



Photo Credit: ר"ד ישיבא ר"ד

The Arab-Israel Conflict is Over! Has Anyone Noticed?

By Paul Scham

Pardon me, but has anyone realized that the conflict between Israel and the Arab states, which defined Israel's life since its establishment in 1948, is over? That there is no serious threat to Israel from any or all Arab states, nor has any (important) Arab leader attacked Israel's legitimacy for years? Not only did four new Arab states join Egypt and Jordan in establishing full relations with Israel in the last year and a half, but there's a likelihood that Saudi Arabia will do so when King Salman (currently 85 and ailing) shuffles off this mortal coil and his son, the notorious MBS (Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman), takes over. Not only are we coming up to the 50th anniversary of the last full-scale state-to-state Arab Israel war (which began on Yom Kippur of 1973), but Arab states are now genuinely looking to Israel for protection, rather than calling for its destruction. Who would have thought...?

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Of course, no one claims Israel is conflict-free. There is the matter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which Israel only officially recognized in 1993, which drags on with no end in sight, and also of Iran and its allies, Syria and Hezbollah. And it's true that if you took a plebiscite in the Arab world, Israel would not prove to be popular. But nothing in the Arab world is decided by popular vote, anyway; it's the governments that count, and most of them are either actively and openly dealing with Israel, or else have no need to do so but would probably join the party if sufficiently induced.

For 45 years, until it recognized the PLO in 1993, Israel maintained that the only reason for the conflict was the Arab states' refusal to recognize the reality of Israel's existence. Two generations of Israelis grew up with that mantra, and many still seem to believe it. The assumption of enmity still seems to inform much Israeli discourse. Micah Goodman's popular book *Catch-67*, published in English in 2018 (two years before the Abraham Accords were unveiled), takes the "fact" of absolute and perpetual Arab (and Islamic) enmity for granted, seemingly with no need to devote even a paragraph to proving the proposition.

In 1923, Vladimir Jabotinsky, the sainted father of the Israeli right wing (at least nominally, though he might well disavow his progeny if he came back to life nowadays), in his most famous essay, posited the need for an "[Iron Wall](#)" between the future Jewish State and the "Palestine Arabs." He saw no possibility of persuading Arabs to accept Jewish hegemony but, when they eventually recognized the Jewish state was in the Middle East to stay, would accept that reality. Moreover, he wrote "And when that happens, I am convinced that we Jews will be found ready to give them satisfactory guarantees, so that both peoples can live together in peace, like good neighbours."

Jabotinsky was gifted with remarkable prescience (he was one of the few Jewish leaders to predict the Holocaust in the 1930s), and he was absolutely right both about the wall and about the Arabs. Israel did build an effective military wall (long before the current physical security barrier was conceived) and gradually the Arab states

recognized that not only was Israel not going away, but, rather, it had become a status quo power like them, and eventually many of them wanted, even needed, it to stick around and share in its military, scientific, and technological prowess. The iron wall has served its purpose, but Jabotinsky never dreamed that the inhabitants of the Jewish state in the 21st century would have trouble recognizing that things had fundamentally changed, and that they would refuse to dismantle the "wall," with respect, at least, to the "Palestine Arabs."

Admittedly, much of this realization is new. Until the Abraham Accords were actually signed in August 2020 (the only act I am aware of for which we can and should thank Donald Trump), most informed observers knew that the Gulf Arab states and others were happy to engage in *sub rosa* trade and intelligence ties with Israel, but were sure that few, if any, Arab states would join Egypt and Jordan to openly normalize with Israel without a fair and consensual settlement of the concurrent and perpetually bloody Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Paradoxically, the only one who championed a peace without Palestine was Bibi Netanyahu, though given his worldview that Israel would always have to live by the sword, he might not have really quite believed it himself. The left, including me, dismissed that claim as a chimera. We were quite sure the Arab states would never openly and formally abandon the Palestinians. We were wrong about that. Bibi was right.

Of course, we on the left are right (i.e., correct) that "The Conflict" writ large won't be over until there is a fair and consensual settlement with the Palestinians (which I, personally, think will have to involve at least some aspects of Confederation, but I'll bypass that for the moment). And by no means am I denigrating the seriousness of the Iran-Israel conflict, though no one seems to agree what that war is about (most wars are really about something). So I'm not asserting that Israel can turn its drones into the modern equivalent of pruning hooks. But who can? If Israel is indeed to be a nation "like all the others," it needs enemies and an arsenal, which almost all nations have, wherever they are located. The claim that Israel is uniquely under threat of extinction expired years

The Arab-Israeli Conflict is Over! Has Anyone Noticed?

ago; attempts to define BDS and anti-normalization as constituting such threats are laughable.

Obviously, recognition that the Israeli-Arab conflict is over doesn't imply the lion lying down with the lamb or anything of the sort, but doesn't it deserve to be acknowledged? However, it probably can't be. The left (rightly) thinks nothing is settled until the core Palestinian basis of the conflict is dealt with, which seems further off than ever, while the right is unlikely to give up its deep-seated belief that "they" (i.e., everyone) will always hate the Jews and, like Micah Goodman, claim that Israel must therefore hang on to the West Bank, perhaps forever. Thus, the present stalemate.

The right is angry to find that that peace with the Arab states isn't really peace, while the left can't accept that peace with the Arab states has come (or is coming) through abandonment of the Palestinians.

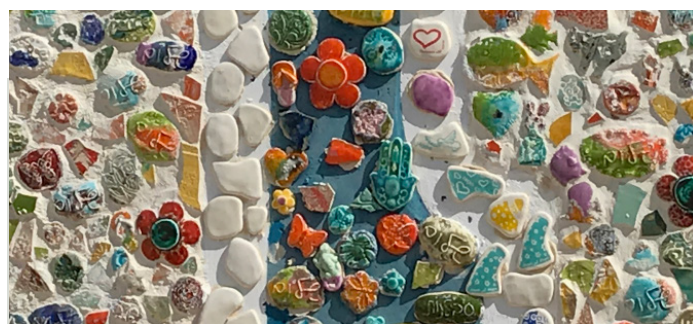
So, even if the Arab-Israel conflict is over—and I maintain that it is—I don't expect any cheers or celebrations. Rather, we see a long, hard road ahead, no matter what we call it. ■

Sincerely,



Paul Scham
President, Partners for Progressive Israel

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel and the Director of the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.



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Environmental Diplomacy Strengthens Israel-Jordan Ties & Promises Region-Wide Climate Security

INSIGHTS

By Gil Kulick



Amid the gloom in so many quarters over the stalemate that bedevils the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is now underway an ambitious and visionary plan that has the potential to reinforce the still-fragile peace among Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, bring environmental rehabilitation and economic development to the neglected Jordan Valley, and create a healthy and sustainable regional interdependence.

The author and driving force behind this plan is [EcoPeace-Middle East](#), a tripartite NGO with offices in Tel Aviv, Amman, and Ramallah, that has pioneered environmental peacemaking in the Levant for almost three decades. The plan, dubbed the “[Green Blue Deal for the Middle East](#)” was devised and elaborated during the last year and is now being rolled out as a realistic blueprint for regional cooperation in dealing with the global climate crisis and its implications for regional

security in the Middle East.

A first pillar of the plan—the Water/Energy Exchange—is designed to take advantage of a fortuitous distribution of natural resources among the three partners: Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. With its large and expanding array of desalination plants on the Mediterranean, Israel now desalinates 70 percent of its drinking water, soon to increase to 90%, with a surplus sufficient to both restore the catastrophically degraded Jordan River and sell water to parched Jordan to meet its urgent domestic needs. The Palestinian Authority is also planning to build large desalination plants in Gaza that could be incorporated into a regional desalination program.

What Israel and Palestine are deficient in is the huge amount of land needed to build the solar and wind energy infrastructure to power this operation sustainably at scale and at reasonable prices. Fortunately, Jordan, with

its vast desert expanses and abundant sunshine, has the potential capacity to produce enough renewable energy to sell to both Israel and Palestine to sustainably power not only the desalination operations, but to meet Paris climate commitments at the cheapest prices as well.

The result would ultimately be a regional desalinated-water/solar-energy community among Israel, Jordan, and Palestine that would help the region achieve its carbon-reduction commitment and lead to healthy and sustainable regional interdependencies. This project would be financed by private investors, as it is expected to generate a healthy profit.

The three other pillars of the Green Blue Deal: advancing Palestinian water rights, Jordan River rehabilitation, and investment in region wide climate education are no pie-in-the-sky ideas either. All are based on extensive research and the on-the-ground experience of EcoPeace programs. Once fully implemented, GBD would be a game-changer for the entire region.

The first pillar of the Green Blue Deal got a kick-start on November 22 with the ceremonial signing in Dubai by high-ranking officials of Israel, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates of a Declaration of Intent to conclude a formal agreement once a number of technical issues are resolved. The UAE is expected to provide a major share of the project's financing.

The Declaration of Intent identifies that the major investment in Jordan will be a solar photovoltaic plant with a first stage capacity of 600 MW plus 300-500 MW in storage, to export green power to Israel, which in turn will sell Jordan up to 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water.

Israel's Energy Minister Karine Elharrar said the agreement was the "most significant" since the former enemies signed a peace treaty in 1994. "The benefit of this agreement is not only in the form of green electricity or desalinated water, but also the strengthening of relations with the neighbor that has the longest border with Israel."

Elharrar met with Jordan Water and Irrigation Minister Mohammed Al-Najjar last month for the signing of a separate agreement doubling the amount of water

Israel supplies to perennially thirsty Jordan.

An indication of the significant United States interest in the project was the presence at the signing of the U.S. Special Envoy for climate change diplomacy, John Kerry, whose mediation behind the scenes was crucial to the success of the negotiations. The Biden administration has also pledged to build on those agreements, while remaining adamant that they are no substitute for Israeli-Palestinian peace.



*Shams Ma'an solar plant, by First Solar, is an important component in Jordan's strategic diversification of its generation portfolio.
Credit: Majdi Abu Lebbeh*

Partners for Progressive Israel enthusiastically endorses the Green Blue Deal and calls on U.S. policymakers to incorporate environmental diplomacy in their ongoing efforts to strengthen practical co-operation between Israel and its neighbors. Partners in particular sees the need for the Biden administration to prioritize advancing Palestinian water rights, a key pillar of the Green Blue Deal. We look forward to working with EcoPeace Middle East in helping to create both a physical and a political environment that can help protect the region from the worst ravages of climate change, as well as lead towards a two-state solution to the long-lasting Israel-Palestine conflict. ■

Gil Kulick is a Middle East peace activist and avid environmentalist. He is a member of the PPI board.



(Original Signature of Member)

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To preserve conditions for, and improve the likelihood of, a two-state solution that secures Israel's future as a democratic state and a national home for the Jewish people, a viable, democratic Palestinian state, an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, and peaceful relations between the two states, and to direct the Department of State and other relevant agencies to take steps to accomplish these ends.

MK Yair Golan of Meretz, past deputy chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, has spoken out in favor of the Two-State Solution Act sponsored by Congressman Andy Levin.



Photo Credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit / CC BY-SA 3.0

“The Two-State Solution Act, which was introduced in the U.S. Congress, is a good law that seeks to repair the scorched earth left behind by Trump and Netanyahu.

The bill promotes a distinction between the sovereign State of Israel and the illegal outposts and settlements, and includes support for aid to Israel ...

Prime Minister Bennett: It's our responsibility to do all that we can not to bequeath the conflict to the next generations. Instead of letting the extremist right continue to threaten the country's future, the time has come to make bold decisions and advance laws like the Two-State Solution Act in Israel's Knesset as well.”

To read an article by MK Yair Golan, explaining the importance to Israel and Israeli democracy of the Two-State Solution Act, go to his [blog page](#) at the Times of Israel website.

** Partners for Progressive Israel has proudly endorsed the Two-State Solution Act. To learn why you should and how you can encourage your Congressional representative to add their name to the Act's growing list of cosponsors, click [here](#). ■*

Yesh Din: Working to Provide Legal Protections for Palestinians Under the Occupation

By Georgie Nustas and Chanah Dulin



May 17, 2021. Photo taken by a Yesh Din field researcher.

Yesh Din—Volunteers for Human Rights is an Israeli human rights organization that documents human rights violations committed against Palestinian residents of the West Bank living under military occupation. Yesh Din also facilitates their access to justice vis-a-vis the Israeli authorities, and promotes structural change by applying pressure on the Government of Israel to uphold its duties under International Humanitarian Law to protect the rights of the Palestinians as protected persons.

Yesh Din operates three primary projects:

- 1) Monitoring the enforcement of law against Israeli settlers who commit offenses against Palestinians
- 2) Demanding accountability of the Israeli security forces for the soldiers and police who commit offenses against Palestinians
- 3) Assisting Palestinian landowners regain access to and use of their private lands.

Offenses by Israeli Settlers

Incidents of violence perpetrated by Israeli civilians against Palestinians are a daily occurrence in the West Bank: Between 2018 and the end of June 2021, Yesh Din documented 540 such incidents of settler violence, in which Israeli civilians harmed Palestinians and damaged their property. In less than half of the incidents, however, did the Palestinian victims choose to file complaints with the Israel Police. In fact, in 43 percent of the documented cases, the Palestinian victims cited the following reasons for their decision not to register a formal complaint: Mistrust in the Israeli authorities and the investigative process and concerns about retaliation or the loss of the right to enter Israel for work. To date, out of the 540 incidents, only 12 indictments have been filed; in other words, only five percent of Palestinian complaints resulted in the Israel Police gathering sufficient evidence to hold

perpetrators accountable.

Yesh Din makes intensive efforts to [expose](#) the prevalence of settler violence against Palestinians, and its severe impact on them. To that end, Yesh Din has published a database of testimonies, called “[In First Person](#).” The database enables Palestinians to describe their experiences in their own voice, along with their struggle to achieve legal remedy from Israeli institutions.

Crimes by the Military and Forcible Home Invasions

In addition to the violent incidents perpetrated by settlers, Palestinians in the West Bank face another challenge—crimes committed against them by Israeli security forces (soldiers and police). Based on Yesh Din’s experience monitoring the military’s investigative authorities, we can conclude that the chances of a soldier who commits an offense against a Palestinian ever facing justice are [infinitesimal](#). The military goes to great lengths to [delay and obscure](#) its internal affairs probes and, in the vast majority of cases, the military police does not even open an investigation.



Oct. 16, 2021. Settlers set fire to lands in Burin. Photo taken by a Yesh Din field researcher.

Nonetheless, Yesh Din did record a significant success recently after 11 years of legal work involving a case from April 2010. The incident took place in the village of Bil’in in the West Bank, where, during a peaceful demonstration of Palestinians, Israelis and foreigners, a Palestinian protestor named Imad Rizka was shot in the head from close range with a tear gas canister; the soldier who fired the canister at him had done so in clear violation of open-fire regulations. The canister’s impact caused a skull fracture that required two surgical operations and left Imad with an irreversible

injury from which he still suffers.



Oct. 11, 2021. Consultation following a High Court hearing regarding the lands of the village of Burqa. For many years, Yesh Din has been legally representing and standing by the residents of Burqa in their struggle to return to their lands. Photo taken by Yesh Din.

With the assistance of Yesh Din, Rizka petitioned Israel’s High Court of Justice, demanding that the soldier be prosecuted and that disciplinary action be taken against his commanders for their overall command responsibility for the incident. Following the submission of new evidence by Yesh Din, the Military Advocate General (MAG) this year ordered the [reopening](#) of the investigation. Then, just this past November 29, the High Court of Justice issued an order, demanding that justification of the decision not to indict the offending soldier be submitted to the court within sixty days.

Forcible home invasions are one of the most harmful and invasive practices conducted by the Israeli military. Nearly every night, armed Israeli soldiers raid homes, wake Palestinian women, men, and children from their sleep, and carry out various actions inside their private residences. According to UN figures, these invasions occur more than 200 times each month. Without a court order or even any suspicion of illegal activity—as none is needed under the occupation’s military law—soldiers invade the intimate space of innocent families, wreaking terror in the early morning hours.

Since 2018, Yesh Din, together with Physicians for Human Rights Israel and Breaking the Silence, has conducted a project designed to expose and challenge the prevalence and devastating impact of these forcible home invasions. This included a petition filed with Israel’s High Court of Justice demanding that legal warrants be required in order to search the homes of Palestinians.

On June 15 of this year, as a result of the legal pressure exerted by Yesh Din, the Israeli military announced that it was putting an end to the practice of forcible home invasions for the purpose of ‘mapping’—military-speak for ‘intelligence gathering,’ which had previously been one of the grounds for home invasions that the military deemed justified. This announcement represents a major achievement in our years-long project researching and campaigning against the practice of forcible home invasions. But while it demonstrates that human rights organizations have the potential to impact military policy, it unfortunately does not shut down forcible home invasions completely, and these are still rampant in the West Bank.



*Arson attack of a vehicle near a house, Farata, 20.12.2019.
Photo taken by Farata Council.*

International Humanitarian Law stipulates that, as the occupying power in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israel is under legal obligation to protect and ensure the security and safety of the occupied civilian Palestinian population. Yet, Israeli security forces themselves regularly commit grave human rights violations against Palestinians, and a lack of effective investigations by the relevant military authorities has created a situation in which perpetrators are [rarely, if ever, held accountable](#). This leaves Palestinian civilians throughout the West Bank—protected persons under international law—exposed and vulnerable with no option for redress when facing such offenses.

Helping Palestinians Access Their Land

In our access to lands project, Yesh Din represents

private Palestinian landowners in their legal battles to return or maintain access to their lands. Since 2017, Yesh Din has witnessed a dramatic acceleration in State-led efforts to take over Palestinian land. This includes not only efforts to formally [annex territories](#) in the occupied West Bank, but also to “regularize” (legalize) construction in unauthorized outposts.

Starting in 2011, the government of Israel has undertaken a process of retroactive ‘regularization’ of outposts which had originally been declared illegal under Israeli law—gradually transforming them into settlements which are then regarded as ‘legal’. Since 2017, the Israeli government has intensified its efforts to create legal tools with which to effect this ‘regularization,’ passing the “Regularization Law” in 2017 and forming the [Zandberg Committee](#) in 2018 to help implement that law. In response, Yesh Din focused efforts on using legal advocacy to halt this process of creeping annexation. We petitioned the High Court of Justice against the “Regularization Law” ([HCJ 2055/17](#)) and ultimately were successful, when the Court revoked the law in June 2020.

In addition to the aforementioned work, Yesh Din hosts information sessions across the West Bank for Palestinian titleholders and landowners. These sessions, facilitated by experts several times each year and attended by hundreds of participants, serve as an entry point for understanding the legal services provided by Yesh Din. ■

To learn more about Yesh Din and their work, please visit their English [website](#), follow them on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#), or [contact them here](#).

Georgie Nustas is the International Relations Officer at Yesh Din.

Chanah Dulin is the Director of International Relations at Yesh Din.



By Mark Gold



Photo Credit: Gili Getz

The year 2021 has seen new escalations in Israeli administration efforts to advance a permanent occupation and unofficial annexation of the West Bank. These escalations are being carried out through a wave of eviction efforts, some through courts and others through permitted acts of violence.

In East Jerusalem neighborhoods, settler groups have been pressing eviction cases in Israeli courts. The annexation of East Jerusalem in the aftermath of the Six Day War made those neighborhoods subject to Israeli law. A 1970 Act permits Israeli landowners to reclaim who property lost in 1948 but Palestinians who lost property in Israel do not have a reciprocal right. In Sheikh Jarrah, Palestinian refugees from 1948 were settled on land acquired in the 19th century by a Jewish Trust. The Trust rights were acquired by US based company that supports Jewish settler eviction efforts and claims were filed in court. This year, the case reached the Israeli Supreme Court which did not

rule on the claims but proposed its own settlement. The Supreme Court's unusual action is a tacit admission of the improper asymmetry of the law and the social and international tensions that arise from this condition. But these cases are a small subset of a more general situation in East Jerusalem involving hundreds of properties and nearly a thousand residents. Recent disclosures regarding changes to land registration and title by Israeli authorities imply eviction efforts in East Jerusalem areas are likely to expand to far greater levels.

Palestinian displacement is not restricted to legal means. In the South Hebron Hills, a campaign of settler violence is being waged with tacit Israeli Army complicity which has not intervened in any way to protect Palestinian residents. People have been assaulted and property destroyed in an organized effort to expel Palestinians from the region. The right-wing segment of the current government, which maintains effective control, has downplayed the violence which

essentially supports it. But the recent administration statements, designed to cover up the pogroms, reveal the pressures growing on it due to wider reporting and both national and international revulsion.

These eviction efforts are not only an injustice to the Palestinian victims, they represent parts of a program to expand Israeli settlements in the West Bank and promote a permanent occupation there. They constitute a threat to the democratic Jewish future for Israel and its international legitimacy.

Unfortunately, Palestinian citizens of Israel have been caught in a web of evictions within the borders of the State. Building permits have often been withheld in Arab communities, thwarting needed housing development. The outcome of this practice is a cycle of unauthorized construction and ordered and executed home demolitions. This has been particularly true among unrecognized Bedouin communities in the Negev, some with roots from 1948 and before.



Israeli Jews and Palestinians marching to the police barricade in Sheikh Jarrah protesting the occupation and threat of home demolitions and evictions in the weekly Friday protest. Photo Credit: Gili Getz

To combat these actions, Partners for Progressive Israel initiated a [campaign](#) this autumn to promote greater public awareness of the situation. The programming included presentations and discussions with Meretz MK and human rights attorney [Gaby Lasky](#), a recorded interview with Jerusalem expert [Daniel Seidemann](#), first person accounts of South Hebron Hills violence from [Eid Suleman](#) and PPI Board member Gili Getz,

[a photo essay](#) prepared by Gili from his recent time in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, an article update from Kolot: Voices of Hope designee, [Ir Amim](#) about their efforts to expose and resist Jerusalem evictions, as well as disclosures regarding the US based pro-settler group, Nahalat Shimon, behind some of the eviction. In addition, the campaign covered the conditions in the Negev with a webinar interview with Aziz Al Toury, resident of Al-Araqib, just north of Beer Sheva, which has been bulldozed and rebuilt over 180 times.

Building public awareness about the legal and extra-legal efforts to expel Palestinians, promote discrimination, and advance an unofficial West Bank annexation is a critical step to stopping these processes.

To help Partners advance its Stop the Evictions campaign and to support the organization in its work, a generous donor gifted a matching grant up to \$15,000 for all contributions made during the month-long period of special programming. Partners reached out to supporters who responded wonderfully and allowed PPI to obtain the full benefit of the matching gift.

As Treasurer of the organization, I personally want to thank the matching grant donor and all who gave during this “Stop the Evictions” effort. ■

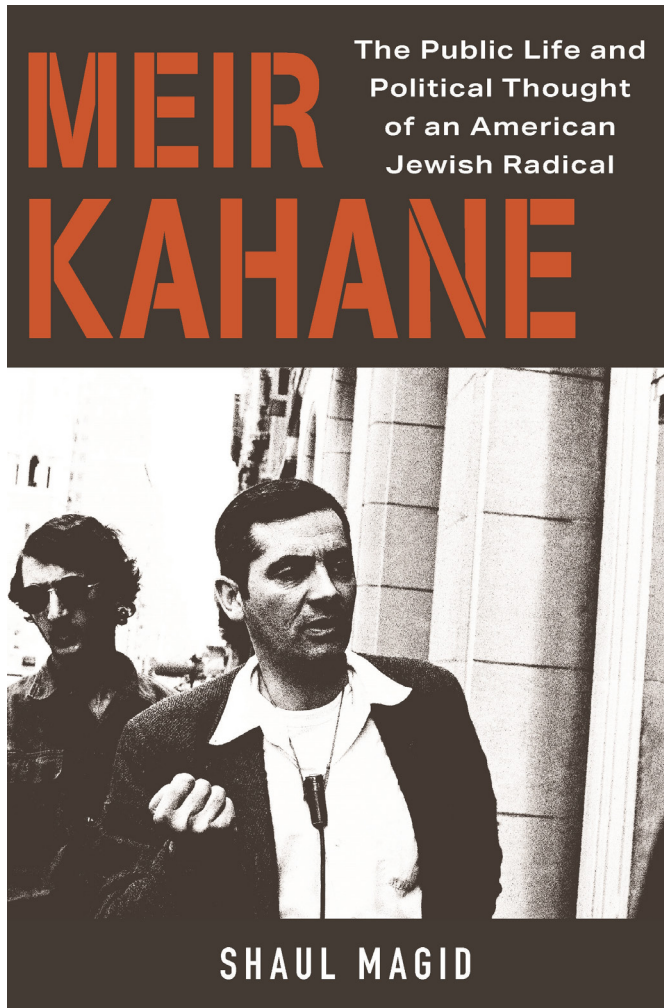
Mark Gold is a PHD economist and serves as Treasurer for Partners for Progressive Israel.



Meir Kahane: The Public Life and Political Thought of an American Jewish Radical

BOOK REVIEW

By Peter Eisenstadt



Like a madeleine dipped in a cup of arsenic, Meir Kahane brings back many memories of things past, especially my adolescent years in the 1960s and early 1970s spent in Rochdale Village in Queens, where Meir Kahane was for a time the rabbi of the Orthodox shul. At the time, Rochdale was the largest housing cooperative in the United States, with almost 6,000 families. Rochdale was a new community, which opened in late 1963. It had been constructed by the United Housing Foundation (UHF), a remarkable organization that under the direction of Abraham Kazan, a veteran of the anarchist wing of the Jewish labor movement, who, in collaboration with the definitely non-anarchist Robert Moses, from the 1950s through

the early 1970s, built over 35,000 units of cooperative housing in New York City, culminating in Co-Op City in the Pelham Bay marshes. Rochdale was located in South Jamaica, one of the largest Black communities in the city, and by the late 1960s it was probably about 75–80% white, of whom the vast majority were Jewish families, and the remainder African American. It was one of the few truly integrated neighborhoods in New York City. And for a while, Meir Kahane lived there.

When Kahane took up the bimah in the Orthodox shul, in the fall of 1968, he had, only a few months before, in May, founded the Jewish Defense League (JDL), the organization that would make Kahane famous, adored, and reviled, the self-proclaimed scourge of antisemites and self-hating Jews. (In Kahane's worldview, everyone, except for his small sliver of the remnant of the righteous, fit into one of those two categories). His reputation as being "to the right of George Wallace" preceded him to Rochdale, and it was during his stay there that Kahane began to earn his enduring notoriety. Within a few months, the orthodox shul, supposedly in an effort to keep his enemies at bay, was adorned with a crown of razor wire, looking more like an auto parts store in a tough neighborhood than a synagogue.

These memories are occasioned by reading Shaul Magid's important new book, *Meir Kahane: The Public Life and Political Thought of an American Jewish Radical*. Magid is absolutely correct that the Jewish left and the Jewish right, each for reasons of its own, have both conspired to minimize the importance of Kahane and of the long, lingering, and ugly shadow he cast on Jewish life on two continents. He was a prophet without much honor, but with many silent admirers. And Magid is absolutely correct that to understand Kahane, you have to see him as an American and New York Jew to his core. He speculates fruitfully on why, after his aliyah in 1971, he never quite fit into the Israeli political scene, perhaps because the country's leadership didn't need a loudmouth provocateur to convince most Israelis

that they were in a perpetual war against Palestinian nationalism. But in Kahane's wake, in the US, the "liberal Jewish establishment" became less liberal, as did, to some extent, the American Jewish community as a whole. The JDL's slogan, "never again," was a sign that American Jews would become comfortable in invoking the Holocaust at the drop of a hat against their domestic enemies, while, the Nazis notwithstanding, they would become more attuned to their potential enemies on the left than on the right, more concerned about Black antisemitism than the frothings of latter-day Aryans. No one can argue, of course, that Kahane was in any way single-handedly responsible for these trends, but there is little doubt he helped give much initial impetus to this general rightward shift.

That said, Magid's book was, for this reader, somewhat disappointing. It could have been more clearly and less repetitively organized. Magid is never an easy read, but his analyses of Jewish philosophy, as in his *American Post-Judaism*, are challenging, extraordinary, and very much worth reading. However, as a historian of New York City, I found him somewhat less sure-footed. Two examples: To say that by 1968, Albert Shanker, the president of the United Federal of Teachers (UFT) was "an unlikely target of African American anger" is just wrong. The animosity had been growing for years. And my next objection is a bit pedantic, but Magid repeats it about ten times in the book. No, when the JDL was founded in May 1968, it was not "during the New York City teachers' strike." That hundred megaton blast took place that fall.

One of Magid's central points, present in the title, is that Kahane was a "radical," that his tactical inspiration was the Black Panthers, and that he shared with Jewish radicals on the left an abhorrence of stand-pat, assimilatory, mainstream Jewish liberalism. There is surely something to this; Kahane was not the only figure on the right with a bad case of Black Panther-envy, with their gun brandishing and headline-generating charismatic newsworthiness. But arguments like Magid's that emphasize the similarity between the "far left" and the "far right" usually emphasize superficial resemblances rather than deep affinities. To argue,

with Magid, that Kahane "was more a child of postwar American radicalism of the left than the maximalist Zionist Revisionism" doesn't make much sense to me, and after reading Magid, Kahane still strikes me as more Stern Gang than Weather Underground, with visions of potential King David Hotels chockablock with anti-Semites swirling in his head like sugar plums. And, as often happens, the left fought "the establishment" to separate themselves from it, while the right fought the establishment to become part of it and assimilate it. And the right, in this case as in many others, usually had the better strategy.



*Rabbi Meir Kahane addressing NCSY youth in Brooklyn in 1975.
Photo Credit: Moshezalman*

And there is another tradition, one almost entirely ignored by Magid, that provides a much more important ideological context for Kahane than either the Panthers or the Jewish left; namely, the long history of racialized violence (and threats of such violence) against racial minorities. I found no mention of George Wallace in the book, despite the fact that in October 1968, as part of his third-party presidential bid, he filled Madison Square Garden. Wallace, however, when conjuring images of violence against his enemies, was not drawing from the Black Panther playbook. Wallace's success in New York City was one example of the growing firestorm of racial resentments that was

roiling New York City during these years, especially in Kahane's prime bailiwick, the outer boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, from the somewhat nebulous organization, SPONGE (Society for the Prevention of Negroes Getting Everything) to Mario Procaccino, the 1969 Democratic candidate for mayor, whose lasting contribution to the English language was coining the phrase "limousine liberal." It's not as if Kahane had to do much inciting to get a following. When, in the early 1970s, a potential housing project in Forest Hills (a middle-class neighborhood in Queens) engendered intense resistance, Kahane professed to be surprised at their virulence. "Suddenly all these Jews that used to get up in the Forest Hills Jewish Center and says the JDL uses violence and that they're bad, come up to me and say, 'Listen, if that housing project goes up, can you blow it up?'" But Kahane said no. When the JDL marched down Fifth Avenue in the annual "Salute to Israel" parade, few groups were applauded more vigorously, or received more donations.

When it came to confronting Blacks, many Jews felt they suffered from a reputation of being insufficiently "tough." In its early years, the JDL, not surprisingly, found many recruits in Kahane's home base of Rochdale. I had many friends and acquaintances in Kahane's orbit, and they all gave me the same recruiting talk, "Aren't you tired of being pushed around by tough Blacks? Isn't it time we Jews learned how to defend ourselves?" By that time, I was already in Hashomer Hatzair, and had nothing but disdain for the JDL and Kahane, but as an archetype of Jewish pusillanimity—unathletic, non-confrontational, very nearsighted, and very bookish—I certainly understood the JDL's invoking an assertive brand of Jewish masculinity that I both abhorred and, on some level, envied. And for every teenage member of Kahane's shock troops, there were ten, if not a hundred, quiet admirers.

I would argue that the appeal of the JDL, in Rochdale and elsewhere, was less about crime (or "Black crime") itself, but a desire to defend one's turf against encroachment, the Jets against the Sharks. A key part of the appeal, at a time of rampant "neighborhood change," was the belief that sufficient Jewish toughness could stay the

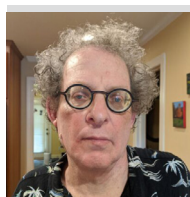
sociological and demographic forces of the day. Kahane was an outer borough Jew who repeatedly mocked the assimilated Jews from "Scarsdale" and "Great Neck," who had presumably given up the fight to preserve Jewish communities in the city, and he lauded the Jews who had remained in the outer boroughs. Kahane had been a rabbi in Laurelton, another community in Southeastern Queens. But Laurelton was "changing." More and more Jewish families were leaving; more and more Black families were moving in. Something very similar would follow in Rochdale. And the Jews in those neighborhoods and many others would fight fiercely, though fruitlessly, to preserve their white and Jewish character. The war to maintain Laurelton and Rochdale as Jewish neighborhoods were wars the Jews lost. There would be no six-day victory. And I believe that on some level that when Kahane moved to Israel he saw the Palestinians less as terrorists than as unwanted neighbors who would move in and force the Jews out. Israel was Laurelton and Rochdale. The West Bank was the rest of South Jamaica.

Others, I would suggest, also saw the world from the vantage point of southeastern Queens writ large. A short bus ride away from Rochdale, those living in Jamacia Estates, an exclusive subdivision for the upper middle class and beyond, could also observe the rising tide of Blackness just outside of their enclave, including a young Donald Trump. I make no claim that Kahane influenced Trump, but Trump surely knew of him as the leading local voice of racial resentment. The two men shared the same bleak worldview; if you give "them" [Blacks, Palestinians, immigrants, any "them" will do] an inch they will take a mile. If we are strident enough, outrageous enough, they will not replace us. Make of that what you will.

One final story. One reason I know so much about Rochdale is not only that I lived there, but about a decade ago, I wrote a book about it, published by Cornell University Press, telling how Jews and Blacks created an integrated community there, and how it fell apart. I interviewed a lot of people for the book, from associates of Robert Moses to fire-breathing Black revolutionaries; anyone who could help tell the story of

Rochdale. I wanted to interview Kahane's widow, Libby, a librarian at Hebrew University, and I managed to get her contact information. She proved to be very helpful and interested in my project, and at one point in our emails, she sent me an unpublished manuscript of her biography of Kahane. I was very impressed. It was, not surprisingly, sympathetic to his politics, but it was not a diatribe. It was well-written, carefully documented, and she had interviewed many of his cronies, who presumably wouldn't have spoken to many other interviewers. I was impressed and told her that in one of my emails. (Magid is also impressed by Libby Kahane's research). Anyway, a few years later, Libby contacted me. The book was being printed in Jerusalem by the Institute for the Publication of the Writings of Meir Kahane, and she wanted to use an excerpt from one of the emails as a blurb for the book. I blanched, but the quote she chose wasn't really embarrassing, something like "an important and thorough study of one of the most controversial Jewish figures of our time." And Libby had given me solid help, and I felt I needed to return the favor. And so I did. I don't know what the moral of this story is, other than the fact that Meir Kahane, in life and death, is still with us, and those who wish to simply dismiss him as an inconsequential rabble-rouser, do so at their own peril. Shaul Magid's book is not the last word on Meir Kahane, but it doesn't have to be. Those interested in the vicissitudes of American Jewish life from the 1960s through 1980s, and its lingering reverberations in the US and Israel, should read this book. ■

Peter Eisenstadt is a a historian and long-time Israeli-Palestinian peace activist. His latest book, *Against the Hounds of Hell: A Life of Howard Thurman* was published by University of Virginia Press in February 2021. He is a member of the Board of Partners for Progressive Israel.



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Directed by
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Throughout, Partners for Progressive Israel has worked to share information, make connections, support progressive forces in Israel working to promote civil rights and a just society within the country and an end to permanent occupation and tacit annexation within the Occupied Territories.

Partners for Progressive Israel's voice is loud and strong as we deepen understanding of the complexities of both Israeli and Palestinian societies while **promoting and cultivating partnerships**.

Partners for Progressive Israel has an action agenda that combines education, policy analysis, and advocacy for progressive causes. In today's uncertain times, progressive forces help preserve our hope for a democratic, just, and strong Israel. Hope is the buzzword for us in the year 2022. This is the time for all of us to step up our efforts to strengthen liberal, democratic, and pro-peace forces both in the US and Israel. **Indeed, transforming our ideals into concrete action is our urgent task.**

Each year, in this season, we ask for financial contributions—your support is what makes our work possible. We depend on your help. Please give generously so we can continue to promote and represent the ideals of civil rights and social justice in Israel and peace between Israelis and Palestinians built upon a foundation of mutual recognition and respect. Please make an end-of-the-year gift to Partners so we can continue to fight for a just and durable peace between Israel and its neighbors. **Seize the moment of hope and ensure progressive voices are heard loud and clear by making an online tax-deductible gift at www.progressiveisrael.org/support.** Your investment in PPI is the one of the most effective, powerful ways of taking action and making a genuine difference. Please be as generous as you can. Your gift, whether one-time, monthly, or a pledge is the sincerest endorsement of our unique programs and vital mission.

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Israel-Palestine Symposium 2021

Conversations with Israel and Palestine Series

The Palestinian Political Arena: Where Do Things Stand? What Lies Ahead?



This conversation has been edited for length and clarity. The original recording is available [here](#).

Ron Skolnik: Let me welcome everyone to this Partners for Progressive Israel webinar, *The Palestinian Political Arena: Where Do Things Stand? What Lies Ahead?* This is the latest installment of Partners' [Conversations with Israel and Palestine series](#), bringing voices from Israel and Palestine to an international audience.

Our moderator today is Diana Greenwald, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the City College of New York. Her research focuses on politics of the Middle East, especially Palestinian politics, and her work has appeared in the National Interest, the Washington Post, and 972 Magazine.

Dr. Khalil Jahshan is a Palestinian American political analyst and media commentator, as well as Executive Director of the Arab Center in Washington D.C. Previously he served as Executive Vice President of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and

Director of its government affairs affiliate, the National Association of Arab Americans.

Dr. Khalil Shikaki is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. He has been a Senior Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis. Since 1993, Dr. Shikaki has conducted more than 200 polls among Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and participated in dozens of joint polls among Palestinians and Israelis.

Diana Greenwald: We're talking about over 13 million Palestinians globally, nearly half of whom live within Israel and the occupied territories. That includes over 3 million in the West Bank—inclusive of East Jerusalem, about 2 million in Gaza, about 2 million inside Israel within its 1949 boundaries, and additionally, 6 to 7 million Palestinians abroad. Palestinian politics is taking place all over the world. Dr. Jahshan, how

would you characterize the current mood within the Palestinian national struggle?



Dr. Khalil Jahshan: Thank you all. If I'm to describe the status of Palestinian politics today, I would say that we're in the post-Oslo paralysis period but it's important to avoid taking a static approach. It's not just the size and the diversity of the population. There is a certain internal dynamic to Palestinian politics that is often ignored by the parties, including mediating parties, and by the media. The tendency is always to talk as if there's a static Palestinian body politic.

If I were to put it into different phases, I would say that the Palestinians went through a first stage from 1948 to 1967, where they were classified and dealt with as "refugees." The emphasis of their politics was on rectifying the injustice that had been done to them and returning home. That's why jokingly I refer to this as the "ET" phase, the "I want to go home phase" of Palestinian politics. At the end of the '60s the Palestinians began to realize that they have to take matters into their own hands. That was the period of toying with armed struggle. I say toying, because I don't think Palestinians really took armed struggle seriously. That's the period when the emphasis of Palestinian politics was on liberation and forming a body to represent them internationally and with Israel, and that's when the PLO was formed.

The next phase was '73 to '87, the beginning of the idea of a two-state solution or political compromise, ending with the first Intifada. This inaugurated the so-called "peace process" that we began to see between '88 and '93. The US began to deal directly with the Palestinians through the PLO, and a peace negotiations process

began that resulted in Oslo.

1994 to 2000—the fifth phase of Palestinian politics, witnessed the transformation of the PLO into the Palestinian Authority—the PA. The PLO itself deteriorated quickly and was reduced to a local PNA, the Palestinian National Authority, based in Ramallah. It tended to overshadow the PLO and all that led us to this sixth period in Palestinian politics: the post-Oslo paralysis. The Palestinians have been trying for the past 20 years to adjust to the failure of the Oslo process. Unfortunately, it imploded and did not produce the intended results. In order to understand Palestinian politics, we also have to refer to the dispersion that Diana mentioned earlier. Half of Palestinians are under Israeli control.

It cannot be asked, "Why can't the Palestinians unite and have a uniform politics that make it easy for me to understand?" Palestinians live under three Ds: dispersion, division, and discrimination. Experts often say that the Palestinians have hit a brick wall. Frankly, it's a bit more complicated. Imagine hitting a brick wall. You probably are shocked, and you might get a scar on your forehead, but you tend to realize that it's the end of the road. The Palestinian situation is worse than that. The Palestinians have hit a cul-de-sac. You keep moving and you get the impression that you're getting somewhere, but you aren't.

The Palestinians are stuck in this desert. There is this semblance of movement, of getting somewhere; that maybe next year will be better. Maybe the next American president will be better. Maybe the next Israeli prime minister will be better. Meanwhile, the PA has become the guardian of the status quo; the gatekeeper of the Israeli occupation because it doesn't have an option. Its survival depends on it.

Greenwald: Dr. Shikaki, what kinds of trends or developments are you seeing in Palestinian attitudes in the West Bank and Gaza? Earlier this year, the Palestinian authorities suspended elections that had been planned for the presidency and legislature within the PA, and for the PNC within the PLO. There have been protests around the ongoing evictions in Sheikh

Jarrah and Silwan, conflict between Hamas and Israel, the Gilboa prison outbreak, and much else.

Dr. Khalil Shikaki: Three broad areas are relevant here. The first is “division,” because of the impact it has on public attitudes regarding both the domestic scene and Israeli-Palestinian relations. The second is “bad governance under the PA.” Palestinian politics have become more and more authoritarian. This is a clearly a fundamental transformation. Third is the dysfunctional relationship with Israel—the lack of any political process to get the Palestinians somewhere.

For example, the unification of the West Bank and Gaza and reconciliation between the PA and Hamas has long been a top priority. However, given repeated failure over the years, we have seen expectations plummeting, and we have seen attitudes shifting as to who is responsible.

Most Palestinians now blame the president and Fatah for the lack of unity; while in the past, the blame was squarely put on Hamas. In governance preferences, we see real stability regarding democracy and liberal values. Most Palestinians, particularly the youth, tend to be very liberal in terms of political values. As to some social values, we see significant support for gender equality among Palestinians compared to other Arabs in the region.

Despite the attachment to liberal social values, when asked to evaluate the status of Palestinian democracy, the trend is very clear. Most Palestinians no longer believe that they have a democracy or that their current political elite is capable of producing democracy. They believe that there is little opportunity for democracy under the old guard. If you ask them today to tell you whether they have a free press, 80% say no. This is also true regarding the independence of the judiciary, pluralism in civil society, et cetera.

Today, there is a grim view of the third issue, Israeli-Palestinian relations. In the mid-‘90s, the golden era for peace attitudes and the two-state solution, diplomacy and negotiations were the most effective means of getting us there. People trusted the leadership to negotiate such a deal after Oslo. Now, most of the support for the two-state solution has vanished, but we still don’t see a competing paradigm. Support was at 80

or 85% in the mid-‘90s and still 70% 10 years ago. Now it’s just about half that. We’ve also seen a shift in support for violence, a real rise. It’s not a majority, but compared again to the mid-‘90s, it is significant. You could hardly find one fifth in favor of violence; today, almost half of the Palestinians believe in it. Most Palestinians believe that they have no Israeli partner interested in reaching a two-state peace agreement—or a one-state solution for that matter.

There is significant demand among the Palestinians for elections. But if you ask if they think elections are about to take place anytime soon, the answer is no. If you ask if it was the right call to cancel the elections again, three-quarters will say no. There is little trust in the president today, and 78% of Palestinians believed the president must resign.

Greenwald: We see the Israeli government pursuing policies to “shrink the conflict.” Small-scale reforms, increasing the number of permits for Palestinians in Gaza to go into Israel to work, rectifying the legal status of Palestinians in the West Bank who have relocated their residency years ago from Gaza. Do you see any hope in these or other policies that come out of this government?

Shikaki: Without doubt, for most Palestinians, the current Israeli government is even worse than the previous government. The current government takes a harder line and essentially leaves the PA without a purpose. The goal of the Authority is to deliver a state through negotiations. But the Israeli government, through settlements, undercuts everything the PA is trying to achieve. Looking at the last two months, you can see planned expansion in the size, location, and number of settlements. If these plans are implemented, they will destroy any prospect for future Israeli-Palestinian peace along the lines of a two-state solution.

Jahshan: The Palestinian public is frustrated. But it hasn’t despaired totally. It is changing its expectations. What we see is the frustration of previously rising expectations; expectations have not been met, and there is a price for that. What this frustration has produced is a pressure cooker that is bound to explode sooner or later, especially in the absence of credible, visionary

leadership in Palestine. “Shrinking the conflict,” which has become a cute mantra, only makes the situation more dangerous.

Growing up as an Israeli Palestinian, I have seen quite a few people try to do this “shrinking of the conflict” under various terminologies, ever since Ben-Gurion. This has been an attempt from the beginning to try to reduce the Palestinian conflict as if it could disappear. Even some Palestinians are prone to drift in that direction. Definitely some of the progressives among our colleagues here in the States and the Jewish community “shrink the conflict.” “Palestine” becomes just the West Bank and Gaza; and then “Palestine” becomes only 30 or 40% of what originally was contemplated.

By this shrinking, Gaza disappears from the equation. And Jerusalem has been shrunk now to Sheikh Jarrah. Where is the conflict? Where is Palestine? My problem is not Sheikh Jarrah, and it’s not equality. It’s not ending discrimination. My problem is Palestine. Unless we, in a protracted conflict, stop this tendency to keep reducing the ceiling lower and lower in order to eliminate the conflict, we’re not going to get there.

What is being proposed in terms of “shrinking the conflict” is nothing better or worse than the Kushner plan. No to peace, no to negotiations, no to meeting with the Palestinians, no to Palestinian statehood, but let’s make your life a little easier. Palestinian life has been difficult for hundreds of years, going back to the Ottoman empire. That’s not the issue. The issue is political. The issue is self-determination. The issue is statehood.

Greenwald: What can we do, or what can Palestinians do, that would most likely create change towards a resolution?

Shikaki: Palestinians continue to demand of the Authority that it clean up its act. I don’t expect these demands to succeed. The PA is isolated from the Palestinian public. Clearly this Israeli government is not interested in a two-state solution or letting the Palestinians create their own sovereign Palestinian state.

The international community must confront Israel

with a choice. It should tell Israel that there are two possibilities: either let the Palestinians have an independent and sovereign state, or else grant them all equal rights. To support or to tolerate the status quo is to contribute to its persistence, and makes it even more difficult for those Palestinians who are struggling right now to create a better future for themselves, both against their own Authority and against the state of Israel.



Jahshan: I agree that the current state of Palestinian governance is untenable. Unfortunately, nothing happens without violence in Palestine. Intifada 1, Intifada 2; there has to be some movement in the Palestinian street threatening to American interests and threatening to Israel’s existence before there is any serious movement by the US. It’s up to the Palestinians to take matters into their own hands. I agree totally with Dr. Shikaki about what needs to be done on the Palestinian side to pressure the leadership to deliver, even though both of us are not very optimistic. In terms of the US, unfortunately, we see nothing.

Any return to peace processing in the Middle East without the goal of ending the Occupation and creating a Palestinian state is pointless. The harsh truth is that Biden needs to tell Israelis now about their future.

I know Biden. I’ve dealt with him as a Senator. On one occasion, I debated with him in front of a J Street audience. He wasn’t properly briefed. He came with a traditional pro-AIPAC speech and embarrassed himself quite visibly. The good intentions declared by this Administration require moral and political leadership that he hasn’t shown.

Greenwald: Is there any chance that the Palestinian leadership and the PA itself will disband in the near future? We also have Abbas's age and health to consider. Will there be a succession crisis anytime soon?

Shikaki: The PA is not on the verge of collapsing or disbanding itself. In fact, if anything the main driver, incentive, and motivation of the current leadership is self-preservation. There are demands among the Palestinian public for the PA to dissolve itself, that it has essentially failed in its mission to be the midwife for Palestinian statehood, and that with bad governance, there is no need for it anymore. However, there is still a small majority that is against disbanding it.

There are no written or unwritten rules right now as to what happens to the leadership of the PA when Abbas is done. Without elections, there is no real process in place for a succession. This current government is the only government since the 2006 elections. This makes the current government more likely to resist any change, reforms, or any attempts to try and meet the demands of the public.

Jahshan: Elections are vital. There is no way to move forward except through democratic elections. The Palestinians, with the support of the international community, can administer democratic elections. They shouldn't be giving Israel veto power over any aspect

of the elections. Let's say they are not going to allow the Jerusalemites to vote; therefore we cannot hold elections. No, we should hold the elections. Palestinians should have elections. You can even bring the whole population of Jerusalem over the city limits and make sure that they vote.

The authoritarian tendencies of the security agencies in Palestine and their coordination with the Israeli agencies and becoming a tool of the occupation; this has to end. Palestine does not need 12 to 18 security agencies, including Naval Intelligence in Nablus. One security agency is enough, and it needs to measure up morally and politically to the fact that the Palestinians are struggling for independence and are not an authoritarian state, like the rest of states in the region that require these types of authoritarian security apparatuses to suppress people.

Abbas should declare that he no longer wants to stay as president, that he wants to preside over elections. If he wants to go down in history as a constructive, useful leader, he has to lead reform, because that is the shortest line between point A and point B.

Ron Skolnik: Thank you Dr. Shikaki, Dr. Jahshan, and Dr. Greenwald. Thanks to everyone for joining us for this latest installment of Conversations with Israel and Palestine. ■

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