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## ISRAEL and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

AIJAC's Brief Guide  
for the Perplexed

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Events in the Middle East continue to fill the front pages of newspapers and arouse heated debate around the world. The war in Iraq, September 11, and Osama bin Laden are only some of the names and topics that have kept that troubled region hot in the news. Of all topics keeping the Middle East in the news, however, no sub-issue generates as much emotion, debate, and ire as the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Because the issue is given to emotion, it is often difficult to discern facts from opinion, truth from falsehood, information from disinformation. It is also difficult to maintain a sense of historical context when discussing the issues at hand. This paper provides some perspectives and talking points, both historical and contemporary. It is not intended as an exhaustive examination of the subject.

When presented with the facts, it is important to understand:

- the real dangers faced by Israel, a tiny country less than one third the size of Tasmania, in a tumultuous, heavily armed neighbourhood
- Israel's commitment to democracy and democratic values
- the common enemies of extremism and fanaticism faced by Israel and the Western world
- Israel's impressive contributions to world civilisation in such fields as science, medicine, technology, agriculture, and culture — contributions that are even more remarkable given the country's relative youth and its heavy defence burden.

No country's historical record is perfect, and Israel, like other democratic nations, is not perfect. But acknowledging fallibility is a national strength, not a weakness, and Israel's overall record on democracy, economy, education, science and plurality

compares favourably with that of any other country in the region, and indeed well beyond the region.

### **The Jewish people’s link to the land of Israel is incontrovertible and unbroken**

It spans nearly four thousand years. Exhibit A for this connection is the Hebrew Bible. The Book of Genesis, the first of the five books of the Bible, recounts the story of Abraham, the covenantal relationship with the one God, and the move from Ur (in present-day Iraq) to Canaan, the region corresponding roughly to Israel. Exhibit B is any Jewish prayer book in use anywhere in the world. The references in the liturgy to Zion, the land of Israel, are endless.



*Ancient ties: The first century synagogue at Katzrin*

Medieval Jewish scholar Nachmanides counted living in Israel as a divine precept or obligation (mitzvah), and the Jewish Holy book of interpretation of Jewish Law, the Talmud, even declares that refusal to move to Israel is a legitimate grounds for divorce.

In later years, the leaders of three widely divergent movements of the Jewish people— Zionism, Hassidism, and Mitnagdisim— independently sent their students to revitalise Jewish life in the Land of Israel. These leaders disagreed on a great many issues, but were united in the central role of Israel in the life of the Jewish people.

### **The same is true of the connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem**

It dates back to the period of King David, who lived approximately three thousand years ago, and who established Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Ever since, Jerusalem has represented not only the geographical centre of the Jewish people, but also the spiritual and metaphysical heart of our faith and identity. Indeed, the relationship between Jerusalem and the Jewish people is unique in the annals of history.

Jerusalem was the site of the two Temples—the first built by King Solomon during the tenth century B.C.E. and destroyed in 586 B.C.E. during the Babylonian conquest, and the second built less than a century later, refurbished by King Herod, and destroyed in 70 C.E. by Roman forces. Even in exile, for centuries Jews have ended prayers on the two holiest of their religious holidays, Passover and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), with the hopeful cry “Next Year in Jerusalem!”.

As the psalmist wrote, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of thee, if I do not keep Jerusalem in

memory even at my happiest hour.” For thousands of years Jews have prayed for her well-being, and always faced Jerusalem while praying.

### **Jews have never stopped yearning for Zion and Jerusalem**

For nearly two millennia, traditional Jews have prayed three times a day to return to the Land of Israel, and have marked the anniversary of the exile, on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, by fasting and mourning. Despite the long exile there have always been Jewish communities in the Holy Land, and especially Jerusalem.

Indeed, since the nineteenth century, Jews have constituted a majority of Jerusalem’s population. For example, according to the Political Dictionary of the State of Israel, Jews were 61.9 percent of Jerusalem’s population in 1892.

The historical and religious link to Jerusalem is especially important because some Arabs seek to rewrite history and assert that Jews are “foreign occupiers” or “colonialists” with no actual tie to the land. Such attempts to deny Israel’s legitimacy are demonstrably false and need to be exposed for the lies they are. They also entirely ignore the “inconvenient” fact that when Jerusalem was under Muslim (i.e., Ottoman and, later, Jordanian) rule, it was always a backwater.

### **Zionism is the quest for national self-determination of the Jewish people**

Although the yearning for a Jewish homeland derives from a longing that dates back thousands of years, it also stems from a more contemporary reality.

Theodor Herzl, considered the father of modern Zionism, was a secular Viennese Jew who became appalled at the blatant antisemitism fuelling the show trial of a French army officer named Alfred Dreyfus. A century earlier France had become the first European country to extend full rights to the Jews, but the Dreyfus affair brought Herzl to the conclusion that Jews could never enjoy full equality as a minority in Europe. Therefore, he called for the establishment of a Jewish state, in which Jews would no longer be dependent on outside forces. He described his vision in a landmark book, *Altneuland* (“Old-New Land”), published in 1902.

Herzl died in 1904, but his vision was posthumously endorsed by the British foreign secretary, Lord Balfour in 1917:

*His Majesty’s Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*

In 1922, the League of Nations, entrusting Britain with a mandate for Palestine,

recognised “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine.”

The rise of Hitler and the Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” spearheaded by Germany — and facilitated by widespread antisemitism and indifference to the fate of the Jews — revealed in tragic dimensions the desperate need for a Jewish state. (Haj Amin el-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, was among the enthusiastic supporters of the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people.)

Only in such a state, the Zionists believed, would Jews be free of the need to rely on the “goodwill” of others to determine their destiny. All Jews would be welcome to settle in the Jewish State, whether taking refuge from persecution or in a fulfilment of a “yearning for Zion.” Indeed, this latter point fired the imagination of many Jews who settled in what was then a generally desolate Palestine, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, out of idealistic convictions, and who laid the foundation for the modern State of Israel.

Israel’s adversaries try to twist the meaning of Zionism and present it as a demonic, or colonising, force, a foreign implant in the Middle East, rather than recognise the Jews as an independent nation with the same rights as other countries. The stated goal of many of Israel’s enemies is to undermine her *raison d’être* and to isolate the state from the community of nations.

Over the years anti-Israel countries have had their share of success. In 1975 the United Nations adopted a resolution labelling Zionism as “racism”, over the strenuous objections of the democratic countries. The resolution was repealed in 1991, but the canard resurfaced ten years later, ironically, at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The Arab bloc, however, failed in that effort to condemn Zionism in the conference documents. This time many nations understood that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is, and has always been, political, not racial.

In this vein, it’s well worth remembering the comments of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. on anti-Zionism:

*And what is anti-Zionism? It is the denial to the Jewish people of a fundamental right that we justly claim for the people of Africa and all other nations of the Globe. It is discrimination against Jews, my friends, because they are Jews. In short, it is anti-Semitism.... Let my words echo in the depths of your soul: When people criticise Zionism, they mean Jews—make no mistake about it.*

## Israel’s Jews and non-Jews

Although Israel defines itself as both a Jewish and a Democratic state, the rights of non-Jews are guaranteed in the Declaration of Independence and Israel’s basic laws, which serve a role much like a Constitution. One-fifth of Israel’s citizens are non-Jews, more than 1 million Arabs, and Arabic is an official national language. Friday, the

Muslim day of rest, is enshrined in law as the day of rest for the Arab sector, equivalent to the Jewish sabbath. In addition, Israeli Arab communities benefit from government grants for cultural activities, including fairs, festivals, and sport. The Museum of Islamic Art in Jerusalem is visited by thousands of guests, Arab and Jewish, each year.

Israeli Arabs enjoy all the same political and legal rights as Israeli Jews, which means they have more political and human rights than any other Arabs in the Middle East. It is true that economic discrepancies exist between Israel's Jewish and Arab populations, but statistics show these gaps are closing. Moreover, in terms of key statistics of overall community well-being such as infant mortality, there is less of a gap between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews than there are between Muslim minorities and the general population of most Western European countries.

Meanwhile, Israel's Jewish population has always reflected enormous national, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, which became even more pronounced in the 1980s, when Israel rescued tens of thousands of black Jews who were dreaming of resettlement in Israel from famine-stricken Ethiopia. The eloquent comments at the time of Julius Chambers, the director-general of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People Legal Defence and Education Fund, bear repeating:

*Were the victims of Ethiopian famine white, countless nations might have offered them refuge. But the people dying every day of starvation in Ethiopia and the Sudan are black, and in a world where racism is officially deplored by virtually every organised government, only one non-African nation has opened its doors and its arms. The quiet humanitarian action of the State of Israel, action taken entirely without regard to the colour of those being rescued, stands as a condemnation of racism far more telling than mere speeches and resolutions.*

### **Arab attacks on Jews preceded the establishment of the State of Israel**

The fallacious claim is often made that Arab terrorism began in reaction to Israel's "occupation" of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following the June, 1967 Six-Day War. In reality, Arab attacks on Jewish civilians began when Jews were actually a small minority in Palestine. From 1880-1914 emerging Jewish communities took care to protect themselves and their crops from marauders, thieves, and organised gangs. The first organised Jewish security group, called Bar Giora, was organised in 1907.

As Jewish settlement continued, Arab attacks increased. Widespread rioting broke out in Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa, and Hebron several times in the 1920s and 30s.

### **The Arab-Israeli conflict was avoidable**

Shortly after its founding in 1945, the United Nations took an interest in the

future of mandatory Palestine, then under British rule. A UN commission (UNSCOP, or the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine) recommended to the General Assembly a partition of the land between the Jews and the Arabs. Neither side would get all it sought, but a division would recognise that there were two populations in the land—one Jewish, the other Arab—each meriting a state.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly, by a vote of 33 in favour, 13 opposed, and 10 abstaining, adopted Resolution 181, known as the Partition Plan.

The Arab states and the local Arab population vehemently rejected the proposal, and they refused to recognise a Jewish claim to any part of the land and chose war to fulfil their objectives.

On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was founded. Winston Churchill said at the time:

*The coming into being of a Jewish state ... is an event in world history to be viewed in the perspective not of a generation or a century, but in the perspective of a thousand, two thousand or even three thousand years.*

Years later, US President John F. Kennedy offered his perspective on the meaning of Israel:

*Israel was not created in order to disappear—Israel will endure and flourish. It is the child of hope and home of the brave. It can neither be broken by adversity nor demoralised by success. It carries the shield of democracy and it honours the sword of freedom.*

Israel's Declaration of the Establishment of the State included these words:

*We extend our hand to all neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land.*

Tragically, that offer was ignored.

On May 15, 1948, the armies of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria attacked the fledgling Jewish state, seeking its destruction.

In the course of this war, launched by the Arabs, civilian populations were affected, just as in all wars. Controversies continue to this day about how many local Arabs fled Israel because Arab leaders called on them to do so or threatened them if they did not, how many left out of fear of the fighting, and how many were compelled to leave by Israeli forces. Importantly, hundreds of thousands of Arabs ended up staying in Israel and became citizens of the state.

But the central point must not be overlooked—Arab countries began this war with an explicitly announced aim to wipe out the 650,000 Jews in the new State of Israel, and by doing so, the Arabs defied the UN plan for the creation of both Arab and Jewish

states. If this had not happened, not a single Palestinian would have become a refugee or been forced to leave their home.

There is no comparable situation in the world today where a refugee population has been cynically exploited in the way the Palestinians have been.

In contrast to Israel, only one Arab country—Jordan—has offered citizenship to the Palestinian refugees. The other twenty-one Arab countries, who share a common language, religion, and ethnic roots with the Palestinians, have refused to do so.

One country, Kuwait, actually allowed many Palestinians to work prior to the Gulf War of 1991. But following Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat's vocal support for Iraq's invasion the previous summer, Kuwait summarily expelled over 300,000 Palestinians working in the country.

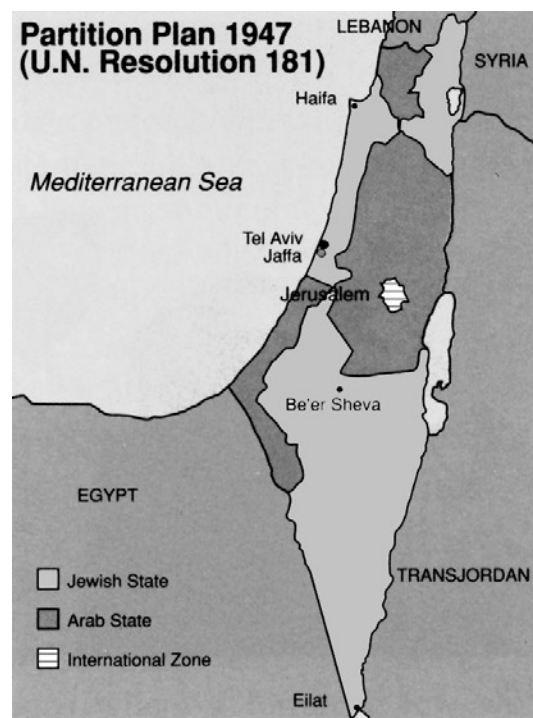
The Oslo process of the early 1990s brought hope to many refugee families in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They assumed Yasser Arafat and the PLO, who created the Palestinian Authority in 1994, would use their newfound power to relieve their difficult situation. But help never materialised, despite more than a billion dollars in international aid to the PA. Today, the refugees continue to wallow in squalor in UN-run camps.

A clue to the approach of the Arab countries to the refugees can be found in a 1961 Radio Cairo address, which admitted “the refugees are the cornerstone in the Arab struggle against Israel.” By maintaining the refugees in difficult conditions with few options, countries like Syria and Lebanon— as well as the Palestinian Authority itself — use the refugees as a key weapon to maintain their ongoing struggle against Israel.

## **Two refugee populations were created by the Arab-Israeli conflict, not one**

While world attention has been focused on the Palestinian refugees, the plight of Jews from Arab countries, hundreds of thousands of whom became refugees as well, has been largely ignored. Indeed, the size of the two groups was roughly comparable. But there was one profound difference—Israel immediately absorbed the Jewish refugees, while the Palestinian refugees were placed in camps and kept there as a matter of Arab and United Nations policy.

When the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries is raised, Arab spokesmen often feign ignorance or strenuously assert that Jews lived well under Muslim rule





(unlike Jews in Christian Europe). Sometimes they disingenuously argue that Arabs, by definition, cannot be antisemitic because, like Jews, they are Semites. (This ignores the origins of the term. Antisemitism was a term which has always been used to describe hatred of Jews – except in terms of linguistic origins, it has nothing to do with the Semitic groups of languages of which Arabic is also a part.)

It is certainly true that there was no equivalent of the Holocaust in the Jewish experience in Muslim lands, and it also true that there were periods of cooperation and harmony. But Jews never enjoyed full and equal rights with Muslims in Islamic countries, and there were clearly delineated rules of behaviour for Jews as second-class citizens. Ethnic violence against Jews was also far from unknown in the Muslim world.

### **Jews in Arab lands**

Apart from the Land of Israel, Jews also have a long history in the Middle East. For instance, there was a continuous Jewish presence in Libya from the time of the Phoenicians, many centuries before migratory tribes arrived from the Arabian Peninsula, bringing Islam to North Africa and settling — some might say occupying — lands already inhabited by Berbers and other local peoples.

Like Jews throughout the Arab world, the vast majority of Libya's 40,000 Jews fled between 1948 and 1951. Even before the State of Israel came into existence, pogroms in 1945 and 1948 killed many people, and most of the community emigrated to Israel at the first opportunity. In 1951, Libya became an independent country. Despite constitutional guarantees, the Jews who remained in the country were denied the right to vote, hold public office, obtain Libyan passports, supervise their own communal affairs, or purchase new property. After a third pogrom in 1967, Libya's remaining 4,000 Jews fled, permitted to leave with only one suitcase and the equivalent of \$50. At the same time, the government destroyed Jewish cemeteries, using the headstones to pave new roads, as part of a calculated effort to erase any vestige of the Jewish historical presence in the country.

There were an estimated 754,000 Jews in Arab countries in 1948, the year of Israel's establishment. Today, there are fewer than 8,000, the bulk of whom live in Morocco and Tunisia.

### **How were Palestinians treated from 1948 to 1967?**

Following Israel's War of Independence, Egypt ruled the Gaza Strip, and Jordan the West Bank. Egyptian authorities imposed military rule in Gaza, and Jordan annexed the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem. Neither moved to create an independent Palestinian state.

In 1964—three years before Israel entered the West Bank— the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was founded. Its aim was not the creation of a state in the lands under Egyptian and Jordanian rule, but rather the elimination of Israel and the founding of an Arab Palestinian state in the whole of Palestine. According to Article 15 of the PLO Charter:

*The liberation of Palestine, from an Arab viewpoint, is a national duty to repulse the Zionist, imperialist invasion from the great Arab homeland and to purge the Zionist presence from Palestine.*

The PLO Covenant also clearly spells out the method by which Palestine is to be “liberated” from Israel. Article 9 states:

*Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. This is the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase.*

The Palestinian “armed struggle” turned out to be a war of terrorism, waged mainly against civilian targets. In the ensuing years, PLO-sponsored terrorists murdered Israeli Olympic athletes, held school children hostage, hijacked aeroplanes and cruise ships, and opened fire on airport check-in desks.

## **How did Israel come into possession of the West Bank, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the eastern half of Jerusalem, including the Old City?**

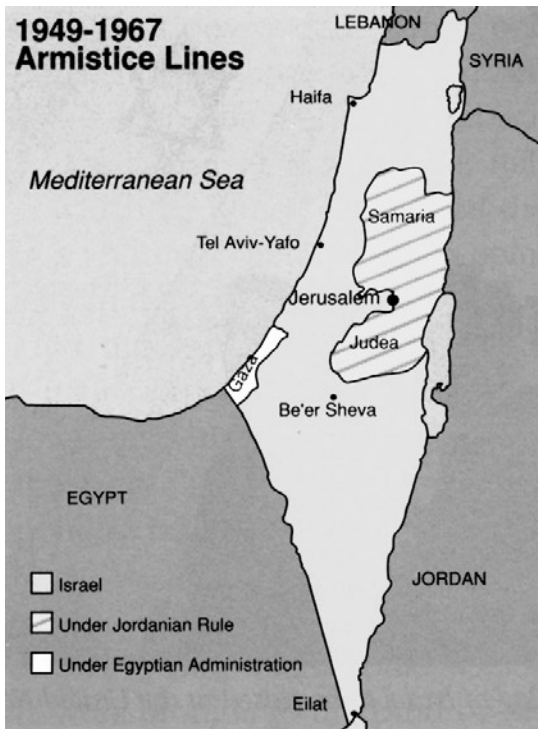
Some people reflexively refer to the “occupied territories” without ever asking the question of how they fell into Israel’s hands in 1967. Once again, there are those in the Arab world who seek to rewrite history and impute expansionist motives to Israel, but the facts are clear. Here’s a quick summary of some of the major events leading up to the Six-Day War:

- On May 16, 1967, Cairo Radio announced: “The existence of Israel has continued too long. The battle has come in which we shall destroy Israel.” On the same day, Egypt demanded the withdrawal of UN forces that had been stationed in Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh since 1957. Three days later, the UN announced it would comply with the Egyptian demand.

- On May 19, Cairo Radio said: “This is our chance, Arabs, to deal Israel a mortal blow of annihilation....”

- On May 23, Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser declared his intention to block the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping, thus effectively severing Israel’s vital trade links with East Africa and Asia. Israel replied that under international law this was a *casus belli*, an act of war.

- On May 27, Nasser said that “our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel.”



- On May 30, Jordan’s King Hussein placed Jordanian forces under Egyptian control. Egyptian, Iraqi, and Saudi troops were sent to Jordan.
- On June 1, Iraq’s leader added his thoughts: “We are resolved, determined, and united to achieve our clear aim of wiping Israel off the map.”
- On June 3, Cairo Radio hailed the impending Muslim holy war.
- On June 5, as Arab forces gathered to mount an attack, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike. Within six days, Israel had defeated its adversaries and, in the process, captured land on the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian fronts.

### Another lost peace opportunity, 1967

Following the war, Israel indicated its desire to negotiate peace with its Arab neighbours. While Israel refused to relinquish the eastern half of Jerusalem—which contained Judaism’s holiest sites and which, despite the terms of the Israeli-Jordanian armistice agreement, had been entirely off limits to Israeli Jews for nineteen years—it was willing to exchange the seized territories for a comprehensive settlement. But Israel’s overtures were rebuffed. Arab leaders met on September 1 in Khartoum, Sudan, where they re-affirmed their previous attitude to Israel. In a sweeping communique, leaders announced the infamous “three no’s”: “no peace, no recognition, and no negotiation.”

### UN Security Council Resolution 242

This resolution, adopted in November 1967, is often cited in discussions about the Arab-Israeli conflict as the basis for resolving it, but is not always quoted with precision. The resolution stresses “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which **every** [emphasis added] State in the area can live in security.” It also includes a call for “termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area”.

Furthermore, it calls for “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” but deliberately omitted use of the word “the” before the word “territories.” The U.S. ambassador to the UN at the time, Arthur Goldberg, noted that this was intentional, so that any final settlement could allow for unspecified border adjustments that would take into account Israel’s security needs. So did the British diplomats who helped draft the resolution.

In short, Resolution 242 establishes the principle of Land for Peace, but makes it clear that Israel is only expected to relinquish land in return for a concrete peace arrangement with the Arab world. It does not call on Israel to make unilateral concessions or return to its pre-Six Day War borders.

On October 22, 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 338, which called for a cease-fire, implementation of Resolution 242 in its entirety, and the onset of talks between the parties concerned. Resolutions 242 and 338 are normally cited together in connection with any Arab-Israeli peace talks.



*Desecrated Jewish graves found on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives in 1967*

### **The settlements have been a contentious issue**

No question, but, like just about everything else associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict, there's more here than meets the eye.

After Israel's victory in the 1967 war, and once it became clear there would be no peace negotiations, Israel's Labor government encouraged the construction of new communities in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights. This practice was accelerated under Likud-led governments after 1977.

In any discussion of the settlements, it is important to understand the factors Israel considered before pursuing this contentious policy. (a) Israel contended that the land was disputed—both Arabs and Jews laid claim to it—and since there was no sovereign authority, Israel had as much right to settle there as the Palestinians; (b) there had been Jewish communities in the West Bank long before 1948, for example, in Hebron and Gush Etzion, both sites of massacres by Arabs in which large numbers of Jews were killed; (c) the West Bank represents the cradle of Jewish civilisation, and many Jews, driven by faith and history, wanted to reassert that link; (d) the Israeli government believed that certain settlements would serve a useful security purpose; and (e) some Israeli officials felt that building settlements, and thus creating facts on the ground, might hasten the day when the Palestinians, presumably realising that time was not on their side, would talk peace.

Today, most Israelis agree that any peace agreement with the Palestinians will necessarily entail dismantling many, though not all, of the settlements. Polls repeatedly show that a majority of Israelis accept this prospect, but only in return for a real peace. However, Israelis fear that any unilateral decision to withdraw would be viewed by the

Palestinians and their Arab supporters as a sign of weakness, not strength, and would only encourage further violence.

In hindsight, this perception of Israeli weakness may have actually been one of the unintended consequences of Israel's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000. Israeli troops were there for one reason only—not to acquire territory, but rather to maintain a security zone that would prevent deadly terrorist strikes from Lebanon on the villages and towns of northern Israel.

But periodic attacks by Hezbollah on Israeli soldiers took their toll, and Prime Minister Barak concluded that the benefit to Israel no longer justified the price. He ordered the troops home in May 2000. Hezbollah declared victory over the seemingly invincible Israel Defence Force (IDF). Many Palestinian opinion leaders in the West Bank and Gaza have cited this withdrawal as part of their rationale for using violence against Israel since September 2000, arguing that they could follow Hezbollah's example and accomplish what no Arab army had succeeded in doing since Israel's founding in 1948, namely, defeat the IDF.

### **The possibilities of peace: Egypt-Israel, 1978**

In 1977, Menachem Begin, Israel's first prime minister from the centre-right Likud party, took office. A few months later, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat made his historic trip to Israel and addressed the Knesset, Israel's parliament. An extraordinary peace process ensued, with all the ups and downs that came with a difficult set of negotiations. In September 1978, the Camp David Accords were adopted, containing a framework for comprehensive peace, including a proposal for limited self-government



*Sadat (left) and Begin (right) came together for the 1979 Camp David Peace Accords*

for the Palestinians. (The proposal was rejected by the Palestinians.) Six months later, in 1979, a peace accord was signed and the thirty-one-year state of war between Israel and Egypt came to an end.

It was a remarkable moment in history. Sadat, virulently anti-Israel and antisemitic for much of his life, and the mastermind (together with Syria) of Egypt's surprise attack on Israel that ignited the 1973 Yom Kippur War, teamed up with Begin, the head of Israel's leading right-wing party, to open a new chapter in Arab-Israel relations. It proved that with will, courage, and vision, anything was possible.

But every Arab country, except Sudan and Oman, severed diplomatic ties with

Cairo. And in 1981 the Egyptian leader was assassinated by members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who would later become brothers-in-arms of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network.

For its part, Israel yielded the vast expanse of the Sinai (approximately 60,000 square kilometres), which had provided a critical strategic buffer zone between itself and Egypt. It also gave up valuable oil fields it had discovered in the Sinai, a big sacrifice for a country with no natural resources to speak of. It closed important air bases it had constructed. And, despite Begin's staunch commitment to settlements, it dismantled these enclaves in Sinai.

In doing so, Israel demonstrated very clearly its desire for peace, its willingness to take substantial risks and make sacrifices, and its scrupulous commitment to fulfilling the terms of its agreements. Similarly, beginning August 16, 2005, Israel will carry out its Disengagement Plan which will see the evacuation of all the Gaza Strip settlements as well as four in the northern West Bank.

### **The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference**

On October 30, 1991, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians held an historic conference jointly sponsored by the US and the Soviet Union. For the first time, Israel entered into direct, face-to-face negotiations with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians.

Madrid was the catalyst for a series of secret meetings in Norway between Israeli and Palestinian representatives which led to the launching of the Oslo peace process.

### **The Oslo Accords, 1993-1995**

The Oslo Accords are the foundation on which current peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are based.

The "Declaration of Principles," entailing mutual recognition was signed at a Washington ceremony hosted by U.S. President Bill Clinton on September 13, 1993, during which Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands, ending decades as sworn enemies.

The "Declaration of Principles" sketched out a series of interim steps leading to a long-term "final settlement", including the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the Palestinians' right to self-rule in those territories. Following the signing of another agreement in May 1994 in Cairo, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat returned to Gaza from his base in Tunisia, together with hundreds of officials and PLO fighters, to take control of a new Palestinian Authority which would govern the Palestinian towns evacuated by Israel.

On September 28, 1995, at another White House ceremony, Israelis and Palestinians

signed another deal known as the “Interim Agreement” or “Oslo II.” The 400-page pact allowed for a second stage of autonomy for the Palestinians, giving them self-rule in all the majority Palestinian towns of the West Bank (except Hebron, which was transferred later) and 450 villages, while allowing Israeli-guarded Jewish settlements to remain under Israeli control.

### **Peace with Jordan, 1994**

This was a much easier negotiation than with Egypt, since Israel and Jordan already enjoyed good, if quiet, ties based on overlapping national interests with regard to the Palestinians. Israel once again demonstrated its deep yearning for peace and readiness to take the steps necessary to achieve it, including border adjustments and water-sharing arrangements called for by Amman.

### **Another opportunity for peace was spurned by the Palestinians in 2000-2001**

When Ehud Barak took office as prime minister in 1999, he announced an ambitious agenda. The Israeli leader said he would attempt to reach an historic end to the conflict with the Palestinians within thirteen months, and set off on an ambitious program to conclude the process started at the 1991 Madrid Conference and accelerated by the 1993 Oslo Accords. As it turned out, he went beyond what anyone in Israel might have thought possible in his willingness to compromise.

With the active support of the Clinton administration, Barak pushed the process as far and as fast as he could, and, in doing so, he broke new ground on such infinitely sensitive issues as Jerusalem for the sake of an agreement. But alas, he and Clinton failed.

Arafat was not ready to engage in the process and make it work. Rather than press ahead with the talks, which would have led to the establishment of the first-ever Palestinian state, with its capital in eastern Jerusalem, he walked away, after preposterously trying to persuade President Clinton that there was no historical Jewish link to Jerusalem and dropping the bombshell demand of a so-called “right of return” for Palestinian refugees and their generations of descendants. Arafat surely knew that this was an instant deal-breaker, since no Israeli government could ever conceivably allow millions of Palestinians to settle in Israel and thus destroy Israel as a Jewish state.

### **What exactly did Barak offer?**

In short, Barak offered the Palestinians a state and almost all the land they claimed. Barak accepted a compromise proposal made by Clinton in December 2000, which entailed a state on more than 96 percent of the West Bank as well as all of Gaza, according even to Faisal Husseini, one of the chief Palestinian negotiators at the time. The offer

included full territorial contiguity, and sovereign control of the Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem to serve as the Palestinian capital, as even a map of the proposal produced by the Palestinian Authority concedes. In addition, Barak offered to compensate the Palestinians for the remaining three percent of the West Bank with land from inside pre-1967 Israel. The proposal had the support of US President Bill Clinton, chief negotiator Dennis Ross, many Israelis and several Palestinian negotiators as well.

### **If Barak offered the Palestinians so much, why did negotiations fail?**

The main reason is refugees. Yasser Arafat demanded Israel accept full moral responsibility for the refugee problem, as well as a full “right of return” for Palestinian refugees to Israel proper. Israel agreed that refugees be allowed to “return” to the new Palestinian state, but an influx of more than 3 million Palestinians to Israel would spell the end of Israel as a Jewish state. But Arafat had promised— and continued to promise— the children and grandchildren of 1948 refugees they would eventually “return” to their previous homes inside Israel proper. By continuing to foster this hope, Arafat ensured the continuation of the conflict.

Another contentious issue for Arafat was Jerusalem. Although Arafat publicly said he was only interested in the now-Palestinian half of the city, he continued to stress his belief that no Jewish links existed to the city prior to the Zionist settlement, and demanded the inclusion of a similar clause in any final-status agreement. As illustrated above, that position is simply false.



*The Camp David Summit, 2000*

Many observers, including some of the key American mediators, feel the real issue that drove Arafat away from the negotiating table was Barak’s insistence on an “end of the conflict” clause to any treaty. Barak was willing to grant the Palestinians almost all their demands, provided Arafat agree there would be no further claims against the State of Israel. Again, Arafat refused, and US mediator Dennis Ross has suggested that “For reasons relating to who he is, his self-definition, having been a revolutionary all his life, somehow transforming himself was something he couldn’t do.”

### **September 2000**

Tragically, Arafat revealed himself incapable or unwilling, or both, of pursuing peace at the negotiating table. Instead, he returned to a more familiar pattern—on occasion talking peace while consistently encouraging violence.

He knew that the media images of heavily armed Israeli troops facing Palestinians



in the streets, including children cynically sent to the front lines, would work to his advantage. Israel would be cast in the role of aggressor and oppressor, the Palestinians as downtrodden victims.

It wouldn't be long, he calculated, before the Arab world would angrily denounce Israel, the non-aligned countries would dutifully follow suit, the Europeans would urge still more concessions from Israel to placate the Palestinians, international human rights groups would accuse Israel of excessive force, and the world, plagued by a short memory, would forget that the Palestinian leader had just spurned an unprecedented chance to strike a peace deal.



*Yasser Arafat: unable to accept the concept of a 'final peace'*

Moreover, he presumably reckoned, Washington might eventually take a tougher line on Israel, as the result of pressure from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two Arab countries that loom large in the worldview of American policy makers. And finally, there was the long-term possibility that Israel, a first-world country, would begin to tire of the struggle and its daily toll of military and civilian casualties, the negative impact on the nation's mood and psyche—not to speak of its economy—and the potentially growing international isolation.

Using then-Opposition Leader Ariel Sharon's visit to Judaism's holiest site, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as a pretence for war, (Sharon had actually visited the site on a number of occasions previously) Palestinians were urged by official Palestinian media to begin attacking Israeli soldiers and civilians on September 29, 2000. Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners were released from Palestinian jails, Palestinian police fired on Israeli civilians, and later, suicide bombers became almost a daily occurrence in Israel.

Since then, over 1000 Israeli civilians have died in terror attacks; well over 3000 have been injured. Groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the late Arafat's own Fatah have attacked school buses, teenage hangouts, fast food restaurants, and a Passover seder meal, one of the most important religious ceremonies in the Jewish calendar.

One statistic often repeated in the media is the number of Palestinian casualties since September 2000, which is well over triple the number of Israeli dead. But there are several important differences. One, the majority of Palestinian casualties have been armed combatants, as opposed to the vast majority of Israel's dead and wounded, who have been civilians. Moreover, Palestinian fighters routinely position themselves

amongst civilians. The legal term for this illegal tactic is perfidy, and the effect, under international law, is that the Palestinian terrorist groups bear full responsibility for the civilian deaths.

### **Is Israel using excessive force in its response to the violence and terrorism?**

Every nation must protect its citizens from threats to their lives. No nation can acquiesce to a situation in which its citizens are victimised daily by indiscriminate terrorism.

The oft-repeated charge that Israel has used excessive force against innocent Palestinian civilians is a distortion of the truth. Israeli soldiers and civilians alike have had to face thousands of organised, violent and life-threatening attacks by Palestinians, only a small percentage of which have been reported in the media. These attacks have included suicide bombings, shootings, violent riots, lynchings, fire-bombings, roadside ambushes, mortar barrages, and car bombs directed at civilian targets.

Under these difficult conditions, the Israel Defence Forces have acted with the greatest possible restraint, taking action only when inaction by Israel would result in loss of innocent lives in imminent terrorist actions. For example, the Israeli government waited through 18 months of widespread terrorism before launching Operation Defensive Shield in late March 2002, in order to root out terrorists from the crowded Jenin refugee camp and other sites in the West Bank. It also tries to target only those responsible for the violence, and continues to do its utmost to prevent collateral civilian injury or loss of life. The loss of any life, Jewish or Arab, is of course regrettable. In the final analysis, however, responsibility for these casualties lies with the Palestinian Authority, which has initiated the violence and refuses to bring it to an end.

The inaction of the Palestinian Authority in the face of widespread terrorist activity in the areas under its control, coupled with the PA's active support of this violence, have left Israel no alternative but to take the necessary action itself to avert continued terrorism. Therefore, Israel has had to undertake preventive, targeted operations that are designed to bring about a cessation of these lethal threats.

Whenever possible, Israeli operations are directed toward apprehending terrorists and their accomplices, and bringing them to justice. In a small minority of cases, when arrests are impossible and when a clear, specific and imminent terrorist threat must be countered, Israel is forced to carry out other types of preventative operations against these legitimate military targets. All civilised nations would act in a similar fashion given these circumstances.

Israel has been engaged in a situation best defined as an armed conflict. International law in general and the law of armed conflict in particular recognise that individuals who directly take part in hostilities cannot then claim immunity from attack or protection

as innocent civilians. By initiating and participating in armed attacks against Israeli civilians or security personnel, such individuals have designated themselves as combatants in the conflict, and have forfeited such legal protection. By the same token, an individual who becomes a combatant is considered to remain a combatant until hostilities come to an end and not merely during that exact instant when the individual is carrying out or organising an attack. Israel only acts in a manner that is in compliance with the principles and practice of armed conflict, and makes every effort to avoid the involvement of innocent civilians.

Israel has no interest in escalating the violence. On the contrary, it believes it is imperative that the violence ends so that both parties can return to constructive negotiations. Israelis maintain that a just and sustainable solution can be found only through dialogue, not armed conflict. However, the Government of Israel has an indisputable responsibility to protect its citizens. As long as the lives of civilians are being threatened on a daily basis, it has no choice but to react in self-defence.

### **Operation Defensive Shield**

By the end of February 2002, the Israeli population had already suffered through 17 months of continuous Palestinian violence and terrorism. However, nothing could prepare them for the wave of shootings, roadside attacks and incessant suicide bombings that triggered Operation Defensive Shield. During the month of March over 130 Israelis were killed in attacks – the bloodiest month of terrorism in Israeli history. Taken proportionally, 130 Israeli deaths would equal over six thousand Americans killed or more than 400 Australians deaths – double the number of dead in the September 11 attacks and around five times the total number of Australians killed in the Bali bombing.

Operation Defensive Shield was launched in order to counter the extreme escalation in Palestinian terrorism. The Operation's aim was to attack the infrastructure of Palestinian terrorism in all its parts and components. Israel hoped to apprehend as many terrorists as possible, to uncover and destroy arms caches and bomb-making laboratories, and to gather the intelligence necessary to prevent future attacks.

In order to effectively attack the terrorist infrastructure, the Israel Defence Forces [IDF] were forced to operate in densely populated areas, since the terrorists chose to conceal their activities by hiding them in the heart of the civilian population. During the previous 18 months, Israel made every effort to avoid extensive operations in these areas because of the high concentration of civilians. When urban warfare finally became unavoidable, the IDF took maximum care to prevent harm to Palestinian civilians, often risking the lives of its soldiers to do so. Israel employed infantry in house-to-house searches, rather than rely upon heavier weapons which, while protecting the lives of the



*Operation Defensive Shield: Israeli soldiers in Jenin*

soldiers, would have placed Palestinian civilians at greater risk. The high moral standards demonstrated by Israeli soldiers during battle stands in sharp contrast with that of the terrorists, who deliberately chose to hide behind civilian “shields”. Israel paid a heavy price for its principles. During Operation Defensive Shield, 29 IDF soldiers were killed (23 of these in Jenin alone) and 127 were wounded.

In the course of the three-week operation, the IDF succeeded in capturing many wanted terrorists, while others were killed in the fighting. Thousands of guns and rifles were seized, as were large amounts of explosives and other tools of terrorism. Many explosive belts - ready for use by suicide bombers - were found and two dozen bomb-making laboratories were uncovered.

### **The Jenin myth**

Shortly after the battle began, PA spokespersons proclaimed worldwide that Israeli forces had committed a “massacre” in Jenin. The Palestinians originally said that 3,000 civilians had been killed, but gradually reduced their claim to about 500. Within a few weeks, after questions began to be raised in the international media, a high-ranking Fatah official was forced to admit that the death toll numbered only in the dozens. Kadoura Mousa Kadoura, the Director of the northern West Bank for Yasser Arafat’s Fatah movement, told reporters that his own investigation showed that 56 Palestinians had died in Jenin during the operation, a majority of them armed fighters who were killed during combat. The subsequent report by the UN Secretary General, which found no evidence of a massacre, could only verify 52 Palestinian casualties— a far cry from the original claims.

### **The Roadmap Peace Plan**

The most commonly discussed current plan to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the “Roadmap” for peace. It was proposed by the “quartet” of international entities: the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations on April 30, 2003, endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1515 on November 19, 2003, and has been accepted in principle by both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. The principles of the plan were first outlined by US President George W. Bush in a speech on June 24, 2002, in which he called for substantial Palestinian reforms in terms of political democratisation, the establishment of effective law and order and a monopoly

on force, leading to an independent Palestinian state living alongside Israel in peace. Bush was the first US President to explicitly call for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

In exchange for statehood, the Roadmap requires the Palestinian Authority to make democratic reforms, abandon the use of terrorism, and disarm terror groups. According to the plan, the PA is to “undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis” and to dismantle “terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.”

Israel, for its part, must support the emergence of a reformed Palestinian government and stop additional settlement activity in the Gaza Strip and West Bank following the disarming and dismantling of the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure.

The Roadmap comprises three goal-driven phases and had the ultimate goal of ending the conflict as early as 2005, however progress on the ground has so far been partial. As of July 2005 the implementation is still at stage I.

**Phase I** - End to Palestinian violence; Palestinian political and security reforms; Israeli withdrawal and freeze on settlement expansion; Palestinian elections.

**Phase II** - Creation of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders through a process of Israeli-Palestinian engagement, international conference and international monitoring of compliance with the road map

**Phase III** - Second international conference; permanent status agreement and end of conflict; agreement on final borders, clarification of the highly controversial question of the fate of Jerusalem, refugees and settlements; Arab states to agree to peace deals with Israel.

On April 15, 2004, US President George W. Bush offered Israel two assurances about the envisioned peace agreements resulting from the Roadmap – namely that the US position was that in those agreements, 1. Israel would retain major population centres located to the east of the 1949 Armistice line, “in light of new realities on the ground;” and 2. the Palestinian refugees would be allowed to settle in their newly-created state but not in the State of Israel.

### **The death of Arafat and the new Palestinian Authority**

On November 11, 2004, Yasser Arafat passed away in a Paris hospital. Airlifted to the French capital to get treatment for an undisclosed illness, Arafat’s death signalled an end to his four decades as the leader of the Palestinian people.

In January 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected as the new president of the Palestinian Authority. Following his election, Abbas made numerous statements against continuing Palestinian violence, and has also reached an agreement with Hamas and Islamic Jihad for a temporary ceasefire (tahadiya). Recently, however, tensions have

increased between the various Palestinian factions, primarily because of disputes over the results of municipal elections. It remains to be seen whether Abbas can fulfil the Palestinian commitments, under both the Roadmap peace plan and the Oslo accords, to disarming the terrorist groups.

### **Israel's Disengagement Plan**

Hope for the prospects of peace has revived in recent months. The death of Yasser Arafat and the election of his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, have fostered the expectation of a new era in relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Within this context, Israel's Disengagement Plan, introduced in December 2003, should be seen as an important step forward.

Ever since the 1967 Six Day War brought the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under Israel's administration, their status has been in contention. Israel was forced to wage that war in self-defence, and the disputed territories were held not as the object of conquest, but to be part of eventual negotiations for lasting peace.

Although Israel has historic ties, security needs and other vital interests that are directly connected to these disputed territories, it was never Israel's intention to rule over a large Palestinian population. Israel is ready as always to address the vital interests of the Palestinians in these areas. The goal is to reach a just settlement that would allow both peoples to live in genuine peace and security.

Israel demonstrated its willingness to trade land for peace in its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, when it gave back all of the Sinai Peninsula. This decision entailed painful sacrifices, including the dismantlement of the town of Yamit and the uprooting of all the Sinai settlements.

Today Israel is poised to evacuate all settlements from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank, an initiative that will be the first practical test of the possibility for peaceful coexistence with the Palestinian Authority under the new leadership of Mahmoud Abbas. This bold move to end the stalemate in the peace process follows more than four years of terrorist bloodshed that have brought untold suffering to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Preparations for implementing the government's Disengagement Plan, which was endorsed by the Knesset (Israel's Parliament) in October 2004, received a welcome boost at the Sharm el Sheikh Summit in February 2005. At the summit, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and PA Chairman Abbas both declared an end to the violence and formally renewed the dialogue for peace.

The Disengagement Plan does not replace negotiations, but could make an important contribution to the renewal of peace talks as envisaged by the Roadmap sponsored by the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations – provided, of

course, that the PA eliminates the infrastructure of terrorism. It is Israel's view that the direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on the final status will result in the establishment of full peaceful relations between Israel and a Palestinian state.

### **Key provisions of the Disengagement Plan**

The following provisions were approved by the Israeli cabinet on June 6, 2004. Some of the details have been modified in accordance with contacts between Israel and relevant parties, including Egypt, the World Bank, and others.

The Jewish towns and villages to be evacuated are to be classified into four groups:

- Group A: Morag, Netzarim, and Kfar Darom in the Gaza Strip
- Group B: the villages of Ganim, Kadim, Sa-Nur, and Homesh in the northern West Bank
- Group C: the towns and villages of Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip
- Group D: the villages of the northern Gaza Strip (Elei Sinai, Dugit, and Nissanit)

Israel will assist, together with the international community, in improving the transportation infrastructure in the West Bank in order to facilitate the contiguity of Palestinian transportation and facilitate normal Palestinian economic activity in the West Bank.

The building of the anti-terrorist security barrier will continue. The route will take into account humanitarian considerations, in accordance with rulings by Israel's Supreme Court.

### **How can a peaceful resolution be achieved?**

Israel's goal has remained constant: halting the violence, and returning to peace negotiations, in order to achieve a permanent resolution of the conflict. Only negotiation - not violence and terrorism - can ever bring peace.

Israel remains committed to finding a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in general and the Palestinian issue in particular. Israel has already achieved peace agreements with Egypt, its largest neighbour, and with Jordan, with whom Israel shares the longest common border. Since the PLO's declared renunciation of terrorism in 1993, Israel has completed a series of interim agreements with the Palestinians, all meant to move the parties towards a permanent peace between them.

Before the outbreak of the Palestinian violence, Israel and the Palestinians were well advanced in the negotiating process, and Israel had put forward far-reaching compromise proposals in order to achieve a mutually acceptable agreement. Polls show the majority of the Israeli population is again prepared to offer such compromises as part of a final peace, provided only that they can be confident genuine peace will be achieved as a

result. The current Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has repeatedly pledged a willingness to negotiate the establishment of a Palestinian state and other “painful concessions”, including the Disengagement Plan, which will result in Israel’s total disengagement from Gaza and the dismantling of four settlements in the West Bank beginning in August 2005.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian decision to pursue violence rather than negotiation rendered the continuation of these talks impossible.

Today, Israel continues to concentrate its efforts on finding ways to stop the violence in order to return to the negotiating table. Israel calls upon the Palestinians to carry out their obligations under the agreements they signed, to renounce terrorism and rededicate themselves to the pursuit of a negotiated resolution of the conflict. The Palestinian leadership must finally abandon its strategy of violence and terrorism.

Furthermore, the Palestinian leadership has obligated itself, in signed agreements, to renounce terrorism, cooperate with Israel in preventing violence and peacefully negotiate a solution to outstanding issues between the parties. The underpinning of international law rests upon the principle that signed agreements must be respected. The international community must therefore hold the Palestinian leadership accountable for the wholesale violation of their obligations. To sanction such disregard for signed agreements would undermine a fundamental principle of international legitimacy. Now more than ever, it must be clear to all parties in the regional and international arenas that violence and terrorism do not pay.

Israel implores the international community to bring pressure to bear on the Palestinian leadership to end the violence and dismantle terrorist groups. The world community has a very important stake in the outcome of these efforts - primarily because terrorism is a global scourge and should not be rewarded with political gains. If this fundamental principle is disregarded, the stability of the region and the globe will be threatened.

Peace can only be built through dialogue, not unilateral violence. When terrorism is halted and ceases to be a constant threat, talks can resume. It is clear that building peace requires historic compromises on the part of all sides. Israel has already demonstrated its willingness to make far-reaching compromises in the service of peace; now is the time for the Palestinian leadership to do the same.



*Israeli PM Ariel Sharon has pledged “painful concessions” and is the architect of disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank*



## Some suggestions for further reading

### ON THE INTERNET:

<b>AIJAC</b>	Our website allows you to search our past publications and view large amounts of material on recent and historical events.	<a href="http://www.aijac.org.au">www.aijac.org.au</a>
<b>Myths &amp; Facts Online: A Guide to the Arab-Israeli Conflict</b>	Simply your best first port of call for discovering the truth about many of the historical myths often repeated about the conflict. Contains many maps and documents.	<a href="http://www.jsource.org/jsource/myths/mftoc.html">www.jsource.org/jsource/myths/mftoc.html</a>
<b>Palestine Facts</b>	A very useful collection of articles explaining both the history of the conflict and providing background for current events.	<a href="http://www.palestinefacts.org">www.palestinefacts.org</a>
<b>The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs</b>	Contains a large library of reference information on Israel's history, politics, demographics, etc., as well as on the history of the peace process.	<a href="http://www.israel.org/mfa/">www.israel.org/mfa/</a>
<b>Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs</b>	Think tank which publishes both useful longer articles and short issue briefs on history, current events, and important controversies affecting Israel.	<a href="http://www.jcpa.org">www.jcpa.org</a>

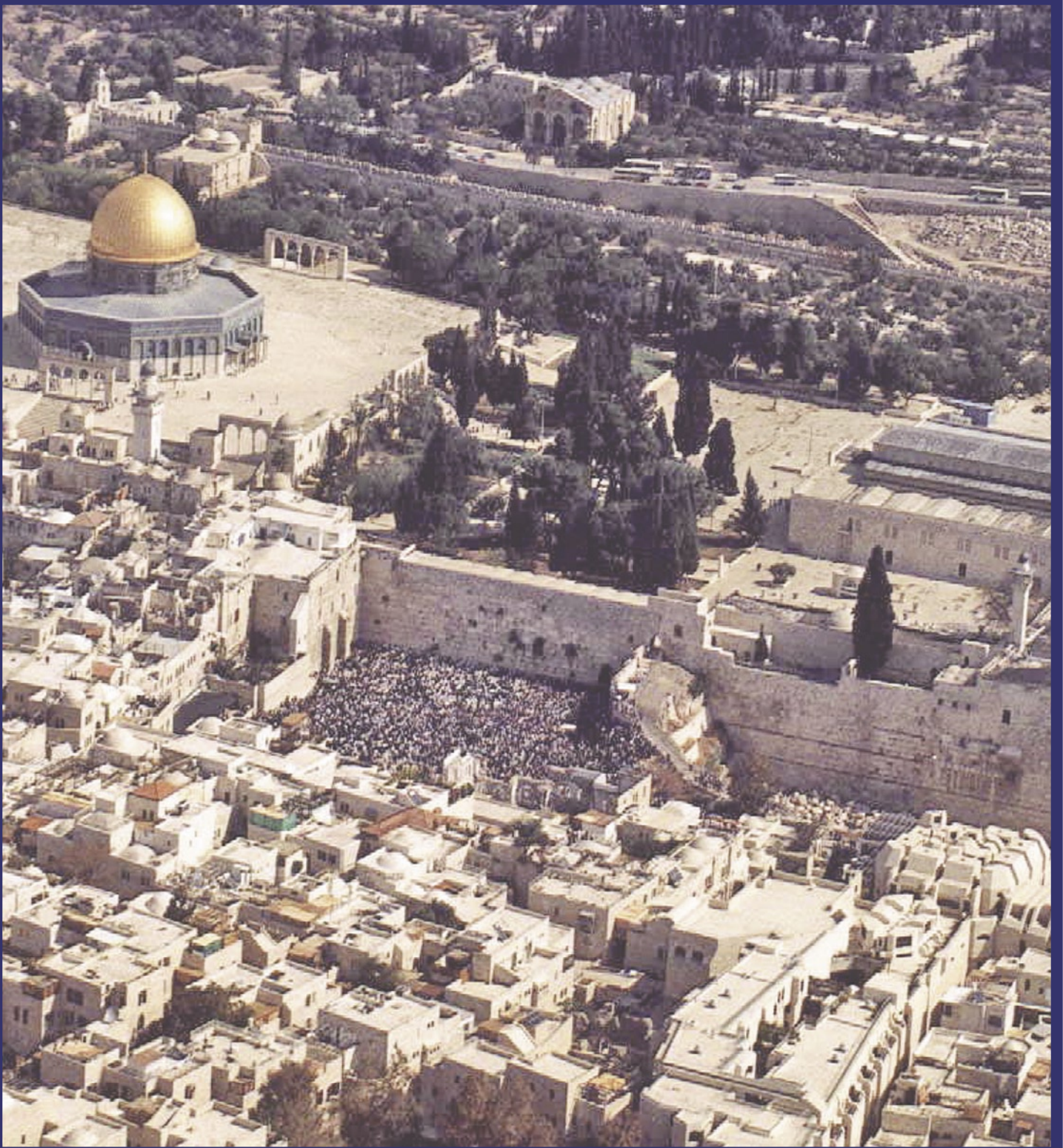
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*For more information or to obtain additional copies of this publication, contact the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), Level 1, 22 Albert Road, South Melbourne 3205. Phone: (03)-9681 6660 Fax (03)-9681 6650. E-mail: [aijac@aijac.org.au](mailto:aijac@aijac.org.au). Or visit our webpage at <http://www.aijac.org.au>.*

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## AN AIJAC PUBLICATION

LEVEL 1, 22 ALBERT ROAD  
SOUTH MELBOURNE VIC. 3205 AUSTRALIA  
TEL: 03 9681 6660 FAX: 03 9681 6650

146 DARLINGHURST ROAD  
SYDNEY NSW 2010 AUSTRALIA  
TEL: 02 9360 5415 FAX: 02 9360 5416

EMAIL: [aijac@aijac.org.au](mailto:aijac@aijac.org.au)  
WEB: [www.aijac.org.au](http://www.aijac.org.au)