

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Israel and Its Security

The security of the nation-state of Israel has been one of the centerpieces of US foreign policy since the administration of Harry Truman. Perhaps at no time since the 1967 war has the security of Israel been such a viable matter of concern. Unfortunately, it is now a part of the political culture of the 2012 presidential election. In addition to the obvious threat of Iran, whose nuclear capability grows each week, and the growing instability of Syria, which is on the verge of civil war, there are other real threats to Israel's security. For that reason, it is imperative to summarize the current volatility of the Middle East and the genuine threat this all poses to Israel's security.

- First is the matter of Palestinian Statehood. This fall the Palestinian Authority will again go to the UN, but this time to the General Assembly seeking recognition as a state. This would occur without any negotiations with Israel and without any peace or treaty with Israel. As the famous attorney, Alan M. Dershowitz, argues, "If the UN now recognizes Palestine as a state without requiring its leaders to negotiate a compromise peace with Israel, it would send a clear message to other groups seeking recognition and statehood: Terrorism will earn you the sympathy of the world and get you your way." Is it appropriate to call it "Palestinian terrorism"? Incontrovertibly yes! Such terrorism is deeply rooted in Palestinian history. As Jews were beginning to return to their homeland, the grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al Hussein, ordered his followers to murder hundreds of elderly Jews in Hebron and other cities and towns where Jews lived—some living in Jewish settlements dating back several millennia. Obviously sympathetic with Hitler and the Nazis during World War II, Hussein personally prevented nearly 1,000 Hungarian-Jewish children from being sent to neutral countries, insisting instead that they be sent to Auschwitz. When the Palestinians were offered their own state in 1948 as a part of the UN partition of Palestine, they chose a devastating war in which 1% of the Jewish population of Israel was killed. Dershowitz reports on a remarkable incident in 1968: "In 1968, a Jordanian-born Palestinian, Sirhan Sirhan, educated to hate anything associated with Jews or Israel, assassinated New York Senator and presidential candidate Robert Kennedy. Five years later, [PLO] head Yasser Arafat arranged to have three American diplomats kidnapped and offered in exchange for Kennedy's assassin. When the US refused to release Sirhan, Arafat personally ordered the torture and murder of the Americans." In 1972, Arafat ordered the terrorist attack on the Olympics in which several Israeli athletes and coaches were murdered. During the 1970s and into the 1980s, there were airplane hijackings, synagogue bombings and other terrorist attacks against Jewish and western institutions and individuals—all in the name of Palestinian terrorism. But the UN has basically refused to condemn this pervasive history of violence; instead, it has done the opposite—reward it! This is quite astonishing because the Palestinians have been offered statehood on numerous occasions and have each time refused—1938, 1948, 2001 and 2007. The reason they have refused is because it would

require the recognition of Israel as a Jewish homeland. There has been a history of violence and terror—and the UN is about to reward this in the General Assembly!

- Second, Israel has had a peace treaty with Egypt for over thirty years. That secure southern border has been the lynchpin of Israel's foreign policy, for it always had the guarantee of a secure southern border. No longer! Over the last 18 months since Mubarak was toppled from power, armed jihadist groups have invaded the Sinai. In June, these groups launched an attack via Sinai that left one Israeli dead. In July these jihadist groups released a video and leaflets promising to turn Sinai into an Islamic emirate and demanded that Egyptian forces impose sharia law or quit. Consequently, Israel's government has warned its citizens to stay away from Sinai's beach resorts because of the insecurity. In early August, these jihadist groups killed 16 Egyptian soldiers at a Sinai checkpoint. Two of the jihadists then hijacked two armored personnel carriers and headed for the Israeli border. One caught fire before it crossed the border, but the other one got about one mile inside Israel before it was destroyed. In short, the Sinai has become a lawless breeding ground for Islamic jihadists bent on Israel's destruction. The new government of Muhammad Morsi is committed to stabilizing the Sinai, but at this point it is difficult to understand how serious he is about this and how much money and how many military personnel he will commit to this effort. At this point, Hamas, which now rules Gaza, is not necessarily supportive of the radical jihadists in the Sinai, but it is hardly willing to support Israel's efforts to suppress the radical Muslims in Sinai. In short, the southern border of Israel with Egypt is no longer stable and it once again poses a serious threat to Israel.
- Finally, during a recent visit to Israel, presidential candidate Mitt Romney suggested that cultural differences go a long way in explaining why the Israelis have succeeded and the Palestinians have not. Although he was severely criticized for this set of comments, it is historically true. As Boston University historian, Richard Landes, has argued, "From the late 19th century, Arab populations grew and prospered where Jews settled (Tel Aviv, Hebron, Jerusalem) and remained stagnant and poor where they did not (Gaza, Nablus, Nazareth)." The amazing success of Israel has been an unbearable blow to Palestinian pride. They have responded in a defensive and (as the first part of this Perspective has shown) a ruthlessly violent manner.

Indeed, Marc A. Thiessen, in a recent *Washington Post* article, argues that there remain three characteristics of the Palestinian culture that explain Palestinian failure: (1) There is a culture of terrorism. According to a recent Pew study, 68% of Palestinian Muslims support suicide bombing, while only 5% of Pakistanis voice such support. "Think about that: The Palestinian territories are so radicalized, they make Pakistan seem like an oasis of peace and moderation in the Muslim world." Perhaps that is why five years ago Palestinians voted into power a terrorist network—Hamas—to rule them in Gaza. Because of the suicide bombing threat to Israel over the last decades, Israel has increased its security, even building protective walls around its major population centers. "The resulting chokehold on the Palestinian economy is the fault, not of Israel, but of a Palestinian culture that prioritizes terror over prosperity and peace." (2) A culture of corruption. Study after study has demonstrated the depths of corruption at all levels of the Palestinian Authority. Indeed, a recent study showed that 82.5% of Palestinians believe that their government is corrupt. That is why so many

investors and governments are unwilling to pour good money into a society where corruption is so rampant. (3) A culture of repression. It is clear that the Palestinian people do not really enjoy the freedom of expression. There is very little freedom of religion (e.g., the astounding flight of Christians from the West Bank, especially Bethlehem). Open criticism of the government is not tolerated and the judicial system is hardly an impartial arbitrator of justice. Mitt Romney was actually then quite accurate in his summary of the cultural difference between Israel and the Palestinians.

I travel to the Middle East at least once each year. I have learned firsthand that Israel is willing to share its technology, its water and its strategies to develop the desert with its neighbors, including the Palestinians. But it has one requirement: Each group and each nation must recognize Israel as the homeland for the Jewish people. Its neighbors, including the Palestinians, are unwilling to grant this basic request. Ignoring the obvious is one of the greatest impediments to peace and remains a systemic characteristic of Palestinian culture. Until and unless this changes, the culture of terrorism, of corruption and of repression will continue—and it is the Palestinian people who will continue to suffer.

See Thiessen's article in the *Washington Post* (1 August 2012); Richard Landes in the *Wall Street Journal* (6 August 2012); *The Economist* (11 August 2012), pp. 39-40; and Dershowitz's essay in the *Wall Street Journal* (10 August 2012).