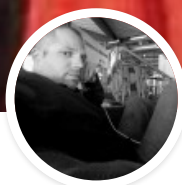History

Israel and its Arab Neighbors – Analysis of a Shared Conflict

by AJ Powell0 Comments16 min read

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There has been a lot of coverage on the ages old conflict between Israel and its neighbors. This comes as no surprise given the instability of the area, the political connections to the area, and the areas war-torn history of occupation. The conflict is an ages old one driven by religion on one side, the demand for peace on the other, and both sides maintaining a stake in the areas future. What is the Middle East problem? Is it really as complicated as so many make it out to be? Or is explaining the conflict simple, leaving only the matter of solving it a complicated affair? That is the question we are attempting to answer here, and to do so, we must look at its history. Evidence shows that the conflict is simple to explain, yet complicated to solve, and the proof lay in both sides of the historical coin.

To start, what is the debate all about? How do we define it, and what should we call it? Well, to sum it up: One side – very simply put – wants the other side dead. It really is as easy as that to explain. Israel wants to be recognized as a sovereign Jewish state, and live in peace with its neighbors. However, all of its Arab neighbors want it destroyed and wiped off the face of the earth. By why? There are two sides to every coin. So in order to understand current events, we should start by understanding – at least – the history behind the current problem.

It boils down to the claim of land rights through religious beliefs. Jews settled the land back during the days of Abraham, but due to famine, the Jewish people left and – long story short – became slaves in Egypt for generations. Eventually, the Jews escaped Egypt and resettled the land by establishing the 1st and 2nd Kingdoms of Israel. This lasted for about 2,000 years. Around the time of Christ, the Roman Empire, and many other empires since, have occupied the land. Around 630 A.D. (or so), Arabs finally occupied the area, the Ottoman Empire established control by the early 1500's, and Muslims occupied the land right up until the 20th century. Finally, the city of Jerusalem has been claimed by Jews (through their claim by Abraham), Christians (through their claim as the Holy Land and Christ), and Muslims (through their claim God gave the land to Ismail, one of the sons of Abraham) alike, as their people's homeland. So we see the area claimed as the rightful home of three sides for religious reasons.

Next we have Zionism to consider, which sprang up in 1897 in Vienna. Although the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries saw movements that demanded Jews return to Palestine come and go, Zionism – which took root early in the 20th century – became the private and political motivation to see mass movement occur. Zionists believed that the Jews had sole claim to the land of Palestine, and belonged in the Holy Land. The movement saw a mass influx of Jewish settlers (tens of thousands) pouring into the land, which by this time had been occupied by Arabs for hundreds of years. In short, "Zionism strives to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.". This means that the settlers not only wanted to move to the area, they claimed it as their birthright, and sought to create another Jewish kingdom (state).

During WWI, the Ottoman Empire, the Muslims who controlled the land of Palestine at the time, sided with the Central Powers. In order to defeat the Central Powers, the British gathered Arab allies in the region to rise up against the Ottomans. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British occupied Palestine through to the end of WWII. During that time, the British adopted the Balfour Declaration in 1917, a Zionist position siding with the Rothschild's, which fully supported the creation of a new Jewish sovereign state. This caused even more Jewish settlers to immigrate to Palestine, most at the time landing in Tel-Aviv. The problem here was that now Muslims who lived in the area saw the increasing Jewish population as a threat to their own homes. Up to this point in history, the land had never been recognized by any world authority as a sovereign state, but the Arabs saw it as such, and that it belonged only to them. This created conflicts between the two sides, and Arabs immediately began using terrorist actions during the period between WWI and WWII (though not defined as "terrorist" yet at this time).

One example is the Black Hand terrorist organization that was created in 1930 immediately following the 1929 Hebron Massacre – A slaughter of Jews living in Palestine by Arabs. Their only goal was to force outsiders (Jewish settlers) to leave the region through the use of violence. They saw the Jews as invaders in the land of Palestine, and demanded them to leave. To persuade Jews to leave, early terrorist organizations resorted to both public and private methods of violence against Jews. Despite this, however, the Jews did not leave the area, and soon WWII began. The mass murder of 6 million Jews during WWII gave Zionists and the remaining Jewish populations throughout the world a better argument on the world stage for a sovereign Jewish state, as previously, Jews had no homeland to return to.

In 1947, the United Nations voted on Resolution 181 to divide the land of Palestine into both a Jewish and Arab state. While dividing the land was widely accepted by the Jewish nation, no Arab nation accepted the decision. In May of 1948, after British rule ended, the very next day, the Arab-Israeli War began. Every single Arab nation that bordered Israel immediately mobilized their armies and attacked Israel with full intent to destroy it. The Arab nations argument was that of self-determination (a part of the United Nations Charter), that the people of the area should decide the future of the land and any official state within in, not Jews (as they were outsiders and have not occupied the land for 2,000 years after the fall of the 2nd Kingdom of Israel to Rome).

Conflict in the Middle East

To combat the mass number of hostilities against the new state of Israel, from 1948 through 1953, Israel fought wars against its Arab neighbors and gained land each time. This increased instability within the region as refugees of Jews within Arab nations fled to Israel, and many Arab people left Israel to move to an Arab state. The new problem now was that, once a Jew left an Arab land, they were not allowed back in. The same was also the case for Arabs that left Israel. Caught in the middle, were Palestinians, Arabs who stayed to fight and destroy Israel, but could now no longer return to their homes.

In 1956, Egypt made matters worse for the region by nationalizing the Suez Canal purposely to remove England (an Israeli ally) from Egypt, and cut the world off from its use. The Suez Canal was an important

infrastructure passageway for much of the worlds open ocean shipping, which means that everyone was directly affected by Egypt's motives. The Suez Canal Crisis ended with a British, French and Israeli military alliance that took back the canal, as well as the entirety of the Sinai Peninsula. This led to the formation of the terrorist organization Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, whose sole mission was to destroy Israel and turn control of the land over to Palestinians only. The 1967 6-Day War came next when Gabal Abdel Nasser – the dictator of Egypt – conspired with Jordan, and gathered the surrounding Arab nations in another attempt to attack and destroy Israel through military action. Israel, however, defended itself with preemptive strikes against Egypt and Syria. During this time, Israel reached out to Jordan in an attempt to make peace, but Jordan attacked regardless. To counter this threat, Israel took over Sinai and the West Bank – which at the time was Jordanian land.

After the war in 1967 ended, Arab nations met in Khartoum, Sudan, and announced to the world their famous three "No's". No Recognition, No Peace, and No Negotiations with Israel or anyone who will ever support Israel. In 1972, Arab terrorists conspired to kill Jewish athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympics, and in 1973, Arab nations again attacked Israel in what became known as the Yom Kippur War. But the attack failed as Israel was able to defend itself with aid from the United States. Despite aggression against it, to promote peace and stability in the area, Israel gave Sinai back to Egypt after a peace agreement was signed between the two nations in 1978. To end fighting between Israel and Palestinians and prompt peace, Israel offered the same thing to Palestinians in 2000, when it agreed to give Palestinians nearly all of the West Bank and all of Gaza as a completely sovereign state. Instead, Palestinians rejected the offer and Arab nations around Israel continued killing Jews with terrorist actions.

Today, there are 22 Arab nations in the world, and many other nations whose sovereignty have been threatened in the last few decades alone by religious extremist terrorist violence and attempted overthrows within their boarders. On the other hand, there is 1 Jewish nation in the world, which has given up land several times since its founding, and defended itself on a continuous basis, for the sake of peace, stability, and the right to exist. This is not to say that the state of Israel has fought alone this whole time. The United States (for example) – Israel's largest contributor and supporter – gives $16 million USD a day to the Jewish state in financial assistance. Additionally, it is the number one supplier of military aid and assistance to Israel.
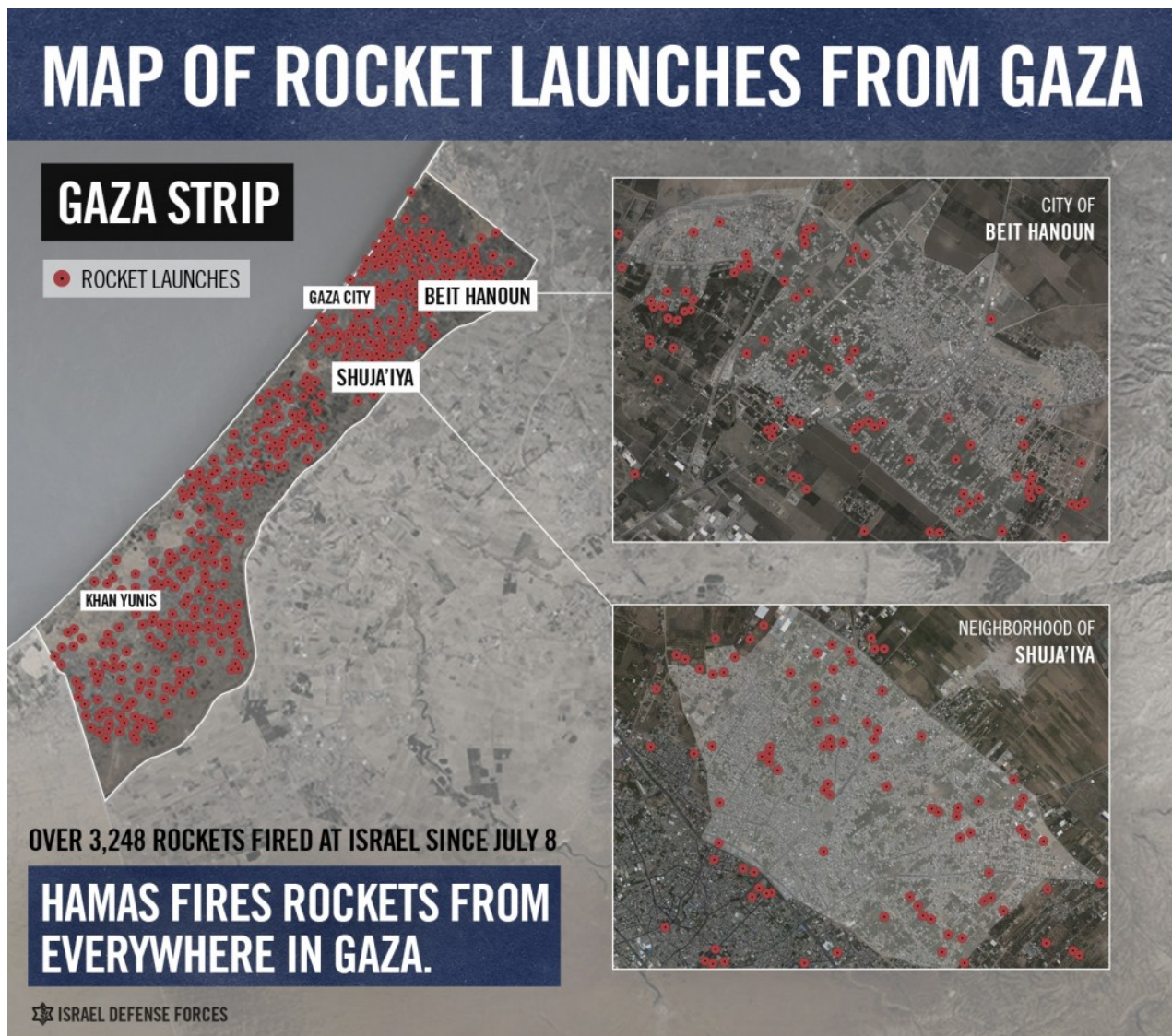
This, of course, is driven by political motives as the United States both recognizes Israel's sovereign democratic government, and right to exist, but also uses it as a foothold against Islamic terrorism and aggression from Arab states. In 1979, president Jim Carter used the Camp David Accord to get Egypt to recognize Israel and open back up the Suez Canal to international shipping, after Israel gave back Sinai. In 1993, president Bill Clinton got Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to come together in Oslo, Norway, to strike a deal whereby Israel would give back the lands of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to Palestinians in order to form a new sovereign nation-state of Palestine. Unfortunately, the deal did not work out. Israeli people in the areas of the West Bank and Gaza continued to build and homestead there, while Palestinians increased terrorist activity and open support for terrorist actions against Israel. After Palestinians elected a terrorist organization – Hamas – into power, conflicts increased as Hamas terrorists continue to attack Israel, Israel defends itself against attacks, and peace talks have deteriorated. Bringing us to the current conflict today.

Since its founding, the state of Israel has always fully recognized the rights of Arab's and Palestinian's to have their own nations and to coexist with each other peacefully, but this recognition is one-sided. Going back to the 1947 United Nations decision, Arabs states and terrorist religious extremists see Israel's existence as an imperialist occupation of what they claim is their land, and use religious extremism as a claim to justify terrorist actions. Hamas – a terrorist organization and official member of the Muslim Brotherhood (another terrorist organization) – is just such an example, whose very charter even boldly proclaims the complete obliteration or dissolution of Israel. Another example would be Hezbollah, also a violent extremist terrorist organization who exists for the sole purpose of destroying Israel.

The question now is, where do we go from here? Based on the history of events, is the matter simple to explain as stated prior? The answer is empirically, yes. One side – very simply put – wants the other side dead. Israel wants to be recognized as a sovereign Jewish state, and live in peace with its neighbors. However, all of its Arab neighbors want it destroyed and wiped off the face of the earth. A summary of the Middle East problem cannot get any simpler than that. Yet then, is the current situation easy to solve? As previously stated, while it may be simple to explain, solving the problem is a complicated affair.

It would be a broad over-generalization to say that all Palestinians want all Israelis dead, or that all Muslims want to destroy the state of Israel, because that simply is not so. In reality, 2014 estimates place over 10 million people in the area – Israel with a population of over 8 million, Gaza with over 1.7 million, and the West Bank with a population over 1.8 million – and they are not ethnically divided. Muslims and Palestinians live in Israel, and Jews also live in the West Bank and Gaza. Most are families just trying to live their lives in peace. However, it is a fact that Arab terrorists want to destroy Israel and attack it regularly while hiding behind innocent civilians, and it is also a fact that these terrorists have the support of a large number of the Muslim population throughout the region who provide shelter and supplies to the terrorist efforts while refusing to cast them out. Israel has a right to defend itself, a right to destroy terrorist threats to peace and humanity, and the truly unfortunate part is, that it is the people who get caught in the middle of the violence. They have no where else to run, no where they can hide, and this is the reason why the problem is so complicated to solve.

Of course the world could step up and demand an end to terrorist violence of all kinds – regardless of their religious affiliations – and they have, but how do you stop them without hurting civilians in the process? Of course Israel has a right to self-defense, and destroying all terrorist networks, assets, and targets completely is an internationally shared responsibility, but how do you accomplish this without hurting civilians in the process? Yes, Israel can stop striking terrorist targets and stick solely to Iron-Dome and ground self-defenses, but this will do nothing to stop the growth of terrorist organizations and further violence. Israel has offered Arabs land in exchange for peace several times, but when the offer is always turned down in favor of continued attacks on Israel for the sole purpose of its destruction and death to its people, what other option does Israel – and indeed, the rest of the world – have to turn to?

The only hope for peace is for Arab nations to lay down their arms. If Israel laid down its weapons right now, Arabs and terrorist extremists would destroy the whole nation while mass murdering the entire Jewish population practically over night. However, if Arabs laid down their weapons right now, and refused to support and/or shelter terrorists from this day on, an end to violence could finally become a reality, a sovereign Palestinian state could emerge, and there would be peace. Yet this may never happen, because for the regions Arabs, the violence is religious, and the famous three "NO's" dictate the complete destruction of Israel and its allies. How then do we provide for the protections of all people, how then do we reach an agreement for the clear establishment of a sovereign nation of Palestine while securing Israel at the same time, and how then does the world destroy terrorism of all kinds for the sake of humanity, without further violence?

That leaves us right back where we started from… Is the conflict simple to explain? Yes, but explanations to such an easily understood history of the affair only complicate the possibilities of solving it today. Just how do you solve a problem where winning equals loss?

That is the simple complication of the modern Middle East problem.

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AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.