, local medical infirmaries, schools, and in time hospitals and universities. The local Palestinian leadership fled and left their fate in the hands of outside Arab leaders none of whom was Palestinian, all of whom were absolutely convinced that they would drive Israel into the Mediterranean.

While the Arabs who fled Israel as the 1948 war broke out ended up in squalid refugee camps, Israel decided that sheltering people in tents, and tin shacks was inhuman. By the outbreak of the second Arab-Israeli war in 1956, this motley mix of emigrant Jews was modestly housed. This didn't happen accidentally. It took thought, planning and hard work.

By 1956 Israel had implemented a '*ship to farm settlement*' model that housed her newcomers. These settlements were early sub-divisions. Israel's first ambassador to the United Kingdom, Elijah Elath described this settlement policy in a series of three lectures given to Brandeis University in April-May, 1956. These lectures were published in 1956 entitled *Israel and Her Neighbors*. While the fleeing Arabs were consigned to living in squalor in UN refugee camps, and remain there, the Jewish state formulated policy based on decency.

In 2020 Israeli per capita production of goods and services was \$40,000. GDP projected for 2022 is \$420 billion US. Palestinian per capita GDP for 2020 was \$2,000

and projected GDP for 2022 is 17 billion US. Israel's key economic sectors are high tech, industrial manufacturing, aviation communication, telecommunication, cyber security, diamond polishing, and tourism. The Palestinian economy depends upon agriculture, some industry and foreign aid.

Within the health care sector, Israeli hospitals and private companies are leaders in research into cancer, heart disease, diabetes, bone implants, screening newborns for autism, reversal of cognitive decline, and early diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. The list goes on.

Research depends on billions of dollars of government funding, private capital, and donations to charitable institutions by Jewish philanthropists around the world. The roots of charitable giving lie in *Torah* [the five books of Moses]. Israel's success as a modern nation is no accident. It is based on building institutions and practices that help people. In the bio-medical field advances are shared with the world. Building a successful state has been hard work. It is deliberate, and organic.

While Israel has moved from success to success, the Palestinians have stagnated. Sadly religion, and culture are a society's critical forces. They either drive progress or stunt it. The Palestinians claim that 1948 was a 'nakba', a catastrophe. They seek the return to Israel of some five million refugees, three generations including those who actually fled. The actual numbers are open to debate. What is largely unknown is that after 1948 some 700,000 Jews emigrated from the Middle East and North Africa. Each of these countries was a dictatorship. Those who owned land or businesses were never compensated for their losses.

Perhaps the main reason the general public is largely unaware of what some call a Jewish 'nakba' is that Israelis don't obsess over it. According to a 2008 report authored by Sidney Zabudoff, a leading Israeli restitution researcher with the *Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs*, Jewish property and business losses due to Arab confiscation were approximately \$7 billion US dollars at the time of statehood.

If meaningful negotiations ever take place between Israelis and Palestinians both sides will have to speak to one another about *shared loss*. Loss is not the preserve of Palestinians. Jews who survived the Holocaust and emigrants from the Middle East and North Africa all suffered. One of the principal obstacles to this kind of conversation lies in 1400 years of religious indoctrination. It is bad enough that the Quran repeatedly curses the Jews as non-believers. Worse still is the Quranic statement that Allah turned the Jews into apes and swine. Whether these descriptions were intended literally or metaphorically is unimportant. No productive negotiation is possible when one side spends 1400 years denying the other's humanity.

For all of the wasted time on the 1993 Oslo Agreement, and the 2000 Camp David talks, neither the Palestinian authority nor Hamas have ever compromised on their charter mission which is to free Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Managing the ground issues of borders, settlements, security, policing, a connecting link between West Bank and Gaza, a capital in East Jerusalem and return of the refugees involves varying levels of difficulty. Repetition of the impossible doesn't make it possible. The return of three generations of 5,000,000 so called refugees to Israel would be a national declaration of suicide.

There are three possible negotiating strategies for this unaltered position. One is that repetition will wear the Israelis down. So far this hasn't worked. The second possibility is that Albert Einstein's definition of insanity applies. Repeat the same failed behavior in the hope that next time the result will be different. The third possibility is that the Palestinians have no desire for peace.

Israel like every other democracy is imperfect. It has 30 political parties competing for the votes of some 9.5 million citizens. While she trips over too much democracy, the Palestinians have none. Truly a case of too much and too little. No elections have been held in West Bank and Gaza since 2006. The world demands that Israel negotiate with these groups. Her conundrum is how to negotiate with people who

deny her very right to exist and whose mission is cleansing Jews from Israel. It should come as no surprise that anti-Israel, anti-Jewish rhetoric and attacks quote Adolf Hitler approvingly, urging that his work be finished.

The challenge of being a Jewish state in the Middle East is cultural. Culture looms over every facet of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Culture defines who we are, how we reason, our values, and our actions.

Palestinians hold on to their 'nakba' as a badge of identification. As citizens of a post-Holocaust nation, Israelis know their history. However, they do not allow history to incapacitate them. Israel today ranks 26th in the world according to the *2021 Index of Economic Freedom*. Eighty percent of the start-ups listed on New York's Nasdaq are Israeli companies.

Israel's success as an economic super-achiever is explained by her drive to succeed, her powerful work ethic, high level of literacy, and a first class education system. But beyond that is a refusal to see herself as a victim. Anyone who visits Israel will immediately notice the number of German made cars on her roads, Mercedes, Audis, and BMW's.

Though some may be shocked at this given the Holocaust, the answer is both simple and profound. Israelis understand that living in the past is a prescription for permanent victimization. Identifying as a victim is a virtual straight jacket. It makes progress impossible. Israel trades more with modern Germany than with any of the other 27 EU countries. Israelis have moved on. Simply put, the Third Reich was then. And this is now. The choice lies in Palestinian hands to cease identifying as victims. Getting there will require a sea change in culture, and in politics. Success is open to Palestinians only if they embrace it.

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