

Lihish'tah'weel

The Dystopia principle and the strategic basis for a just peace in Palestine

“Lihish’tah’weel in essence represents a movement for two Rights of Return: for Palestinians to return to places that were stolen from them, for Jews to return to the expansive roots of Jewishness that have been stolen as well, and with equally devastating results.”

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March, 2007

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Introduction: conflict, compassion and clarity

The conflict over Palestine has settled into a kind of dynamic stalemate. The state of Israel pursues a strategy of escalating brutality against Palestinian civilian society. The dominant forces on the Palestinian side oscillate between attacks on civilians in Israel and concessions to Israeli demands. Each side chooses from a limited and predictable menu of responses which do not alter the underlying balance of forces. The dynamics of this brutal standoff are raising the temperature in each society and bringing internal divisions into play. Glimpses of more promising initiatives can be seen on the ground but they are eclipsed by the military/paramilitary players who set the rhythm and pace of the conflict. What follows is an analysis of the factors underlying the stalemate, and an attempt to highlight the possibilities for transforming the strategic landscape. This requires identifying points of leverage in the conflict, identifying how they can be utilized and who is in a position to do so. To be meaningful, such an analysis must also address the perceptions held by people in the conflict that make the idea of a strategic shift appear hopeless. For it to be of use, a lever must be within reach.

The lever that is identified in this analysis I have called ‘Lihish’ta’weel,’ a composite of words meaning ‘transformation’ in Arabic (tahweel) and Hebrew (lihishtaneh). The transformation in question is from a ‘Jewish/Palestinian’ conflict to a struggle for social justice. Neither Palestinian nor Jewish ultimate goals (as expressed in the lives and dreams of ‘ordinary’ people) are well served by the prevailing understandings of the conflict. These ultimate goals, as we shall see below, are not mutually exclusive but mutually dependent. For either people to achieve their goals will require a change in the vision and dynamics of the conflict. This transformation will create the conditions to replace the military-political elite that controls the Israeli state with a leadership capable of ushering in a democratic order in partnership with a newly invigorated Palestinian civil society. This is what will be necessary to deliver the Palestinian and Jewish needs for land rights and safety respectively. This scenario will seem like wishful thinking only because the brutality of this conflict has given it the intractable rhythm of a blood feud, obscuring the cultural and political currents at work that provide the keys to its solution. This paper will introduce tools of analysis to make these currents—and the possibilities they embody—visible.

For a strategic vision to hold water, it must deal—in a forthright manner—with the most contentious dimensions of the conflict: colonial oppression, ethnic displacement, theft of resources, violent targeting of non-combatants, terror tactics, denial of services, the role of international opinion and the legacy of current and past racial victimization of Arabs and Jews. Nothing must be left off the table.

Many of the elements of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are echoed in, and linked to, past and current struggles around the world. The idea that this conflict is completely unique--existing in a world of its own--is a myth that deprives us of necessary perspective. There are, for sure, unique aspects to this conflict. This is true of every conflict. Understanding what is specific to this struggle and what can be learned from other instances of conflict is key to finding the points of pressure that can unlock the creative power of the “ordinary” people whose actions can end the log jam. The case will be made that it is among these people, not in the capitols of the United States and Europe, that the leverage can be found to redefine and redirect this struggle. The interests of the officials in those capitols do not, in any case, correspond to those of the people in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Jenin. Any strategic initiatives with the potential to resolve the conflict must be within the reach of ‘ordinary’ people on the ground.

Every analysis begins with a goal. If I wish to travel to a neighboring city to purchase a pair of shoes and return in time for supper, my analysis must consider the conditions of the roads, the weather, the distance to be traveled, the means of transportation available to me and the amount of money in my wallet. If my goal is to be standing on the moon within twenty years then an entirely different set of variables will come to mind.

The goal of this analysis is to offer a new perspective on some of the puzzling dynamics of the conflict. It is offered with the intention of identifying sources of “traction” that can move the conflict toward a just outcome. A “just” solution does not refer to a compromise between the stated positions of leaders and governments but to an outcome that embraces the ultimate needs of the families, communities and individuals who make up the mass of the population. My commitment to this goal is uncompromising. I have brought up two children. The challenges I have experienced along the way have raised questions about how to fulfill my task of bringing them safely to adulthood. They have never called into question the goal itself. Similarly, injustice, oppression, racism and arbitrary brutality are realities we must come to terms with in order to find the necessary steps toward a peace that leaves no one behind. The question is “*how*” to accomplish that, not “*if*. ” A solution that does not address everyone’s needs is not a viable option.

What if it were suggested that such a solution is possible; that the current dynamic of conflict can be interrupted by realistic strategies that are within reach of activists; that these can result in a realignment of forces that will produce a strategic alliance between the people of Palestine and a significant sector of Israeli Jews--the very people, we have been led to believe, whose needs are irreconcilable and whose hostility is incurable? In what follows I will seek to demonstrate the practicality of this optimistic assessment. I will address the underlying dynamics that, by being misunderstood, have confounded the elaboration of viable strategies. If good ideas alone would solve the conflict it would by now be a distant memory. Any credible effort to bring fresh air into the strategic discussion must counter and address the weight of discouragement borne by those who have wrestled with the issues for many years only to see the brutality grind on. Discouragement reflects the ineffectiveness of the predominant strategies that in turn reflect misunderstandings of the political and cultural geography. Discouragement also leads us to fight hard for half-measures and partial solutions because bolder goals seem out of reach. This report recommends a different approach.

Any discussion of this conflict is as explosive as the conflict itself. There is a natural interest in, and suspicion about, the agenda of any commentator. It is fair, then, that I lay my cards on the table at the outset so that you will understand the intentions and assumptions of this project. I come to this table not as a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs but rather as an participant/observer of social movements and student of social movement strategy. I am a Jewish child of the Puerto Rican anti-colonial movement. As a colonial subject I can readily identify with the victims of colonial occupation and am intimate with its mythologies and justifications. As a Jew and the son of two homelands (one of which is the United States) I do not believe in the inherent evil of any people. Therefore I seek explanations for how we behave, in the histories--real and imagined--that we carry with us and in the conditions of the real world.

This paper will touch upon these histories. They will not prove anything. They are not meant to. They are brought in to illustrate the undercurrents beneath the landscape that can help to explain its seemingly conflicting laws of motion. They represent a skeletal description of the forces that have brought us here. The implications of this rough sketch will be fleshed out in a strategic overview and translated into proposals for actions that could turn the new understandings into power on the street. These proposals will sound like crazy-talk without the third element of this paper: a theoretical framework for understanding the choices that people make under the stress of conflict. It is this framework that allows a fresh look at strategy to move beyond the level of fantasy.

One element of this framework--which runs counter to common assumptions--is that “intractable” hatreds, racist ideologies, rigid positions and seemingly contradictory demands are, in fact, quite fluid. They respond to changing conditions and these conditions are subject to human action. In the Palestine/Israel nexus people--like people everywhere--make the best choices they can see under the circumstances they face. When new options emerge, alignments can change rapidly. If we were to take as given the postures and rhetoric of the moment and attempt to fashion it into a peace program, we would be doomed to failure. The negotiating table only reflects the conditions, balance of forces and perceptions current in the world outside. There is greater potential for flexibility in that outside world than in that negotiating room. Even the best seeds cannot take root in barren soil. It is the soil that requires our attention and that is the focus of this project.

There are three lenses through which this analysis is attempted. The first is compassion. It is commonly feared that recognizing the full humanity of all of the players will deprive us of the

ability to confront people's complicity with structural violence and oppression; that we cannot simultaneously understand people and hold them accountable. If this paper contributes anything, I hope it will be to demonstrate that strategic compassion is indispensable for a clear analysis and that without it we are susceptible to strategic mysticism, racism, "clashes of civilizations," and other absurdities.

The second lens is unsentimentality. This means that we look at history to find out what happened, not to find comfort in stories that will make us--or those we sympathize with--look good. It requires facing ugly truths. The purpose of acknowledging crimes that have been committed is not to build a case for the prosecution but to prescribe with maximum precision the steps we must take to interrupt crimes still in progress. The truth can be a cruel and unsympathetic friend--but it is never an enemy. This goes to the heart of the project. I will seek to demonstrate that no matter how harsh the facts of the case, it is possible to approach it in a way that honors the ultimate interests of all of the peoples involved. This is an unwavering commitment. This attitude, which will seem unduly optimistic to some, allows us to set aside the temptation to shape the facts for our convenience. It proposes that the only hope lies in clarity of vision. It is a process that has generated its share of surprises for this writer.

The third lens is that of political ecology. This is the idea that society resembles an ecosystem more than a chessboard. Any actions taken cause reactions in many directions, some large, some invisible. A gardener can create the conditions for the desired plants to flourish and can continue to monitor and react to the results--but cannot truly control the process. The gardener must above all understand the life cycle of plants, the patterns of rain and sun, and the interlocking fortunes of vegetables, weeds, birds and insects. Even so there will be uninvited guests and unforeseen conditions. Farming is an improvisational process, not the fulfillment of a blueprint. If peace has not come, it is not for lack of blueprints and peace plans. Peace proposals are the seeds that need hospitable soil and sufficient water to grow. This paper suggests an approach--a "diplomacy of action"--intended to prepare the conditions, the soil if you will, that will permit a genuine peace process to take root. This process is what we will call Lihish'ta'weel. It is not a blueprint to stop the conflict but a strategy for transforming it into one that can give birth to a just resolution.

Finally, I must clarify that this paper is about the possibility of achieving peace and justice. It is not about fairness. The struggle for justice is not fair. People die who should not die. Lives are spent striving for things that should be everyone's birthright. In the end, people who should face criminal charges for unspeakable crimes walk free. The burden of making necessary changes, of forcing history onto new paths, does not fall upon those who should bear it, it falls on those who must. The heaviest price is often paid by the wise, the generous or the innocent.

The most unforgivable sin of strategic thinking is self-deception. Whatever short term advantages can be gained by convincing ourselves of falsehoods, it will exact a heavy toll over time. If one side in a conflict has sufficient power to impose its will unilaterally, the consequences of these illusions may be postponed, but the bill eventually comes due. If the balance of forces is not so imbalanced, then the price will be immediate and continual since our choices will be based on unreliable assumptions. What will follow contains some harsh assessments. Unsentimental vision is the most important tool we can apply to secure ultimate safety, peace and healing for the Arab, Jewish and other peoples of the region.

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Making Choices

Crafting crisis

In late 2003, eight months after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, I wrote the following: "The eighty seven billion dollars in public funds approved by the U.S. Congress this fall will be used mostly in a vain attempt to escape a stubborn reality: that the United States has lost its war in Iraq." I suggested that the United States, dazzled by its dreams of power and its unprecedented military superiority had sealed its ultimate defeat by tripping in a common blind spot of the militarily powerful: "a dismissal of the complex cultural experience of ordinary people."¹ That complex experience is the central character of this account.

In 1968 Pakistani revolutionary scholar Eqbal Ahmad was asked to give the principal address at a conference of Arab activists, including some of the leaders of the recently formed coalition, the Palestine Liberation Organization.² The delegates were stunned when Ahmad, a veteran leader of the Algerian revolution, outlined an unexpected analysis of the Palestinian situation. He suggested that the principle task of a liberation movement--whether armed or not--was to "out-legitimize" its opponent. This meant to dramatize the central contradiction in the colonizing society until it can no longer sustain the strain. This is how Gandhi understood the achievement of Indian independence. The Indian movement undermined the self-image of the English people. Their view of themselves as a decent, generous and democratic nation could not withstand the pressure of seeing British troops shooting, brutalizing, imprisoning unarmed civilians for the crimes of collecting salt and weaving cloth. Public support for the occupation collapsed and Britain pulled out rather than risk a deepening internal crisis. At this time Ahmad recommended a parallel strategy for Palestine: "This is a moment to fit ships in Cyprus, fit boats in Lebanon and say, 'We're not going to destroy Israel. That is not our intent. We just want to go home.' Reverse the symbols of the Exodus. See if the Israelis are in a mood to sink some ships. They probably will. Some of us will die. Let us die." He predicted that Israel would be unable to contain the internal pressures that would build up. Ahmad's address was received with the politeness required for a figure of his stature and his words were carried away on the breeze as though they had never been uttered.

This was the era of the rising tide of national liberation movements. The Cuban revolution had triumphed and the United States military had followed France into the unforgiving jungles of Viet Nam. Guerrilla movements were causing tremors through colonial and semi-colonial regimes across Africa, Asia and Latin America. The road of armed struggle was the top item on the menu and it promised great successes to those who embarked upon it. Ahmad would return, along with his protégé, Edward Said, to meet with Palestinian leaders at later turning points in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Each time they would propose equally innovative courses of action. Each time they would be graciously thanked and their ideas ignored.

Given the actual course that history has followed, it is worth taking note of the trajectory of other anti-colonial and secessionist movements. Those conflicts that began as--or were transformed into--racial or religious confrontations between peoples, fueled by a cycle of retaliatory atrocities (Sri Lanka, the Basque country and Ireland as well as Palestine) are still ongoing or were fought to a standstill. Those who effectively highlighted the colonial or racist nature of the conflict and engendered divisions in the opposing civil society (India, Viet Nam, the Portuguese colonies in Africa--Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau--and South Africa) divided the citizenry of the colonizer, isolated their governments, and achieved victory. In the Algerian revolution--which employed both terrorism and guerrilla warfare--the rebellion was defeated militarily by French counterinsurgency but had shifted the center of the struggle to the political arena and succeeded by securing the moral isolation of the French government.

Self Image

Self-image, more than any other factor, determines the choices that each of us makes every day. Our view of ourselves as family or community members, workers or soldiers, devout worshipers, lovers or leaders, is something which we must continually reaffirm through our actions and which we expect to see reflected back to us by the people with whom we interact.

There are two elements to self-image -- whether it be of an individual, a nation, an organization or any other grouping. The first is self-preservation: we must know that we are capable of protecting ourselves, that we have the necessary competence and courage to survive. The second is connection: we believe that we are generous and righteous in our interactions with others, that we contribute to the community of which we are a part. These two imperatives -- self-preservation and group cohesiveness -- govern our social world.

We sometimes fall short of our utopian self-image. When we do, we must justify our shortcomings in order to preserve a flattering image of ourselves. The primary justification for violating the integrity of others is self-preservation-- that our survival is at stake. "I thought my life was in danger" is a defense that permits behaviors otherwise deemed unacceptable. The other

justification is to claim or to believe that we have acted out of concern for others. This can be seen in Bush administration rationales for the invasion of Iraq. Initially it was claimed to be in self defense ("weapons of mass destruction"). When that was discredited, the new rationale was generosity (to establish democracy). The actual reasons were neither of these but the war needed to be framed in one of these two ways in order to flatter the moral self-image of the U.S. people.

This dual self-image applies even in the most extreme cases. The Nazi regime resorted first to the self-preservation instinct: it conjured up the specter of a massive Jewish organization with global reach and evil intentions to justify its racial regimentation. Its invasion of Poland was framed as a preemptive strike to prevent an imminent Polish attack on Germany. Equally important, as an element of Nazi ideology, was that they defined targeted peoples as not being part of humanity. This allowed for extreme measures of cruelty to protect the sanctity of the (now narrowly defined) human community.

Core and Periphery

The core of any system is the component that determines the direction and motions of the system as a whole. To study the behavior of the planets you must understand the forceful presence of the sun at the gravitational center of the solar system.

Arabs experienced the establishment of Israel as one more expression of European colonialism. The core issue was the implantation of a colonial settler state in Arab lands. If we follow Ahmad's thinking, an effective strategy would be one that keeps local and international attention focused on the core issue of colonialism and isolates the colonial regime and its backers. Peripheral issues would be any factors that interact with (and may distract from) that core dynamic. To say that these matters are peripheral is not to suggest that they are unimportant. Such issues can overwhelm the dynamics of a conflict and put the solution to the core issue out of reach. This occurred in Northern Ireland where a nationalist, anti-colonial struggle was diverted into a religious feud characterized by atrocities against non-combatants. In the end, an agreement was imposed that addressed the peripheral issues and left the core ones unresolved.

Expansion and contraction

Human choices are regulated by love and fear. These correspond to the two components of self-image: fear is the mechanism for self-preservation when we are under threat, love for connection with others. Both are necessary for our survival. In general we experience these as a zero sum balance: when we operate from fear our ability to connect is lessened.

Both these forms of response address the need for safety. Connection allows us to lessen potential dangers by strengthening the social networks that sustain us, creating a circle of community that affords safety through peace and mutual support. Fear kicks in when the circle is violated from without or from within.

When a people are not under imminent threat and experience amicable social relations with other communities, they experience a period of social expansion. The circle of community enlarges to include greater numbers of people. A period of social contraction occurs when a threat is perceived and the parameters of who is in your circle of mutual support narrow. It can contract to the size of your nation, your family or even only yourself.

All peoples pass through periods of expansion and contraction in the course of their histories and these periods leave their imprint on their cultures. When faced with a perceived grave threat, people will draw on the traditions that have helped them confront dangers in past times of threat. Times of social expansion will awaken a revival of social and religious traditions from expansive periods in their history. This is natural. When your car breaks down your memory brings up everything you know about car motors. When dear friends are coming to your home, you remember your best recipes. When a stranger breaks down your door you remember where your weapon is kept.

The fear response is physiologically expressed in individuals as the "fight or flight" reflex. It provides the energy to respond to immediate peril. The body's resources are diverted from long-term regeneration and growth and applied to the task of confronting the danger. When neither

fight nor flight seem adequate to address the scale of the threat, our senses are overloaded and we freeze into helpless paralysis. This is known as trauma. Trauma can damage both our capacity to protect ourselves and our ability to connect. Any intimation of a threat can convince us that we are once again experiencing the original attack and that whoever is nearby is the perpetrator. Under the effects of Post Traumatic Stress this reflex is constantly stimulated at a high cost to the body's well being. This can affect any people who have been traumatized and imposes complex challenges to the resolution of core issues.

Which of these responses becomes dominant at any given time is determined not by eloquent theological or ideological debates, but by the lived experience of people. It is difficult for contractive, fear-based ideologies to take hold during an expansive, generous time. Likewise it is hard to find traction for solidarity-based perspectives during a time of social contraction.

These two modes of responding to the world are not equally balanced. People naturally gravitate toward an expansive mode of being. This is the most conducive to making a living, raising children and building community life. Conditions of war do not lend themselves to safe and stable communities.

Deer grazing in the wild will go into a state of full alert at any sign of a threat but will return to relaxed, quiet grazing as soon as the perception of danger has passed. The expansive mode is naturally preferred, but to choose it we must be convinced that it is safe to do so.

Mobilizing for war requires stimulating the fear impulse. Most conflict is instigated out of greed--a malfunction of the self-preservation aspect of human character. The first Crusade in 1095, a violent campaign of conquest and plunder, was motivated by the hunger of an ascendant merchant class for control of Arab and Byzantine trade routes to south and east Asia. It was presented to the European lower classes, however, as a campaign to free the Holy Land from infidels and avenge alleged outrages committed against Christian pilgrims: as an act of self-preservation. Pope Urban II, acting on a request from eastern emperor Alexius Comnenus, placed a divine stamp on the enterprise, providing the moral pretext and even promising direct ascendancy to Heaven to those martyred in battle.

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Colonialism and utopia

The battle over Zionism

The roots of the Mid-east crisis are to be found in Europe. Jewish people there were excluded from land ownership by means of discriminatory laws. We often filled niches in the local economy and government bureaucracy as merchants, tax collectors and other positions that created a buffer between the elite and their subjects. Public dissatisfaction with government could be redirected at the Jewish community, who were the public representatives of the more distant, Christian elites. Pogroms, expulsions, and other forms of harassment and humiliation were directed at all Jews regardless of class, occupation or age.

This function--an ethnic group occupying a buffer position--has been fulfilled elsewhere by ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and Viet Nam, by South Asians in Tanzania and Uganda, and by Koreans in the United States. Sometimes worsening conditions are enough to put intermediary population groups in danger. While different groups have filled this role at times in history it is a particularity of Jewish oppression that it seems to have been a recurring feature of Jewish life over the course of many centuries.

It is worth lingering for a moment on the rise of ultra-nationalism to its pre-eminent position within Zionism. This is a story that is little known to people on either side, given the smoke and mirrors that obscure the pre-history of the conflict.

By the 19th century the European Jewry was divided into three major ideological camps. The religious community organized around the Synagogue; the socialist, anarchist and liberal partisans of the labor movement (where my people are mostly from); and the smaller nationalist movement

(known as Zionism) that advocated the establishment of a Jewish nation as a bulwark against racial oppression. The relations between these currents were complex. Like other nationalist movements, Jewish nationalism overlapped with other right and left wing tendencies in the community. The same people might support socialist labor demonstrations and donate funds to support Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Political and ideological loyalties can shift quickly when conditions demand. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 unleashed a wave of anti-Jewish violence across Russian and its territories. Many Jewish communities--such as Odessa, Ukraine, one of the largest in Europe--that had pursued assimilationist strategies, now shifted in the direction of emigration to Palestine. Even so, converts to the nationalist cause also flocked to the opposition movements agitating for the overthrow of the anti-Jewish Tsar Alexander III and Jews were well represented in the leadership of the Bolshevik Party that overthrew the Tsarist regime in 1917.

As the stream of Jewish emigrants from Europe settling in Palestine grew, so did the debate among Jewish intellectuals over the nature and implications of the settlements. These debates would continue even as the exclusive/colonialist wing of the movement steadily marginalized more moderate tendencies during the early decades of the twentieth century. Jewish arguments against extreme nationalism were summarized in 1929 by prominent Zionist leader Rabbi Judah L. Magnes:

We must once and for all give up ideas of a “Jewish Palestine” in the sense that a Jewish Palestine is to exclude and do away with an Arab Palestine...The fact is that nothing there is possible unless Jews and Arabs work together in peace for the benefit of their common Holy Land. It must be our endeavor first to convince ourselves and then to convince others that Jews and Arabs, Moslems, Christians, and Jews have each as much right there, no more and no less, than the other: equal rights and equal privileges and equal duties. That is practically quite sufficient for all purposes of the Jewish religion, and it is the sole ethical basis of our claims there. Judaism did not begin with Zionism, and if Zionism is not in accord with Judaism, so much the worse for Zionism.³

Already in the 1890s Jewish observers were disturbed by the fanatical tendencies of many settlers. Ukrainian essayist Ahad Ha'am complained after an investigative trip to Palestine in 1891:

...we should be cautious in our dealings with a foreign people among whom we returned to live, to handle these people with love and respect and, needless to say, with justice and good judgment. And what do our brothers do? Exactly the opposite! They were slaves in their diasporas, and suddenly they find themselves with unlimited freedom, wild freedom that only a country like Turkey can offer. This sudden change has planted despotic tendencies in their hearts as always happens to former slaves. They deal with the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, trespass unjustly, beat them shamefully for no sufficient reason, and even boast about their actions. There is no one to stop the flood and put an end to this despicable and dangerous tendency.⁴

Rabbi Magnes again, writing to nationalist leader Chaim Weizmann contrasted his vision to that of the movement's leadership, "The one policy may be termed that of militarist, imperialist, political Zionism; the other that of pacific, international, spiritual Zionism." "Moreover," he added. "A Jewish Home in Palestine built on bayonets and oppression is not worth having, even though it succeed."

What is important to note is that the Jewish nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was as diverse and complex as other nationalist movements. The segment that demanded an ethnically pure state built on the expulsion of the Arab population was one current within Zionism. It is the current that gained ascendancy, in part through the use of violence. Some of this was directed against Jewish critics in Palestine but more against Arab and, eventually, British targets as well. Arab retaliation placed the armed Jewish ultra-nationalists in the role of protectors of the Jewish settlers who now reaped the bitter harvest of anger that the extremists had sown. Jewish critics of this ultra-nationalist trend spoke out, sometimes with heartbreakingly prescience, about a bunker society, perpetually at war, which they predicted would result from the campaign to create an ethnically pure Jewish nation on Arab lands.

The Nationalist movement that organized the establishment and expansion of Jewish settlements in Palestine following the Second World War, included the tattered remnants of all of the disparate Jewish currents, under the domination of the ultra-nationalists. The horrors experienced during the third Reich left the Jewish survivors desperate for a safe haven and in search of a course of action that would protect them from future attacks. As historian Isaac Deutscher described it; “From a burning or sinking ship people jump no matter where--onto a lifeboat, a raft, or a float. The jumping is for them an ‘historic necessity’: and the raft is in a sense the basis of their whole existence.”⁵ That raft was the Nationalist movement with its goal of a homeland in Palestine populated only by Jews. No other Jewish tendency at that time had a program to respond to, or even a framework to explain, the genocidal terror they had just experienced.

The post-war Nationalist initiative took place in a global context of an upsurge in anti-colonial struggles. In the wake of the war, colonialism was out of fashion (but as profitable as ever). The colonial powers moved quickly to reestablish their empires (so necessary to rebuild their own battered economies). In this atmosphere Zionism initiated the establishment of a new nation-state utilizing the practices of colonialism and the language of national liberation.

This, in part, reflected the diverse ideological cross-currents that had become enmeshed in the project. It encompassed reactionaries who had sought to secure Mussolini’s support for an authoritarian Jewish state allied with fascism, as well as idealists who envisioned a homeland of socialist workers’ cooperatives.

It is common to find right and left wing currents coexisting uneasily in emergent nationalist movements. In China, the movement led by Sun Yat Sen in the 1920s gave rise to Mao Tse Tung and Chiang Kai Shek, who would confront each other as leaders of the left and right wings of Chinese society. Likewise, in Viet Nam, the Communist Ho Chi Minh and neo-colonialist Ngo Dinh Diem had been part of the same nationalist upsurge.⁶ In Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Nicaragua, and many other movements, the nationalist organizations and coalitions included elements with diverse visions that would come into conflict as their struggles matured. In my Puerto Rican homeland, the nineteenth century struggle against Spanish colonialism brought together partisans of an independent republic along with those seeking annexation to the United States. The diverse tendencies in a nationalist movement can enter into conflict under a number of conditions, chief among these is the assurance of victory (which sharpens divisions over the nature of the future state) or the likelihood of defeat (which brings questions of strategy to the fore). In the case of Jewish Nationalism these conditions did not develop and the disparate wings of the movement would remain joined together as it pursued an explicitly colonial external program combined with a utopian socialist internal monologue.

Jewish Nationalism and the dystopia principle

At the Zionist convention in Atlantic City in 1944, the program adopted included a demand for the “whole of Palestine, undivided and undiminished” for the Jews and dropped previous references to the existence of an Arab population. It represented the triumph of the militarist, exclusivist tendency in Jewish Nationalism--those who demanded the removal of non-Jews from the territory of a future Jewish homeland. In the following years, as military conflict loomed, Hannah Arendt, perhaps the most prophetic of Zionist critics, foresaw a bleak future for a victorious Israeli state founded on the displacement of the Palestinians:

“The land that would come into being would be something quite other than the dream of world Jewry, Zionist and non-Zionist. The “victorious” Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders, absorbed with physical self-defense to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities.”⁷

Arendt identified a particularly troubling element of Nationalist ideology that would come to play a decisive role in the unfolding of contemporary Israeli identity, “the cynical and deep-rooted conviction that everybody and everything is against the Jews.” She characterized this conviction as “plain racist chauvinism” which contributed to an atmosphere in which Jewish “terrorism and totalitarian methods are silently tolerated and secretly applauded.” This isolationist idea--what we will call the “dystopia principle”—had gained prominence under the leadership of Zionist patriarch

Theodore Herzl. It constitutes a central tenet of the core nationalist ideology that still guides Israeli policy. More than a popular aphorism, we will show that the precept that Jews are uniquely isolated in a hostile world is a key to understanding the laws of motion of the conflict.

The dystopia principle is a vital component of Jewish nationalist self-perception. If I enter the phrase “why does the world hate the Jews?” into an internet search engine I find over six million entries. Some are anti-Semitic tracts but more are Zionist sites. Some answer the question with theological explanations, for others it points to resentment of Jews’ superior morality, for yet others it is an inexplicable human defect. Some Christian sites attribute it to Satan’s anger that the Jewish people produced Jesus. All of them take as a given that the non-Jewish peoples of the world harbor a deep-seated hatred for Jews and ultimately yearn for our extermination.

The strategy for establishing the new state was based on a fantasy narrative of the European colonization of North America. There would be a brutal but brief process of displacing the natives, who would be absorbed into the surrounding Arab countries. Zionism would establish a democratic Jewish utopia, memories of the conflict would fade away to be replaced with more appealing foundation myths, and Israel would take its place in the community of nations. Did not all nations have such skeletons in their closets?

Zionist ideologue Vladimir Jabotinsky articulated the positions of the racialist, authoritarian current which would become the dominant force in the movement. It is worth quoting several excerpts of his writings to shed light on the ideology which has guided disciples from Menachem Begin to Yitzak Shamir to Ariel Sharon. “Natives,” wrote Jabotinsky. “Always struggle obstinately against the colonists--and it is all the same whether they are cultured or uncultured. The comrades in arms of Cortez or Pizarro conducted themselves like brigands... The natives struggled because any kind of colonization anywhere at any time is inadmissible to any native people...(The Arabs) have the precise psychology that we have. They look upon Palestine with the same instinctive love and true fervor that any Aztec looked upon his Mexico or any Sioux upon his prairie. Each people will struggle against colonizers until the last spark of hope that they can avoid the dangers of conquest and colonization is extinguished. The Palestinians will struggle in this way until there is hardly any spark of hope.”⁸

Jabotinsky goes on to insist that colonization must proceed without permitting any agreement to be reached with any Arabs, Palestinian or otherwise, ever, and that there must never be compensation offered or agreed to for the farms, homes, businesses and communities to be seized or destroyed.

Jabotinsky lambastes those who would have moral qualms: “To the hackneyed reproach that this point of view is unethical, I answer, ‘absolutely untrue.’ This is our ethic. There is no other ethic. As long as there is the faintest hope for the Arabs to impede us, they will not sell these hopes--not for any sweet words nor for any tasty morsel, because this is not a rabble but a people, a living people. And no people makes such enormous concessions on such fateful questions, except when there is no hope left, until we have removed every opening visible in the iron wall.”

This is the ideological ship that carried European Jews to the founding of Israel. Not all who rode along could accept the logical implications of their enterprise. For them Jabotinsky had only scorn. Only superior force could bring about the removal of one society for the implantation of another. “This is our Arab policy. To formulate it any other way would be hypocrisy.”

Many other Zionist leaders (Moyshe Dayan, Golda Meir, David Ben Gurion) were just as frank about the colonial nature of their enterprise. They conceded the presence of an established people, terraced hills, thriving towns and farms. The campaign of assassinations, massacres, and forced “transfer” directed by the Nationalist paramilitary organizations and army, were seen as the necessary convulsive moment that would give birth to the new nation. A majority Arab land must be transformed into a majority Jewish land by whatever means necessary.

As tensions rose in Palestine, the nationalist right consolidated its power. In December, 1948 a group of 28 U.S. Jewish intellectuals, including Arendt and Albert Einstein published a letter in the New York Times protesting the visit of ultra-Nationalist leader Menachem Begin to the United States:

Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our time is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the “Freedom Party,” a political party closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was formed out of the membership and following of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization in Palestine.

The current visit of, Menachem Begin, leader of this party, to the United States is obviously calculated to give the impression of American support for his party...⁹

The authors go on to describe the indiscriminate massacre of 240 civilians carried out by Begin's group in the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin. They continue:

The Deir Yassin incident exemplifies the character and actions of the Freedom Party.

Within the Jewish community they have preached an admixture of ultranationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority. Like other Fascist parties they have been used to break strikes, and have themselves pressed for the destruction of free trade unions. In their stead they have proposed corporate unions on the Italian Fascist model.

During the last years of sporadic anti-British violence, the IZL [the paramilitary Irgun, ed.] and Stern groups inaugurated a reign of terror in the Palestine Jewish community. Teachers were beaten up for speaking against them, adults were shot for not letting their children join them. By gangster methods, beatings, window-smashing, and widespread robberies, the terrorists intimidated the population and exacted a heavy tribute.

Documents from the Israeli Defense Forces Archives, analyzed by Haifa University historian Ilan Pappe, illuminate systematic preparation for the planned expulsion of the natives, which belies the official line that the Arab exodus was the unfortunate byproduct of war. Detailed instructions were transmitted to military unit commanders based on several years of researching and mapping targeted villages and neighborhoods. Prescribed tactics included the destruction of public meeting places, sources of sustenance and transportation and the demolition of village housing. Military directives advised planting land mines in the rubble to prevent any chance that the owners would return. The populations were to be removed beyond the borders of the new state. “Plan Dalet,” as it was called by the small planning group headed by Ben Gurion, was carried out over six months in 1948, emptying 513 villages and 11 urban communities of Palestinians.¹⁰

Prominent Nationalist historian Benny Morris meticulously researched the systematic and violent nature of the expulsion but bemoans the fact that the job was left unfinished. He, too, invokes the North American analogy: "Even the great American democracy could not have been created without the annihilation of the Indians. There are cases in which the overall, final good justifies harsh and cruel acts that are committed in the course of history."

Note that for Morris, the displacement of indigenous societies by white colonialists is assumed to be a sign of progress. Morris foresees that conditions permitting the expulsion of all remaining Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories might be ripe in another five to ten years. His public comments signal the return of the vocabulary of racial purification to mainstream Israeli discourse.

For most the most part, the history of what Ben Gurion considered a necessary “revolutionary moment” does not play a part in contemporary Israel’s internal discourse. Even alluding to them is seen as capitulation to Jew-haters. Similarly, the Jewish critics of nationalism from an earlier era have been banished from the collective memory. In Pappe’s words:

“If you look at Israeli textbooks, curricula, media, and political discourse you see how this chapter in Jewish history - the chapter of expulsion, colonization, massacres, rape, and the burning of villages - is totally absent. It is not there. It is replaced by a chapter of heroism, glorious campaigns and amazing stories of moral courage and superiority unheard of in any other histories of people’s liberation in the 20th century. So whenever I speak of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948, we must remember that not just the very terms of “ethnic cleansing” and “expulsion” are totally alien to the community and society from which I come and from where I grew up; the very history of that chapter is either distorted in the recollection of people, or totally absent.”

Defenders of the expulsion point to the absence of a local Palestinian state and to the existence of numerous Arab lands to which the displaced population could relocate to make way for the homeless Jews. The mostly urban, professional leaders of the Zionist movement can perhaps be forgiven their ignorance of mercantile and agrarian society. I doubt that my neighbors in my Puerto Rican mountain community would take well the suggestion that abandoning their communities and family lands would be acceptable because they can always settle in Spanish-speaking Paraguay or Guatemala. No evidence suggests that local societies are any more or less tied to their land and communities for want of a local bureaucracy.

If--in the framework of the dystopia principle--the entire world is fundamentally anti-Jewish, then solidarity with non-Jews is not a real option. All alliances must be tactical, based on calculated interests. This justified the continuation of the familiar European arrangement of offering Jewish services to powerful elites--however distasteful--in exchange for sponsorship. If such arrangements helped one group of anti-Semites at the expense of another, so be it, so long as it furthers the nationalist project. Theodore Herzl offered his movement's services to the Ottoman empire as an "outpost of civilization" in exchange for Palestinian land (while Palestinian communities welcomed Armenian survivors of the Turkish genocide, Zionist leaders offered their backing to the Turkish state). Later Chaim Weizmann suggested that a future Israel, populated by a projected one million Jews, could serve British interests and could "develop the country, bring back civilization to it and form a very effective guard for the Suez canal."¹² During the British occupation, Moyshe Dayan and other Zionist firebrands served in the British police force, helping to repress Arab resistance.¹³ Later they were to arrange French sponsorship in exchange for their assistance combating the Algerian revolution.¹⁴ They secured support from racist politicians and financiers in Rhodesia and S. Africa, appealing to them as fellow beacons of civilization in dark, barbarian lands.¹⁵

The dystopia principle has also provided the rationale for Israeli arms sales and counterinsurgency training to some of the most repressive regimes of our times, including the anti-Jewish dictatorship in Argentina. Israeli military sales and expertise helped to sustain the armies and secret police forces of the Shah of Iran; Mobutu in the Congo; Amin in Uganda; Bokassa in the Central African Republic; Somoza in Nicaragua (accounting for 98% of his arms during the final year of the dictatorship); Haile Selassie in Ethiopia; the Guatemalan dictatorship (including establishment of arms manufacturing in that country and provision of the main computers for both the army and the death squads);¹⁶ the Suharto regime in Indonesia as it pursued genocidal persecution of the East Timorese; and the juntas in Chile and Brazil. Israel defied the international arms embargo on apartheid South Africa, providing counterinsurgency training as well as weaponry, supplying the warships, patrol boats, missiles, tanks, computers, radar bases and gun technology needed to suppress domestic unrest and destabilize neighboring countries.

The Jewish Nationalist program did not question the legitimacy of Arab claims to Palestine, it simply asserted that these claims must give way to Jewish ones. By the time of the declaration of the founding of Israel, Zionism was under the control of its ultra-nationalist, colonialist faction and firmly committed to ethnic displacement as its non-negotiable founding principle. The clash between the core ideological assumptions of the new Nationalist state and the stubborn reality that the Arab residents would not obligingly disappear, set the course for the next sixty years of brutal conflict.

Nothing in this narrative should suggest an endorsement of the Arab regimes of the day. Not all stories figure with visionary, heroic leaders. That should not distract us from recognizing that the exclusivist ambitions of Jewish ultra-nationalism--not the confused, dysfunctional, and often reactionary responses of the Arab states-- set the die for the inevitable violent confrontations which would follow.

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Facts and shadows

Proximate and Ultimate Goals

If I am hungry, I may decide that I want a sandwich. I may want it very badly and will expend significant effort in order to secure one. If I'm unable to find either a sandwich or the means to make one, I could decide to find another way to satisfy my hunger. In other words I am able to abandon my proximate goal--to find a sandwich to eat--in order to achieve my ultimate goal of satisfying my hunger. The Lebanese movement Hizbullah provides a more concrete example. They were able to abandon their original objective of establishing a Lebanese government based on Islamic law when it became clear to them that Lebanese society comprised too delicate a balance of religious/ethnic populations for that to be a viable option.¹⁷ Having concluded this, they determined that their ultimate goal of a renewed and powerful Islamic society would have to be pursued without achieving exclusive control of the state. This resulted in a number of self-reinforcing choices. At the end of the first Israeli occupation of Lebanon, when Hizbullah took possession of the areas formerly controlled by the right wing Christian Southern Lebanese Forces, it prohibited any acts of revenge against its former foes (even those responsible for serious crimes).¹⁸ This marked the beginning of significant Christian electoral support for Hizbullah and a realignment of Lebanese political forces.

Israel cannot make such a shift. The dystopia principle, the conviction that the world is inherently hostile to Jews, dictates that Zionism cannot distinguish between its proximate and ultimate goals. If the whole world hates the Jews, then there is only one conceivable solution to the problem of Jewish safety. There must be a racially regulated nation-state which will guarantee Jewish demographic dominance and which commands permanent military and economic superiority over all of its neighbors. If it were to become clear that this formula does not, in fact, enhance the safety of the Jewish people, there is no plan B. The racialized fortress state is the only strategy imaginable in a world composed entirely of active or latent enemies. Israel's legal system and practices must be structured to guarantee demographic and political dominance by Jews. No neighboring country must be allowed to reach a level of development that could challenge Israeli dominance. Israel's inability (rooted in the dystopia principle) to distinguish proximate from ultimate goals is the key to decoding the laws of motion of this conflict.

The first implication of this observation is that--in a reversal of the common "wisdom"--Palestine has never had a negotiating partner. This is because Israel cannot go into peace talks openly demanding the right to a racially stratified state with military and economic dominance over its neighbors. Such a position would never be acceptable to Arabs or to the rest of the world. If that is my bottom line position, then I can only go to the peace table under the *pretense* of negotiating. Any credible peace agreement would require some concession to the right of Palestinians to pursue their own development and to have control over access to water, the right to build homes, and other necessities within the contested lands. Seen through the lens of the dystopia principle such concessions would pose an "existential threat" to the Israeli nation.

David Ben Gurion put it succinctly in 1948. Discussing the proposed partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs, he said that he would be "satisfied with part of the country, but on the basis of the assumption that after we build up a strong force following the establishment of the state--we will abolish the partition of the country and we will expand to the whole Land of Israel."

This observation also sheds light on a feature of Israeli behavior that has long perplexed even Israel's supporters: each time there is a move toward peace, a concession to Israeli demands, or even the possibility of a concession, Israel immediately goes on the offensive. It accelerates the construction of settlements, assassinates Palestinian activists, closes borders, bombs neighborhoods, attacks a neighboring country or otherwise provokes an eventual Arab response. This has been true even when the agreement in question overwhelmingly favors Israeli public demands. The 2006 massive assault on Gaza came just as the leading Palestinian factions appeared prepared to accept Israel's demand for recognition. Raids on Hizbullah camps in the first days of the ceasefire in Lebanon follow this pattern, but one can look to any past "breakthrough" to observe the same reflexive response. In the closing days of 2006, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met with Palestinian President Abbas and announced some areas of cooperation. The next day Israel announced the establishment of a new settlement on the West Bank. Abbas was left to either break off talks with Israel and be ostracized by the global powers or be shamed before his own people for acquiescing to another Israeli humiliation. Two weeks later the story was repeated when Israeli forces chose to attack the West Bank the day before Prime Minister Olmert's meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak was left to either cancel the meeting or appear

to tacitly endorse the Israeli action.

Past rounds of negotiations have featured western endorsement of Israel's "reasonable" positions and demands for Palestinian "concessions."

Ben Gurion University professor Jeff Halpern describes Israel's approach to the Oslo process:

They never really negotiated with Palestinians. In the Oslo peace accords, it demanded the Palestinians to recognize Israel in 78 percent of the country, but it never recognized the rights of Palestinians. Israel seemed to be negotiating, but doubled the settlements in that period...That's why the second intifada came out, because Palestinians said 'What is this? We are sitting for seven years to talk to you, now there were twice the settlements than the beginning of the peace process.'¹⁹

Palestinian negotiators of various persuasions have regularly acceded to what amounted to terms of surrender in order to halt the construction of settlements and secure a commitment to discuss their issues at an undefined future date. Each such moment has immediately given rise to major violations of Israeli commitments under the latest agreement, followed by calls for further Palestinian concessions.

In the Crosshairs

The tenacity of Arab civil society is a problem that has confounded Israel from the outset. Increasing the pressure on the civilian Arab population by Israel has been at the heart of Nationalist strategy since the inception of the state. The point here is not to make the case that Israel has done mean things, or even to demonstrate that these were strategically designed. Such discussions can be pursued elsewhere. Our concern is to understand why this Israeli strategy makes sense within the ideological framework of the Nationalist political-military elite and how it is made sense of by the rest of Israeli and Jewish society. Understanding the logic behind this policy is a necessary step toward a solution that will assure peace and safety for both peoples.

The founding scenario of the Jewish Nationalist state called for the "transfer" of the Arab population in order to permit the establishment of a majority-Jewish territory. It has been the source of frustrated Israeli rage that the Zionist dream is thwarted by the simple refusal by Palestinians to disappear. The Palestinian civilian population must be persuaded to leave in order for the Zionist program to be consummated, and it is to secure their departure that policy has been constructed. The index of Palestinian suffering has been ratcheted upward as each new level of repression has failed to break their tenacity. It has now reached the extreme of sealing Gaza off from access to the necessities of life and launching indiscriminate missile and air attacks against this densely populated area.

Another feature of Israeli policy has been to cripple or destroy any Palestinian leadership that might be a counterpart in negotiations (even asserting the right to assassinate elected officials at will). If you are in conflict with an opposing force that you cannot defeat outright, you must ultimately come to an agreement with the leadership on the other side. Any agreement with the Palestinians, however, would pose an unacceptable threat to the uncompromising Zionist vision. Palestinian people must be removed, not accommodated. Palestinian civil society must be convinced that the price of remaining is too great to bear and the world must be convinced that Palestinians have no legitimate leaders. This explains the bizarre spectacle of the accommodationist Yasser Arafat, besieged in his office, being vilified for "allowing" terrorist attacks (after Israel had destroyed the Palestinian Authority police force and administrative centers which would have been needed in order to comply). Since Arafat was demonstrably more interested in constructing a stable patronage administration with access to the Israeli economy, it seems that the siege was meant to marginalize the only Palestinian public figure with an electoral mandate. A similar course was pursued by Prime Minister Sharon to undermine the Mahmoud Abbas administration that followed. It has since played out in the Israeli and US creation and funding of an Abbas "government" to replace the elected Hamas administration of the Palestinian Authority.

This Israeli strategy finds current expression in the demand that Palestine's leaders recognize

Israel's "right to exist." On the face of it this sounds reasonable. But what Palestinians are being asked to recognize is the legitimacy of Israel as a racial state with legally guaranteed Jewish hegemony. In effect this would require the Palestinians to abandon their central demand of the right of Palestinian return, in order to be allowed to speak to Israel. In the real world of political and military conflict, it has never been necessary to endorse the right of an adversary to exist--only to recognize that they *do* exist. The United States never recognized the right of the Soviet Union to exist, but that did not prevent negotiations, the signing of binding agreements or the maintenance of multiple channels of communication. In instances of separatist movements, recognition is the product of, not the prerequisite for, negotiations. This unique requirement amounts to a demand for surrender as a precondition for negotiation.

A symmetrical Palestinian response might be to accept Israel's demand in exchange for Israeli acceptance of the internationally recognized Palestinian right of return. It would say, in effect, "we will recognize Israel, but the Israel we can recognize is one that respects international norms, acknowledging our right to what was illegally taken from us." This would put two core issues on the table (albeit mutually exclusive ones), establishing a real basis for negotiations and requiring the true meanings of these positions to be made transparent.

It should be noted that the Israeli strategy of targeting civilian Palestinians is not a response to either terrorist attacks (which it pre-dates) or anti-Jewish racism. These are both serious factors whose impact on the conflict will be analyzed below. They do not, however, explain the origin or trajectory of Jewish Nationalist policy. Creating conditions to force the Palestinians to leave has been at the center of Jewish Nationalist policy since before the establishment of the Israeli state.

The idea of a calculated program of ethnic expulsion does not fit comfortably in the self-image of Israel's Jewish civil society. Liberal Jews, raised with the sanitized creation myth of the nation, for the most part concede that there was some "excess" in the struggle to bring a Jewish homeland into being. But that was then and this is now. Today--they insist--Israel has become a struggling humanist democracy that only wants to coexist with its intransigent neighbors. The problem with this self-flattering view is that there is no evidence--reflected in the actual practice of the state--that there has ever been a rupture with the extreme nationalist goals articulated by the founders. In fact Israel has been on an increasingly authoritarian trajectory. The revelation in November, 2006, that 39% of land under the Jewish settlements in the "occupied territories" is, even under current Israeli law, privately owned Palestinian property, suggests that legal niceties continue to be trumped by the imperatives of expansion and demographic dominance.

Critics of Israel (including Nelson Mandela and other veterans of the South African struggle) have often compared Israel's system of racial regulation to that of S. Africa under the apartheid system. The parallels are indeed striking; although Israeli measures to reduce its dependency on Palestinian labor has begun to alter this equation. Apartheid was a system to control African labor and land. The sham African "homelands" (known as Bantustans) absolved the state of responsibility for providing social services to a population which was nonetheless dependent on low-wage jobs in S. African industries.

The current trajectory of Israeli Nationalist policy features increasing emphasis on land acquisition and an effort free Israel from dependence on Palestinian labor. Up until the early 1980s, large numbers of Palestinians in the "occupied territories" worked at temporary, low wage jobs in Israel. Their wages were taxed at rates up to 20% despite their ineligibility for most social services. Following the first Intifada, Israel began importing workers from South and Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. "They were brought by labor-hire firms set up in Thailand, the Philippines, and Romania, with employers taking their passports on arrival, employing them in very poor conditions and often withholding pay. They formed an ideal reserve army of labor, as they could easily be deported to their home countries on charges of being in Israel illegally."²⁰ Whereas in 1992 33% of the Palestinian labor force was employed in Israel, by 1996 the number had plummeted to 6%. Income from work in Israel dropped over the same period from 25% of Palestinian GNP to 6%.

Importantly, this meant that the Palestinians could be subjected to arbitrary border closings, increased repression and even bombardment without seriously impacting Israeli businesses. The

“disengagement” from Gaza was a chilling extension of this policy by limiting the danger of accidentally hitting Jewish targets. Several years ago Israeli playwright and novelist A.B. Kenosha described to a newspaper his prophetic vision of Gaza’s future:

After we take out the settlements...we would use force against the entire population, use force in a total manner...We would cut off the electricity in Gaza. We would stop fuel supply to Gaza...It won’t be a desirable war, but definitely a purifying one.²¹

This separation of the Israeli economy from Palestinian labor also renders the strike ineffective as a tactic of resistance. Frustrating Palestinian ability to confront Israel through direct civic confrontation has contributed to shifting the struggle (between the time of the first Intifada and the second) increasingly onto the military plane.

The philosophy of racial separation finds its ultimate expression in the wall. This fortified barrier, complete with guard towers and machine gun emplacements, follows a circuitous route that bears no relation to municipal boundaries or topological features of the land. It only makes sense when superimposed on a map of the aquifers that underlie the territories. The water resources (crucial to the viability of any society in this dry region) are neatly incorporated into the new lands annexed by the Israeli wall.²²

The full-spectrum concept of Israeli security is illustrated by a bizarre operation that took place in 1998 during its earlier occupation of Lebanon, when the occupying force removed thousands of tons of topsoil from the Litani River basin to be trucked to Israel and spread on Jewish farms in obvious violation of legal norms.²³

To acknowledge the strategic nature of Israeli anti-civilian policies is to go against a powerful consensus in international diplomatic and media circles. The misconception that Israeli atrocities are aberrations in an otherwise moral policy is widely held, especially in the United States where access to information on the region is constrained by a timid intellectual class. It must be stated again that it does no one a favor to soften the reality of Israel’s brutal policies. Understanding the strategic nature of Nationalist brutality does not endanger Jews. It is absolutely necessary for finding a solution that addresses the ultimate aspirations of both peoples.

Jewish self-image and Nationalism

The refusal of the Palestinians to disappear is the obstacle on the road to the Zionist vision. This is a strategic reality about which the Zionist elite has always been very clear. From their perspective any opposition to that dream is a danger to the existence of Israel. The policies that this logic engenders have turned the occupied territories into one of the most inhospitable environments in the world. Around 10,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli prisons, often without any prospect for a trial.²⁴ The routines of the occupation include raids, curfews, random shootings, the detention of ambulances en route to hospitals, cutoffs of social services, closing of borders, bulldozing of homes (of people related to those “suspected” of being “terrorists”), destruction of olive groves, denial of permits for construction or well-digging, and other arbitrary measures creates a climate of desperation. This is further exacerbated by the periodic invasions and missile and bomb attacks against neighborhoods.

Israeli anthropologist Jeff Halpern describes how all of this plays out in a world that most Israelis are barely aware of. The systematic separation of Jewish Israelis from Arabs produces a “cognitive membrane” within which Jews live in the illusory bubble of a Jewish nation. “Porous and transparent, the membrane has the effect of turning everything “Arab” into mere background. Driving down the highway we may “see” Palestinian villages or towns in distance, but we have no idea -- or interest -- in their names or who lives there.” Relationships are impersonal, perfunctory and based on a shared understanding of Israeli privilege and power.

Referring to the Israeli public, Ha’Aretz writer Gideon Levy commented to an interviewer, “If they really knew how cruel the occupation is, they could not live with themselves.” He added ruefully, “They don’t want to know.”²⁵

Maintaining Israel’s positive self-image in the face of such harsh measures requires a versatile

ideological toolbox. A number of explanations are offered which are mutually contradictory but which appeal to different sectors of the community. On the one hand, the brutality is denied outright while at the same time it is justified as self-defense.

The massacre of Palestinians refugees in the Beirut camps of Sabra and Shatila was viewed as a tragedy and an atrocity in the Arab world and even in the West but mostly as a public relations failure by the Israeli government. London Independent reporter Robert Fisk describes:

They surrounded Beirut. In three months, 17,500 people, almost all of them civilians, were killed. I saw many thousands of their bodies. Then came the massacre of Sabra and Shatila by Israel's own allies, as the camp was surrounded by Israeli troops. And they desperately said, "What went wrong?" It was concluded that the problem was, it wasn't good enough public relations.²⁶

The camps were populated with the families of PLO fighters who had been forced out of Beirut at the end of an extended siege (does anyone else remember that the U.S. had agreed to guarantee their safety?). Following the massacre (for which then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon would later be indicted by the Belgian courts), Israel retooled and reinforced its public relations machinery. The propaganda dimension of policy has been increasingly prioritized, with its prime targets being the Israeli and US publics.

University of Texas journalism professor Robert Jensen:

After the public relations disaster of Lebanon, Israel decided to set up permanent institutional structures to control how Americans would think about the Middle East. In 1983, Israel launched the Hasbara Project, the aim of which was to ensure good press in the U.S. media. The goal was to train Israeli diplomats in communications and public relations. For example, they trained press officers in Israeli consulates in the U.S. to ensure that American journalists would write stories favorable to Israel. As one of these press officers said in the 1980s, he had breakfast, lunch and dinner with journalists and that a typical day would involve conversations with producers at leading news and TV talk shows about the content of the program. He described it as, in fact, a "joint formulation of ideas."²⁷

The military-political elite of Israel (increasingly dominated by the military), guides policy in accordance to a core ultra-nationalist ideology which has not fundamentally changed since the days of Ben Gurion. The Israeli Jewish population on the other hand, clings tenaciously to the utopian self-image of a people hated and persecuted for no good reason. If harsh measures must be employed in self-defense--it is reasoned--this is a circumstance forced upon them by the hatred to which they are subjected as Jews. The conflict with Palestinians and Arab neighbors is simply--in this view--a continuation of earlier battles against Nazis and all the hostile forces arrayed against the Jewish people. A large percentage of the population believes the fable that the exodus of 1948 resulted from the Palestinians' stubborn unwillingness to co-exist with Jews and that "we begged them to stay." No historians make this claim anymore but it retains broad appeal. This narrative coexists uncomfortably with the contradictory story that Israel was established on "a land without people for a people without land." Seen from this vantage point, the endless accusations of Israeli cruelty against civilians in the West Bank and Gaza are merely a seamless continuation of anti-Jewish propaganda stretching back centuries: then they said we killed babies for rituals, now they say we bomb and starve them. When will it end?

Massive, disproportionate responses are accepted as necessary to demonstrate to opponents that any resistance is counterproductive. The July, 2006 assault on Lebanon is illustrative. The destruction of the nation's energy, transportation, commercial and health care infrastructure fit into Ben-Gurion's concept of perpetual conflict to prevent viable Arab nations from achieving stability. Israeli military officials stated openly that destroying civilian infrastructure was intended to convince the people to reject Hizbullah and pressure their government to make concessions. They also proclaimed all civilians in the south to be legitimate targets: the Israeli government had ordered them to leave and therefore those who remained were supporters of Hizbullah. Setting aside the fact that Israel's air force targeted fleeing civilians, making evacuation difficult, there is

no legal basis for turning civilians into military targets based on their political sympathies. The Israeli attack featured the demolition of infrastructure as outlined above as well as aerial attacks on refugee convoys, ambulances, hospitals, fishing fleets, the Jiyyeh Power electric power plant (causing a 15000 ton oil spill along the coast), UN personnel, funeral processions and the bombing of villages and urban neighborhoods across the country. There appears to have been no correlation between these attacks and the presence or absence of Hizbulah forces.²⁸

The official response to each revelation is for Israeli diplomats to assure the television audience that Israel leads the world in its efforts to protect civilians, using only precision weaponry targeted with utmost care. This is difficult to reconcile with the fact that 80-90% of the resulting deaths were of civilians and is explained away as the result of occasional errors and Hizbulah entrapping. The most revealing statement is the repeated reassurance that “unlike the terrorists, Israel does not target innocent civilians.” These carefully chosen words should be taken seriously. The core Zionist ideology does not, in practice, acknowledge “innocent” Arab civilians as a legitimate category. From the perspective of the ultra-nationalist military-political elite, it is that very group that is the greatest threat to the existence of the state of Israel and therefore is a legitimate target for attack under the doctrine of self-defense. The dropping of up to half a million cluster bombs in the last 48 hours before the ceasefire in Lebanon could serve no legitimate military objective unless the civilian population is understood to be the enemy.

While disproportionate response fits into a strategic military paradigm for leaders of the state, for the public it fits into the traumatized logic of the abuse victim. It was widely seen as reasonable to respond to the capture of two soldiers by a Hamas faction in June, 2006, by destroying Gaza’s government buildings, arresting officials, leveling the water and electrical distribution systems, locking down the boundaries, cutting off food and medicine to the entire population and killing hundreds of civilians, many of them children. Members of the public expressed the conviction that Israel was helpless to respond otherwise.

On the menu: Zionism and Jihad

The European Jewish survivors of World War Two had come through an experience of systematic dehumanization and genocide inconceivable in its scale. The machinery of modern technology had been employed to wipe a large and rich culture off the face of the continent through the mechanism of mass murder. Nazi racism had reached into every corner and community of occupied Europe, enabling and enforcing a culture of complicity with genocide. The menu of offerings survivors could choose from as a people, which would permit them to recover and renew their tattered lives, was pretty thin.

Zionism was attractive because it was the option that most resembled a weapon. Nazism had systematically stripped Jewish communities of rights, choices, and self-governance to the point that local leadership was rendered ineffective as a locus for resistance. While Jewish clandestine resistance would develop, it could not prevent the consolidation of Fascist power across Europe and the enslavement and genocide that would follow. Following the Zionist star to Palestine, the survivors were determined to fight any fight that would secure for the Jewish people a place safe from future persecution.

To the Arab residents of Palestine, Jewish immigration under Zionist auspices was simply the latest European colonial intrusion. Like any nationalist resistance, the Arab coalition included (and includes) a wide range of class, ideological and religious currents. One of the features of nationalism is that it subsumes class, regional, gender, and sectoral interests under the banner of national identity. Resistance (unless channeled in another direction by an ideological leadership), tends to reflect the nature of the assault that brings it into being. If the intrusion is a racial assault across class lines, then the resistance will seek unity among all those in the targeted racial group. If the local, indigenous elite sides with the colonialists, then the struggle takes on a class nature that divides the society internally. The Jewish nationalism that Arab society confronted was a unified coalition of Jews across class and ideological lines united to expel the Arab population without distinction. The resistance would therefore take the form of a pan-Arab nationalist movement to expel the intruders.

Victories and defeats define the political menu more than any other events. The 1967 war was to

re-define the perceived choices for a number of important constituencies. The Israeli defeat of the Arab armies discredited Arab nationalism in the eyes of a younger Arab generation. Disillusioned by an ideology that had given rise to corrupt and inept regimes, they began a turn to the Islamist movement, which had withstood the corrupting influences of western commercialism and immorality.²⁹ The same events spurred the ascendancy of the religious Zionist current that would overtake the secular nationalism that had guided the founding of Israel. Orthodox Jews dropped their theological opposition to ultra-nationalism, choosing to interpret Israel's victory (and its occupation of the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria) as a sign of God's support and an indication of the messianic era.³⁰ This current became the core of the movement to build Jewish settlements in the newly occupied territories.

Outside of the region, the war catalyzed a political shift in the Jewish Diaspora in Israel's favor. Previously, the Nationalist project had enjoyed the support of less than half of the world Jewish population, who tended to view it as a dumping ground for helpless refugees. Among U.S. Jews it represented a turn to the right and the beginning of fissures in the traditional Jewish alliance with the African American human and civil rights struggle.³¹ Sympathy with the colonized Palestinians on the part U.S. people of color clashed with mainstream Jewish support for the colonizing state of Israel. At the same time the United States came to appreciate Israel as a military asset that could be of use in counterinsurgency operations throughout the world.³²

The Jihadist wing of the Islamist movement came of age with the war to expel the Soviet army from Afghanistan. Thirty five thousand volunteers were recruited in a worldwide campaign orchestrated by the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and funneled through the training camps of al Qaeda. The defeat of the Soviets gave these young Jihadists a sweet taste of victory. Jihadi warriors left for other fronts (often their home countries) ready to continue the struggle.

The "lessons" learned from military conflicts are most often framed in simplistically military terms. The shadows cast by blazing experiences can obscure underlying complexities. This is illustrated by the victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959 which inspired a generation of young Latin American revolutionaries to initiate ill-fated guerrilla operations in their home countries based on a misreading of Cuba's experience. Studying only the rural guerrilla war, they took little notice of the urban popular movements and overall configuration of social forces that had made that victory possible.

Convinced that the Afghan experience could be replicated, the veterans of the campaign launched disastrous insurrections in Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These went down to defeat in the face of brutal repression, in large part because the Islamic public was repelled by the shocking atrocities carried out in the name of Islamic renewal. This experience would inform the scathing critiques of al-Qaeda by Egyptian Jihadist leaders (some of them from prison cells) in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States. The obsession with military conflict, they argued, resulted in distortion of Muslim moral principles and violation of strategic ones by uniting Islam's enemies and dividing its own supporters rather than the reverse. The flood of Jihadist volunteers with which Bin Laden had expected to confront the U.S. never materialized and al-Qaeda found itself on the run, increasingly isolated and marginalized within the movement.³³

Hitler's footprints

The legacy of European Fascism casts a long shadow across the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Nazi onslaught has been treated as a great anomaly in history: something so uniquely evil that it defies understanding. This mystification has obscured important lessons. The first thing to understand about Nazism is that it was colonialism. Shut out of the colonial scramble, the Nazi movement (like the German nationalism of the first world war) attempted belatedly to build an empire at the expense of its rivals. More shocking, it did so on their home territories. This is one of the dirty secrets of WWII history and one of the two reasons that Nazism is remembered as a diabolical crime that defies historical analysis: it imposed the norms of colonial conquest upon the powerful nations that were accustomed to being its perpetrators. The brutality it imposed upon the subjugated peoples of Europe was not greatly different than that imposed by those same European nations on their subjects around the world--particularly during the early, conquering phase of their colonial occupations. The Nazis, in short, treated the "civilized" Europeans as though they were mere Kenyans or Yemenis or Cambodians.

The other outstanding feature of Nazism is the holocaust: the calculated, factory-efficient genocide against the Jewish (as the primary target) as well as other “inferior races.” The fanatical hatreds of the Nazis combined here with a cold pragmatism: the holocaust was about land. From its earliest days the movement that Hitler led was obsessed with the territorial limits of Germany and the growing needs of an Aryan race that they believed was destined to rule the world. Removal of Jews from the wide swath of land known as the “Jewish Pale of Settlement” was a central tenet in the Nazi program.³⁴ The genocide that they called the “final solution” was instituted after efforts to pursue a number of resettlement schemes, particularly to Russia, had failed to prove viable. Fear of a hostile Jewish territory close to German borders was an important consideration in selecting the path of mass murder over transfer.

It is customary for the various contenders in the Middle East to accuse each other of having collaborated with the Nazis. Many of these accusations are accurate. To many nationalists around the world, the gathering conflict in Europe appeared as a family feud among colonial powers. Allying with one or another faction was understood as a tactical maneuver in the pursuit of freedom from the colonial yoke. The brazen racism of the Nazis was distasteful, but so was that of Britain, France, Holland, and Belgium (which had killed over 10 million Congolese at the dawn of the century). When Britain ejected Italian forces from the horn of Africa, they kept the Fascist racial laws in place, since rescinding them would send the wrong message to Britain’s own colonial subjects.³⁵ The brutal enforcement of European racial superiority in the colonial world has left deep scars that still play out in news headlines today (the citizens of the great powers, generally incurious about their the details of their global histories, are chronically puzzled that the victimized peoples don’t just “get over it”). The policies enforced by the Allied powers in hundreds of occupied territories spanning all of Africa and most of Asia and Oceania, did not endear them to the awakening nationalist movements of the colonies. The commander of British forces in Burma in 1942 estimated that 10% of the population was pro-British, 10% pro-Japanese and 80% indifferent or likely to back whomever was winning.³⁶

Both Jewish and Arab nationalists flirted at one time or another with the fascists, as did leaders and factions in nationalist movements and governments in India, South East Asia, Argentina, Ireland, and the Caribbean. For some this represented ideological affinity and for others opportunism. Right wing Zionists who identified with the racial purity and authoritarianism of fascism offered to build an authoritarian Jewish state allied with the Nazis. Others sought to take advantage of the Nazi desire to expel Jews from Europe in order to gain traction for a Zionist state. The Nazi occupation of North Africa provided ample opportunity for their close contact with nationalist Arab officers. Some of these played all sides, negotiating with all of the contending powers. Nazi control over Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and other territories resulted in the construction of over 100 labor camps throughout the region and harsh, often lethal punishment for anyone caught harboring enemies of the Reich. Collaboration with the occupiers and heroic rescue activities by the local populations both played out in the Arab lands as they did in European areas under Nazi control. The belligerent powers on both sides were eager to make insincere promises of postwar aid and independence to Arab nationalists who would support their side during the war. In some cases the connections were seen as purely tactical and others (both among Jewish and Arab ultra-nationalists) reflected the appeal of the Fascist racial and authoritarian worldview.

Israel’s empty mirror

Perception is a matter strategic magnitude. None of us act--in any pure sense--on the basis of our own interests. We act according to our *perception* of those interests. Our perception may be an accurate approximation of what is happening around us. We may also have a distorted view as a result of distraction, past trauma, outdated assumptions or deliberate efforts to confuse us. It is commonplace for us to confuse other people in order to get them to make choices that benefit us.

Ensuring continued popular support for Israel’s ultra-nationalist policies requires framing them in a manner which preserves Israeli Jews’ self image as innocent victims who must defend themselves (as any reasonable people must). The public must be ideologically inoculated against information that would threaten their support for the nation’s leadership. In labor organizing “inoculation” is the name of a practice used to prepare workers for the tactics they will encounter

from the other side. If an organizing campaign is experiencing success, it can be expected that management will begin to improve the working conditions and even increase wages in order to undermine arguments that a union is needed, while at the same time attempting to fire or force out the most effective leaders. Inoculation means explaining the likely form and purpose of management tactics in order that workers will see them as an attempt to trick them into surrendering their power. In Israel, inoculation is used to insulate its people against threats to the Nationalist consensus.

Here's an illustration of ultra-nationalist inoculation. "There are no Arab 'moderates,' declares the web site of *The Jewish Task Force*. "The universal goal of the Arab world is the destruction of America, Israel and western civilization. The clever Arabs who pretend to be 'moderate' when speaking to naïve Christians and Jews are far more dangerous than the less clever Arabs who honestly and openly proclaim their Nazi genocidal goals."³⁷

The group Masada 2000 maintains an online database (complete with photos and contact information) on 7,000 individuals whom they have labeled "self-hating Jews." This peculiar phrase refers to Jewish people who are not in support of the Israeli colonial project or the policies of racial stratification and expulsion that it engenders. This includes people who are not even anti-Zionist but are merely critical of its most extreme practices.³⁸

International institutions, human rights groups and observers fare no better. The Israeli government response to outside criticism is to declare that "the source is suspect." The United Nations and other outside bodies are seen as hostile to Israel and therefore their opinions are inherently tainted.

The dystopia principle brings into being a sealed, self-referential ideological system in which the world hates the Jews, outside critics are enemies (or their dupes), internal critics hate themselves (and by extension, all Jews), Arabs who seek peace are the most dangerous kind and any Israeli action, be it repression, aggression or seizure of resources, is a form of self defense. Within this protective cocoon, the public (across most of the political spectrum) seethes at being cast as the bad guys by an uncomprehending world.

Self-image is reinforced each day by the people with whom we interact. The reflection of ourselves in the mirror of others helps to inform us as to who we are in the world. In a world in which any unflattering reflection is, by definition, false, Israeli society is deprived of the mirror on which most peoples rely in their interactions with the rest of the world.

Palestine's clouded window

Failure to grasp the significance of peripheral issues can interfere with our ability to address core issues. The dystopia principle and the empty mirror cause Israelis to seek peace and security within the dysfunctional framework of a racially stratified legal system and regional military domination. In other words they are paralyzed by an inability to understand the reality and trajectory of Israeli society itself.

In a peculiar asymmetry, Palestine's strategic weakness also stems from a misunderstanding of Israel. It is fair to say that the implantation of a colonial settler state in an already inhabited territory is the core issue around which the conflict revolves. However to view it as just another instance of European colonialism is a serious mistake. What makes the specific differences in the Israeli case significant is that the resulting cultural organism is not susceptible to anti-colonial strategies that have worked in other places.

In a 2005 report, Israeli counter-insurgency expert Avi Kober examines the nature of the military conflict in terms of the Blitzkrieg strategy originally favored by Israel (this is the label used by Israeli strategists!) and the war of attrition that has in fact evolved. Israeli planners originally shared the assumption of Egypt's Gamal Abdul-Nasser (and later, Hezbollah's Sheik Hassan Nasrallah) that Israeli morale would not be able to withstand an extended war of attrition--a strategy which emphasizes inflicting casualties and fostering uncertainty over a long period to wear down the will to resist, rather than seeking a swift, decisive victory. What Kober finds, after examining the periods of intense conflict, is that morale (and along with it, support for the military) increases in Israel during periods of attack, whether in the form of concerted action or

low intensity attrition.³⁹ The historic self image of innocent victimhood and the reality of having no place else to go (in a hostile, dystopian world) means that escalations in violence result in a strengthening, not a weakening of Israeli cohesion. Even if Hizbulah had made good on its threat to make Tel Aviv look like Beirut, it would not have weakened Israeli public resolve any more than the Israeli invasion of Lebanon weakened support for Hizbulah. The lack of a ‘fatherland’ to which to retreat (as well as the particularities of pre-Israel Jewish history) distinguishes the Israeli case from that of other settler colonies.

Democracy and despotism

It is a common refrain in the pro-Israel global discourse that Israel is the only democracy in a region dominated by hostile dictatorships. This perception--made commonplace by continual repetition--bears some examination. The Israeli political system is, above all, a racialized one. This stands to reason given the *raison d’être* for the state. Only by regulating separately the rights of Jews and non-Jews can the state remain under Jewish control and retain its identity. There is no Israeli citizenship as such. One is registered as either an Israeli of Jewish nationality or an Israeli of Arab nationality.⁴⁰ This designation determines your right to own property, obtain employment, the schools your children may attend (there are two distinct school systems with different curricula and dramatically different levels of funding⁴¹). Different colored license plates and documents identify your racial status to authorities.

In order to participate in the political process, an Arab political party must pledge fealty to Israel’s identity as a Jewish state.⁴² Israel, in other words, follows the practice of limited democracies since the days of the Greek republic: democratic opportunities for the select circle of legitimate citizens and severe restrictions on access to power, resources and social mobility for the permanently unworthy.

Jewish society in Israel is itself highly stratified, with European Ashkenazi Jews accounting for 88% of the elite and Arab Mizrahi Jews representing 60% of low-income families. Mizrahi intellectuals, increasingly critical of the nationalist state, assert that Israel promoted the immigration of Mizrahim to Israel not to improve their condition (they tended to have harmonious relations with their neighbors in their home countries and were not particularly Zionist in orientation) but to constitute a cheap labor force.⁴³

Discrimination against the Mizrahim extends to the earliest days of Israel. Nachum Goldman, president of the World Zionist Organization and head of the Jewish Agency considered that “A Jew from Eastern Europe is worth twice as much as a Jew from Kurdistan.” Journalist Aryeh Gelblum wrote in 1949 that the Mizrahi’s “level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance and worse, who have little talent for understanding anything intellectual.” He added:

Generally speaking, they are only slightly better than the general level of the Arabs, Negroes and Berbers in the same regions. In any case, they are even lower than what we know in regard to the former Arabs of Israel... As with Africans you will find among them gambling, drunkenness, and prostitution... chronic laziness and hatred of work.⁴⁴

In his 1964 book, the *Ashkenazi Revolution*, author Kalman Katznelson argued that the Mizrahim were genetically inferior and their presence endangered the superiority of the Ashkenazi-Zionist state. He recommended abrogating their political rights.

Despite a greater representation in government posts in recent years, the economic and educational gap between Ashkenazi and Mizrahim has continued to widen.

The democracy enjoyed by even the inner circle has itself suffered continual erosion. In what seems to be an inevitable trajectory for societies with institutionalized inequality, the mechanisms of social control developed for Palestinians are increasingly applied against Jewish nationals. This has alarmed a growing number of loyal Israelis. High Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak compared Israel’s trajectory to that of pre-Nazi Germany. Barak, himself a Holocaust survivor, warned, “If it could happen in the country of Kant and Beethoven, it can happen anywhere. If we don’t defend democracy, democracy will not defend us!”⁴⁵

Since the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin the state has come increasingly under the domination of the military high command. Generals and other top brass sit in on cabinet meetings and represent the state to the media, in international diplomacy and in outlining policy to the public. They have been known to openly threaten the civilian government if it is slow to embrace military proposals.⁴⁶ At the same time a World Bank report on “Western” countries finds Israel to be second only to Italy on the index of government corruption. Without a constitution to keep them in check, legislators are free to pass laws to reward friends and punish enemies, free corrupt politicians from jail, waive the legal requirements on running for office to favor particular individuals, legitimize illegal cabinet appointments and remove legislative immunity from opposing representatives.⁴⁷

The religious and immigrant parties, who consider divine law, not legal niceties to be the proper guiding force of society, have opened an ideological assault on the already timid judiciary. This far right current denounces the court, media and even the police as being part of a “left mafia” and “traitors to the nation.” Israelis who cling to the ideals of a secular society are being vilified as an enemy within, on par with the despised Arabs.

These forces got a boost with the incorporation of Avigdor Lieberman’s Yisrael Beiteinu Party into the Olmert government. This move was accompanied by cabinet approval of electoral changes that will block most smaller parties--such as those representing Arabs--from winning Parliamentary seats in the future. Lieberman has openly advocated the ethnic purification of Israel, bombing of Palestinian population centers, and execution of Israeli officials who talk to Hamas.

The demographic viability of the Jewish state requires a continual tightening of restrictions on non-Jewish immigration, travel and even marriage. Recent legislation rescinds the right to ‘citizenship’--or even residency--to Palestinians who are married to Israelis (whether of Jewish or Arab nationality).⁴⁸ Movement has been further restricted by the denial (since the late 90s) of all applications for ‘Palestinian’ ID cards, which are needed by West Bank and Gaza residents (even after Israel’s ‘disengagement’). These IDs mediate birth, death, marriage, visits, visas, permits and all personal and civil matters for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

The majority of other countries in the neighborhood are ruled by a variety of autocracies and bureaucracies that constrict freedom of expression and political participation. Since the 1980s many of these regimes have been challenged by movements demanding democratic reforms, women’s rights and broad human rights. The fact that most of these regimes have enjoyed unwavering U.S. support has not been overlooked by pro-democracy activists. U.S. political relationships have been guided by geopolitical concerns such as the cold war, the ‘war on terror,’ access to oil at acceptable prices and support for Israel. Opposition to U.S. policy in the region (especially the war in Iraq and support for Israel) is overwhelming and cuts across the entire political spectrum. This is equally true in Egypt and Jordan, the two Arab states who have treaties with Israel. It is only the undemocratic nature of these governments that keep these nations from moving fully into opposition to the United States. This is why Washington’s rhetoric about democracy does not translate into support for real majority rule in these countries.

The establishment of an actual democracy in Israel and Palestine would most likely give further impulse to pro-democracy efforts in these countries by depriving their rulers of a major rationale for suppressing dissent. These regimes have traditionally taken a wary view of Palestinian nationhood. At the height of PLO influence, the presence of a well-educated secular Palestinian Diaspora was seen as a destabilizing influence that strengthened the hand of their real or potential internal opponents.

Big picture little picture

Our understanding of the world we live in can be said to come in two sizes, the big picture and the little picture. The little picture is where we experience our traumas and delights, loves and fears, our friendships and conflicts. What happens in this sphere is shaped by the big picture, the wars and economic trends, media outlets and elections, earthquakes and migrations. Each of these pictures can tell a very different story. We might come upon a two people fighting, for example. They are punching and scratching and causing great damage to each other. In the small picture we

can see the blood and hear the gasps of the combatants. It is only when we step back to see the big picture that we understand that what we are witnessing is an attempted rape. We can see that the violence--which appeared to be equally brutal in the small picture--has a different meaning for each of the combatants when seen within a larger landscape.

In the creation story of the United States--so often invoked by Israeli Nationalists--white settlers spread across the land, clearing the wilderness, building communities and establishing productive farms. In these communities they built schools, created their music, published local newspapers and set up churches and taverns. They also defended this world from attack by warriors from native tribes who were not willing to accept the presence of their new neighbors.

This little picture looks different when we step back and can see the larger stage on which these small dramas play out. What is revealed is a systematic campaign to uproot indigenous communities, burning crops, massacring villagers, poisoning water supplies, destroying hunting stock and livestock, forcing marches at gunpoint for hundreds of miles, suppressing Native languages, installing puppet regimes, engineering internal struggles and inducing epidemics. It was the largest and longest-running genocide in history, continuing year in and year out for over two centuries. This campaign, which successfully transferred the land of an entire continent into the hands of white immigrants and their descendants, is barely a whisper in the popular memory. What is remembered is the Battle of Little Big Horn ("Custer's Last Stand"), a moment when invading white troops were surrounded and defeated and U.S. Americans can imagine themselves to have been hapless victims of wild savages.

When the truths revealed by the big picture are unflattering, we seek refuge in the little picture. Cocaine mogul Pablo Escobar financed schools and soccer fields for the children of Medellin, Colombia, to counter the negative local perceptions of his brutal enterprise. Conquering armies often dig wells and pave roads for the conquered while plundering their national treasury.

The big picture of forced expulsion and confiscated property is an uncomfortable frame of reference for Israel, which prefers to shift discussion to the smaller frame of Palestinians blowing up cafes. Seen in the small picture, Israeli insistence on their self-defense narrative has some validity: a burglar who is attacked by the homeowner really *is* defending himself. Partisans of Palestine prefer the big picture narrative which justifies their historical resistance (by illuminating the burglary), rather than linger on the terrorist tactics which tacitly endorse the colonists' ideology of collective punishment and racial culpability.

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Creating a change

Dividing Israel

The perspective presented here suggests that the Israeli military-political elite is the primary obstacle to peace. Its inability to differentiate between proximate and ultimate goals means that a racially stratified state with full spectrum regional dominance is the only conceivable outcome it can countenance. This is the footprint of the dystopia principle at the core of the Jewish Nationalist worldview. The elite is united in this perspective and is able to direct state policy and to maintain sufficient internal legitimacy to keep Israel on a course of perpetual warfare. There is little prospect for breaking the pattern of military escalations and futile negotiations as long as this sector remains in control of the Israeli state.

Terror attacks on Israeli civil society (even at greatly elevated levels) cannot raise the social cost to the point that Israel will concede on substantive issues. Instead, they strengthen Israeli social cohesion and increase support for the state's militarist policies. That support is the cement that holds today's strategic deadlock in place. The people of Israel are the only force able to remove the Israeli elite from power but they are bound to it by the dynamics of the conflict.

One way or another--in the spirit of Eqbal Ahmad's proposals--the cohesion of Israeli public opinion must be broken for a peace process to unfold under new leadership. This merits underlining: the political-military elite that controls Israel must be removed from power for a

viable peace to survive the birthing room. The hegemony of Zionist ideology is so strong that it is difficult for pro-peace activists within Israel to gain any traction with which to challenge the state. The ones who are able to secure space in the public discourse do so by not challenging basic Zionist assumptions. A large proportion of the Israeli public, increasingly disillusioned with government corruption, incompetence and bellicosity, are nonetheless bound to the state by the belief that it protects them from a dangerous world. To change this balance will require help from the only source capable of offering it: the Palestinian people.

Palestine can divide Israel by loosening the glue which binds the public to the state: the fear of annihilation and belief in the dystopia principle. A strategy to accomplish this must bypass the Israeli state altogether and initiate a process of “diplomacy through action” with the Israeli public. Contrary to common Arab perceptions, Israel *is* vulnerable to division along moral lines. The clearest (but not only) example of how such a crisis might be fomented is for Palestinian society, including--crucially--the armed sectors, to implement a permanent cessation of attacks on civilians. This move must be strategic. It cannot be conditioned on any reciprocal response from Israel. It can be assumed, to the contrary, that the Israeli state will escalate provocative actions in order to break Palestinian resolve and thereby prove that the Palestinians weren’t really serious. A Palestinian shift away from targeting civilians and toward engaging them will be seen by the Israeli state (correctly) as presenting an “existential threat” to its continuation. The gesture must be directed at the Israeli Jewish public and must withstand government efforts to sabotage it. It must be sustained, in the face of all provocation, until the process that it unleashes becomes irreversible.

It will become irreversible as it is taken up by sectors of civil society on both sides of the divide. In the case of Palestine, it will allow the spotlight to shift to direct struggle over water, safety, access to health care, transportation, trade, education, jobs, prisoners, land, repression and the many implications of the wall. These are moral issues that starkly illuminate the nature of the occupation rather than obscuring it. They make clear that the struggle is about securing the necessities of life and the dignity of a people, not about exterminating Jews. The repression that will continue against the movement will be more difficult to frame convincingly as self-defense on the part of Israel. Palestinian organizing around these issues--as well as solidarity from some Israelis--is a present and ongoing reality but it has not been able to set the rhythm and tone of the overall conflict or define its central narrative. It would now take center stage.

The practicality of such a strategic move on the Palestinian side is indicated by the unilateral ceasefire observed by Hamas during the year leading up to their electoral victory. The capacity is there. The strategic framework is needed. It is also telling that the popular mobilization to shield the home of Palestinian paramilitary leader Mohammed Baroud from Israeli bombing created confusion and paralysis in the Israeli high command. Similar uncertainty over how to proceed has plagued the military in the face of the creative and flexible Palestinian/Israeli/internationalist protests against the Wall in the village of Bil’in.⁴⁹ The ability to set the agenda and keep the opponent off guard is important for shifting momentum and initiative in a conflict.

In Israel it would open space for activists to organize opposition around these concrete human issues and thus create a moral dilemma for the nation. To many Palestinian victims of the occupation, Israelis seem incapable of experiencing such a dilemma. Israel is not different in this regard from other colonial societies (settler or imperial). All colonial societies require (at least at certain stages) brutal repression in order to maintain their hegemony. All of them create stories for themselves to justify how they can do these things and sustain a benevolent self image. Israel is no exception. The soldiers who have protested the brutality of the occupation and the atrocities in Lebanon describe an inability to reconcile the acts they were ordered to carry out with the benign self-image they were raised with. The basis for a moral crisis is in place and can be exploited. Israeli popular support for the nationalist state is based on the unquestioned assumption that no other option will ensure Jewish survival. It is this “monopoly of possibility” that must be broken.

There is a sufficient core of courageous Israeli activists to provide initial traction for the Lihish’ta’weel. This can be seen in the hundreds of Israeli Jews who have stepped forward to protect and assist Palestinians in the harvest of olives in defiance of the military in Jayyus, Jama’in, Yassouf, Aqraba, Khirbet Jbarra and in popular mobilizations against the Wall.

Any Israeli political actions that embody solidarity with Palestinians will reverberate in Palestine. The bolder the action, the greater the impact. Especially crucial will be campaigns to hold back the arm of the repression and to provide basic necessities to the people in the occupied territories. The process becomes irreversible when the public on both sides see that their initiatives are being heard and reciprocated on the other side of the wall. Having experienced initial results from this process, there will be little incentive to return to the previous static inertia. The Israeli elite can be counted on to make choices that will only deepen their crisis.

Dividing a colonial society is not an end in itself. One must determine where in the social structure the split should occur. It does not help to foster divisions among the elite regarding how to best defeat you. A display of military capability (such as that demonstrated by Hezbollah during the Lebanon war) will precipitate this kind of split. In the aftermath of the 2006 war, the divisions that have appeared within Israel are of this nature, with attention focused exclusively on the “conduct” of the war. This is paralleled in elite U.S. dissatisfaction with the occupation of Iraq.

One of the factors that permitted the Cuban revolution to triumph was the unity of the Cuban elite. When the Batista coup took place in March of 1952, none of the major political parties expressed significant opposition. No faction of the elite was disturbed enough by the takeover to split from the regime and provide leadership to the opposition. This meant that the field was left open for new leaders to emerge who, within a few years, became the leaders of the state.⁵⁰ The new government was able to institute policies that broke completely with the consensus of the old guard. In contrast, the Philippine crisis following the rigged presidential elections of 1986 caused a split in the governing class. Elite factions who had been marginalized by the regime led the uprising that removed the Marcos dictatorship. This insured that the outcome would not threaten the interests of the elite as a whole or its international backers.

The possibility of a major change in direction for Israel is favored by the unanimity of elite loyalty to the core Zionist vision. Its inability to distinguish proximate from ultimate goals means that it cannot readily shift strategic direction or divide internally over matters of principle. The experience of the United States (in relation to Viet Nam), Portugal (in Africa) and South Africa (in relation to its own majority population), to name a few, suggests that once a moral crisis is instigated by an anti-colonial movement, there is little that the offending elite can do to contain or reverse it.

Ehud Olmert (then Deputy Prime Minister under Sharon) warned of the danger of a Palestinian shift in strategy:

We don't have unlimited time. More and more Palestinians are uninterested in a negotiated, two-state solution because they want to change the essence of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African one. From a struggle against “occupation,” in their parlance, to a struggle for one man, one vote. That is, of course, a much cleaner struggle, a much more popular struggle--and ultimately a much more powerful one. For us, it would mean the end of the Jewish state.⁵¹

This analysis proposes the introduction of a new proximate goal for peace forces in both Palestine and Israel: the removal of the dysfunctional Israeli political elite from administration of the Israeli state. It calls for diplomacy-through-action on the part of the Palestinian people to precipitate the unraveling of the pro-government consensus within Israel. Attempts to remove the Israeli elite by any external force will fail due to the military capacity of Israel and the unity it would reinforce within Israeli society.

A strategy that socially isolates the Israeli political-military elite can transform the dynamics of struggle within Israeli society. Reframing the struggle for Palestine as a mass-movement political struggle for basic rights undercuts the Jewish Nationalist insistence that Palestinians are the enemies of peace. There are Jewish peace groups who incorporate the demand for the right of return for Palestinians. Freeing the struggle from its racial straight jacket will force the moral issues of the occupation and the racial social structure onto center stage. The elite correctly considers such a shift to be a fundamental threat to the bunker state. Once the conflict is framed as a struggle for justice, democracy, and equality rather than an “Arab-Jewish” conflict, the Israeli state loses legitimacy. It must remain an Arab-Jewish racial conflict in order for the elite to claim

that it represents the interests of the Jewish people. If it is about democracy and justice the state has a very meager resume. It will be forced to choose between inflicting greater repression against sectors of its own people or of offering concessions that will weaken its position. Either course will demonstrate to the world that the Nationalist cult is, itself, the primary obstacle to peace. This was the constricted menu that hastened the unraveling of Iranian Shah Reza Palavi's regime in its final two years.

Most dramatically, the strategic alignment ceases to fall exclusively along national lines and can be reframed as a joint Jewish/Palestinian struggle for peace and human rights and against extreme Nationalism of any kind. Peace among Jews and Palestinians depends on the creation of a post-Zionist world that will require their joint efforts to bring into being. Far from endangering Israeli Jews, this process will free them from the dead-end trajectory that ultra-nationalism has locked in place since the days of Jabotinsky and Ben Gurion. The impact of such a restatement of the issues will by necessity cause a crisis and a realignment in the Jewish Diaspora and in the international arena generally.

The fact that many participants in the current and latent Israeli peace movement have internalized Zionist ideological assumptions is not a major obstacle. These are assumptions conditioned by lived experience and inherited ideology. They can be countered through the living of alternative experiences pointing to an ideology of connection. There is often a part of a peace movement that sees its mission as securing peace in order to preserve the state itself. When the state is seen to be threatened, participants are forced to make a choice between their nationalism and their humanism. This is not unique to Israel. The submission of European Social Democratic parties to their respective national governments during WWI is a rough parallel. The spectacle of peace movement leaders in Israel acting as cheering squad for the assault on Lebanon exposes this nationalist current. It is the contorted stance of a people who see no alternative to the belief that they need the Nationalist military state to protect them. This scenario is likely to recur until a credible vision of peace--one that does not enshrine the Nationalist state--can be presented to the public. Sharpening the contradictions in the Israeli peace movement will force a clearer politics to the fore and reframe the struggle as between those who favor self-imposed military isolation and conflict and those who favor peace.

Desperation to end the conflict has led masses of Palestinians and Israelis to embrace the thin promises of various doomed peace plans. Any initiative that offers a credible possibility for changing the relationship between the two peoples will have potential to generate genuine popular excitement.

Peace and Jewish ultimate goals

At a minimum, a peace process stops people from killing each other. At its best it creates conditions for the achievement of the conflicting societies' ultimate goals. The ultimate goals of all peoples are, in the end, quite similar. They are all variations on wanting to live well, enjoy plenty, and develop according to their own rhythms and preferences. The specifics of our histories determine the particular shape these dreams might take.

In the case of Jews the question of safety is genuine and profound. It is a preoccupation that has made our people susceptible to the dysfunctional mirage of a racialized fortress in a hostile land. Might another vision take its place? Let us be blunt: Zionism didn't work. Sixty years have not created a secure society with unassailable Jewish demographic, political and military dominance. What sixty years have failed to achieve, another sixty will not deliver. If Zionism had taken another course, if it had followed the humanists instead of the Nationalist extremists, would things have turned out differently? Who can say? The road not taken forever lies in darkness. What we can say is that the political and cultural landscape shaped by six decades of conflict is one in which no amount of military power can implant the post-war Zionist dream.

The Jewish preoccupation with safety goes beyond the desire to not be killed. Concerns over assimilation, dispersal and intermarriage have long occupied the leaders of Jewish communities in their countries of residence. It explains the opposition of many Jewish leaders to "emancipation," the granting of full citizen rights to Jews in parts of Europe during the 19th century. It was feared that integration would spell the end of Jewish identity.

If Jews are to take our place in the world as a people among peoples--rather than a nation among nations--we must gain a new understanding of what place we might occupy. First of all, the world does not hate the Jews or seek our destruction. Most of the world does not concern itself with us at all. The presence of Jews at the birth of European global expansion meant that the patterns of anti-Jewish racism became a template for the racist treatment of other peoples. Anti-Jewish racism spread with the Europeans on their quests of colonial conquest, implanting the Spanish Inquisition, for example, in the Americas and the Philippines. Similarly, anti-African racism has been globalized as has racism against each new population that sets out into the world currents of labor migration. Anti-Jewish racism is just that: racism. It functions essentially the way racism does in all of its many (and diverse) guises. It is not a fantasy conjured up by Jewish Nationalists but neither is it an inherent characteristic of humanity. The Nazi genocide, for all its horror, was not the ultimate expression of a universal, inherent hatred of Jews. It was an explosive mix of European racism and a colonialist obsession with geographic expansion. We are not the chosen people of oppression: all racism is brutal.

We have also been the beneficiaries of solidarity. When the Nazis took possession of Europe and the European colonies, tens of thousands of non-Jews risked, and sacrificed, their lives in order to protect us. This was true in the Arab territories as well as in Europe.

Si Kaddour Benghabrit, perhaps the most influential Arab in Europe, was the rector of the Great Mosque of Paris. Under his direction, Mosque staff issued certificates of Muslim identity to around a hundred Jews with which they could evade arrest and deportation, until the authorities uncovered the scheme. Similarly, the Bey of Tunis, Tunisia's wartime ruler under the Germans, reportedly informed his government: "The Jews... are under our patronage and we are responsible for their lives. If I find out that an Arab informer caused even one hair of a Jew to fall, this Arab will pay with his life."⁵² Many of the people who support the ultra-Nationalist Israeli state today, do so mistakenly believing that they are thereby promoting safety for Jews.

There is a wide range of institutions that lend themselves to cultural exclusivity and to the preservation of traditions. These include schools, houses of worship, cultural institutions, athletic centers, clubs, youth organizations, publishing houses, restaurants and language and historical institutes, among others. The nation-state is not one of them. A national state governs a territory and must answer to the full range of people who settle or pass through its boundaries. For the state to privilege one sector over others requires a system of undemocratic laws and practices. Such a system will inevitably become more repressive as it seeks to control the natural resistance of its excluded subjects. Ultimately such entities begin to limit the freedoms of even those who are supposed to be its privileged inner circle.

Why should the Jews, among all peoples, be deprived of the benefits of a nation of our own? My own view is that racially stratified and theocratic states are not viable or desirable for any people. In the present era of globalization there are few corners of the Earth that have not experienced major population shifts due to labor migration. The era of the demographically homogeneous nation has passed. Israel was two centuries late to sail that particular ship. As it turns out, there are hundreds of ethnicities around the world that straddle national borders or are contained within larger, multi-ethnic entities and have no state of their own. They include the Basque, the Sami, Tureg, Ogoni, Navajo, Yoruba, Hmong, Samoans, Berbers, Kurds, mapuche, Tamil, Welsh, Zapotec, West Papuans, Karen, Ndebele and Mixtec, to name just a few. The efforts of such groups to gain control over natural resources and territory for their exclusive use have not produced any happy endings.

Peace and Palestinian ultimate goals

Palestinian ultimate goals revolve around a return to the land from which they were expelled by the Jewish nation-builders since 1948, and the freedom to determine the shape of their own lives. Israel has qualified and amended every peace proposal to rule out the return of any Palestinians, seeing it as a fatal threat to the nationalist dream of a racially structured homeland. This resistance does not correspond to a scarcity of land--Israel continues to frantically recruit (and convert) Jews from around the world to shore up its demographic position--but to the obsession with maintaining a Jewish majority. Once that dysfunctional dream is taken off the table, the possibility for a

peaceful solution materializes. The United Nations formula for resolving this issue is simple and appropriate: return of confiscated property for displaced people, or compensation.

The Zionist occupation, for all its horror, is not an expression of the evil of Jews or even of Jewish Nationalists. It is an instance of settler colonialism. Colonialism is a form of armed robbery. It depends on racism in order to justify taking possession of what belongs to someone else. Zionism is not inherently more harsh or evil than Portuguese, Belgian, Dutch, French, British, Spanish, German, Italian or other colonial instances (although the policy of ethnic transfer--which is not inherent in all colonialism--secures for this occupation a place at the harsher end of the spectrum). Israeli Jews are not more inherently racist than other settler colonists. This is not to minimize it: colonialism is brutal.

Making it real: turning strategy into tactics

Strategy is a prescription for how to achieve goals in the landscape of the big picture. Tactics are the concrete actions that bring strategy into the small picture frame of everyday experience. In the English language the word ‘tactic’ shares its root with the word ‘tactile,’ to touch. A tactic is strategy you can hold in your hand.

The greatest impact is achieved when tactics and strategy are in harmony with each other. If my strategy to feed myself is to grow a vegetable garden, then securing and planting seeds, fertilizing and watering them are tactics that harmonize with that goal. Since tactics in a movement are constantly being improvised, it is important that a maximum number of people have a clear understanding of and can embrace the strategy within which they must fit.

The strategy suggested here runs counter to the common assumptions about the Palestinian conflict. This is because traditional strategic thinking is effective for evaluating the visible conditions of the political landscape but not the forces at work beneath the surface. The Lihish’ta’weel strategy will appear counter-intuitive--even absurd--when viewed from that perspective. It is to instigate an anti-nationalist Israeli revolution organically linked with the Palestinian national movement for the purpose of creating a new, non-racial national entity. The only idea more absurd is the hope that the current trajectory will lead anyplace we would want to be.

The piece of the puzzle that makes such a scenario seem fanciful is the widespread misreading of Israeli Jewish identity under Zionism. Jewish ultra-nationalism has been effective at framing Jewish identity in terms of a stark duality: a Jew must either support the ultra-nationalist project or be a “self-hating Jew” and be complicit in the destruction of the Jewish people. This has created a dilemma at the heart of Jewish identity, as people oscillate between questioning Nationalist practices and defending the Nationalist state’s “right to exist” when it seems threatened. Anti-Zionist Jews often have the uneasy feeling that they are betraying their own people if their opposition goes too far. What is missing from these observations is an appreciation of the deep longing among Jews to resolve this dilemma. Just as Zionism has made the claim that authentic Jewish identity revolves around support for Israel, a rebirth of solidarity Judaism--an identity anchored in compassion instead of fear--must, at this stage, revolve precisely around rejection of the militarist, ultra-nationalist state. Ultra-nationalism must be named as a dangerous deviation from the compassionate central currents of Jewish tradition. Self-love’ in Jewish life requires displacing the ultra-nationalist cult that has highjacked Jewish public life and caused so much suffering.

The ascendancy of Ariel Sharon to the Prime Minister’s office brought with it the institutionalization of corruption on a massive scale. His exit from the scene has left lesser figures, politicians and officials lacking his prestige, public following and political skills, to face a cascade of scandals, indictments and resignations. Top police officials have been convicted of corruption, leading to their boss’ resignation; the Minister of Justice was convicted of sexual assault; the President has been forced to step aside in the face of rape charges; the Prime Minister is the subject of several corruption investigations; the Chief of staff has quit over his incompetent handling of the invasion of Lebanon; and the nominee for Police chief is under attack over a past corruption case.⁵³ Confidence in public institutions is severely weakened and would likely have been forced to a full crisis were it not for the unifying fear of an ‘external’ threat.

The emergence of solidarity Judaism as a political force requires undermining the state's only claim to legitimacy: that it is the guarantor of Jewish safety. An alternative self-image--essential to any political change of direction--needs to be expressed and reinforced in the realm of personal experience. Here is where tactics play a crucial role in cultural transformation even as they challenge the power of the state.

If the struggle is to be framed as a struggle against oppression, then the tactics employed should reinforce that frame at every level of society. Especially powerful are actions that undermine the official narrative that the struggle is between Palestinians and Jews. One possibility would be a campaign of Israeli Jews transporting Palestinians on Jews-only highways; occupy government offices that administer discriminatory laws or occupation regulations; issue universal ID cards for Jews and Palestinians that entitle the bearer to all rights "regardless of race, language, faith, nationality, area of residence", etc.; organize joint concerts for young people; joint meetings of professional associations; serve demolition papers on the offices of officials responsible for home demolitions; initiate "teach-ins" on campuses on the real history of Israel, Jewish and Palestinian identity and the possibility of change; present joint religious services; challenge segregation and discrimination at very point, small or large, where it is expressed; take actions to dismantle (or at least create murals on) the wall (keeping in mind the different levels of risk accruing to Jews and to Palestinians); build the movement of collective olive harvests and mass plantings; build joint schools and other institutions; create a project to build a hospital in Gaza out of materials brought by hand by Israeli Jews; create awards for soldiers who refuse to enforce occupation regulations; joint actions by the victims of violence; public events for children of both peoples to hear stories and play together. Campaigns can demand legislation that affirms basic human rights and decency. The point is to create 10,000 moral crises every day throughout the entire area governed by the Israeli state.

The tactical initiatives in a struggle are crafted to not only undermine the legitimacy of the state but to transfer that legitimacy to the opposition. Since Israel has resisted its commitment to establish a constitution, the movement can create its own grassroots process throughout Israel and the territories, culminating in a People's Constitutional Convention. This tactic was innovated by the Black Panther Party in the United States in 1970 as a way to build a multi-constituency coalition. The resulting document could serve as a lightning rod for organizing and mobilizing, much as the South African Freedom Charter did for the anti-Apartheid struggle. This could be a particularly effective tool in that it would enshrine the rights of both Palestinians and Jews in the nascent nation and undermine government propaganda about the movement. It would be an expression, in the midst of the struggle, of a legitimate nation taking shape in the shell of the old and beginning to fulfill the functions of the state.

This process will cause a steady erosion in support for the elite and separate those adversaries who are enemies because they have vested interest in maintaining oppression from those who should be on our side but have been cajoled, coerced and frightened into alliance with the Nationalists. It will do so by forcing them to continually confront the contradictory elements of their own self image: Jewish internationalism vs. the sense of constant siege; commitment to justice in broad terms vs. the brutal realities of reprisals and oppression. On the side of the resistance, where a sense of futility is often the greatest obstacle, movement tactics must reinforce that we are not alone and that barriers erected by people can be dismantled by them. Each action should therefore consider the effects on our opponents, ourselves and observers. This provides the movement with power in the most precise sense of the term: the ability to determine outcomes. Understanding how others see and respond to our actions enhances our ability, like the farmer in the garden, to shape the results.

In countries where the military rank and file reflects (or overlaps) the ethnic makeup of the popular movement, it is possible to foment division within the military. This was the case in the Iranian revolution of 1977-1979. The movement to overthrow the Shah encompassed broad sectors of the intelligentsia, the commercial class, the poor and workers (the widespread use of the strike--beginning with the oil workers was a crucial tactic leading to the fall of the regime). The movement confronted a formidable military apparatus generously supported by the U.S. and not seriously opposed by other international powers. In the end, soldiers refused to fire on opposition mobilizations, leaving the government powerless. The stress experienced by the Israeli military

when it was ordered to dismantle Jewish settlements in the summer of 2006 reflected a reluctance on the part of soldiers to be used against fellow Israeli Jews rather than political sympathy for the settler movement. There are already instances of Israeli fighter pilots refusing to carry out missions over the territories where Palestinian civilians would be in the line of fire.

Support for the large numbers of Palestinian prisoners is a particularly appropriate task for Israeli insurrectionists. This can be done through adopt-a-prisoner campaigns where activists support individual prisoners, wear buttons with their face, publicize their cases, provide support to their families, and attempt to visit them. This will help undermine the regime's imperative to racialize the conflict. Prison is one of the few arenas in which Palestinian activists have an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their experiences and even hold classes and lectures. As in many other struggles around the world, it provides a place for prisoners from differing factions to develop relationships as they confront the same difficult conditions. As campaigns on the outside gather steam they will lead to a new influx of prisoners with direct experience with the new dynamics of conflict. In some cases (such as the Puerto Rican campaign to eject the U.S. from Vieques island) civil disobedience campaigns can bring civic leaders and cultural figures into custody for brief stays, providing an opportunity for them to interact with each other and with long-term prisoners.

Actual tactics in a campaign are generated daily in the course of struggle and respond to the internal rhythm and changing conditions experienced by a movement. A tactic that is perfect at one moment in a struggle will be irrelevant or counter-productive at another. The responses of the public and the state to one day's tactics create the conditions for new, more powerful tactics to emerge at each stage. Although governments do not need to recognize each other's right to exist, peoples do. This is achieved by developing a tactical language of joint action and solidarity. These experiences can allow the imagination to grasp the possibility that peace is ultimately possible.

The emergence and nature of mass popular struggles cannot accurately be predicted. They *can* be prepared for and the conditions constantly tested. The Puerto Rican general strike against the privatization of telephone service in 1998 emerged with a ferocity and popular enthusiasm that could not have been predicted even by its leaders. The Zimbabwean elections in 1980 shocked the British and U.S. by sweeping the former guerrillas into power, leaving their preferred candidate with only 3% of the vote (they were sure he'd improve on his showing of the previous year when he swept into office with 67% support). The Civil Rights movement in the U.S. was sparked by activists who continued to probe the segregated public transportation system in Alabama until the right combination of conditions ignited mass protest.

In the international arena the solidarity movement can be mobilized into actions which complement the new dynamics at the heart of the struggle. Governments can be pressured to freeze the bank accounts and deny travel abroad for Israeli officials responsible for crimes (these campaigns can be effective even when they do not succeed). Movement embassies can be set up around the world staffed by Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. Municipalities in the U.S. can be asked to pass resolutions demanding Palestinian rights to control and access drinking water. The possibilities are virtually unlimited.

Once a viable strategic vision is in place, the tactics will naturally flow from the grassroots people energized by a renewed sense of possibility. The coverage of the multiple initiatives, particularly in the Arab media, will reshape perceptions of the conflict around the region and the world.

Solidarity is a two-way street. It necessitates that the parties engaged in it understand that they all stand to benefit. Lihish'ta'weel in essence represents a movement for two Rights of Return: for Palestinians to return to places that were stolen from them, for Jews to return to the expansive roots of Jewishness that have been stolen as well, and with equally devastating results. History dictates that the achievement of each of these rights is inextricably linked to, and dependent upon, the success of the other.

States of confusion

It is a reflection of the corrosive despair engendered by this conflict that the solution that enjoys the widest currency is the one that is nobody's dream: a "two-state solution." That a solution is

practical does not mean that it is viable--only that it can be achieved. And what then? Seen through the lens of Lihish'ta'weel analysis, three possible two-state scenarios come into focus.

The first would represent, in effect, a return to the apartheid model. A Palestinian homeland would be hobbled out of isolated enclaves with access monitored and controlled by Israeli military and administrative personnel. The primary commitment of the Palestinian state--with military advice and aid from the U.S. and other reactionary governments-- would be to guarantee the security of Israel. Such a non-viable Palestinian entity would be unable to provide the economic stability to maintain its population except as a cheap, migratory labor force for it's neighbors.

The second option, envisioned by many peace activists, would entail a withdrawal of Israel to its the pre-1967 boundaries, surrendering the West Bank and Gaza and returning occupied portions of Syria and Lebanon. Seen as an inevitable compromise, it would allow a more territorially coherent Palestinian state to exist along side of a racially stratified Jewish entity. The right for Palestinian return to confiscated lands would be traded for self-governance on a limited land base and an end to the military conflict.

From the standpoint of Israel's military-political elite such a plan would have to satisfy certain requirements. First of all, the nature of the Israeli state as an entity that exists in the service of Jews would have to be enshrined and guaranteed. Maintaining a racialized political system would require a growing military-police apparatus in order to institutionalize unequal access to resources, services and political power and to confront the inevitable regional tensions that such a system would engender. Racially-based restrictions on immigration and residency would have to be expanded and strictly enforced.

There is the additional question of whether such a 'solution' would be seen by Israel--as in so many previous instances--as merely a negotiating ploy, with an eye (as in Ben Gurion's vision) toward future expansion when conditions ripen. The increasingly powerful religious fundamentalist forces in Israel would demand reassurance that the nationalist dream has not been abandoned.

In any case, such a scenario would strengthen the fundamentalist and racialist currents in Palestine, as Palestinians would face a powerful neighboring nation organized on the principle of the racial exclusion of Arab people. If an accomodationist Palestinian authority were to be implanted, its popular legitimacy would be continually in question given Israel's constant demand for gestures of subservience.

A third option, the most utopian, would envision two states sufficiently resigned to each other's existence and economically integrated to the point that the benefits of peaceful relations would be obvious to all. This is genuinely appealing as long as you do not look too closely. In this sunny scenario, what is it that would define Israel as a Jewish homeland and Palestine as an Arab one? The natural course of events cannot guarantee (and is very unlikely to deliver) the demographic growth, through birth or conversion, of the Jewish population relative to the non-Jewish peoples in the region. The Jewish dominance within Israel would have to be guaranteed by the state through all of the problematic mechanisms we have already encountered. No polity, no matter how well intentioned, can govern a system based on racial privilege without becoming reactionary. And what impact would such a development have on neighboring Palestine? Palestine is not a mere reflection of Israel but contractive and expansive trends in any country will re-enforce their counterparts in surrounding societies.

A genuine move toward a two state peace would still necessitate the removal of the dystopian elite in any case. To envision Palestinians as enjoying an equal claim to the land and its fruits is beyond its reaching ability. As seen above, the end result would be to recreate a racially defined society, thus undermining the Jewish ultimate goal of collective safety. For the Palestinians it would erase the possibility of return, a central feature of their ultimate vision. If the dystopian ideologues have been removed from power why replace them with a system that, by the logic of its own development, will lead back to the polarization of the past and which closes off the avenues toward everyone's ultimate goals? Might it not be more practical to institute free mobility for everyone across the entire land and the settlement of past claims as fairly as possible?

If a system of separation were to be codified, who must be separated? If the issue is racial then Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews are incompatible. If it is religious then are Arab Jews and Muslims unable to co-exist (and what of the large number of secularists on both sides?). There is no sense in these questions. This is not a racial conflict. It is a conflict over resources and political power that has been manipulated into a blood feud in order to further powerful interests.

I have yet to find anyone who actually wants a two-state solution, only people who have given up hope for something better. Like historian Isaac Deutscher's refugees leaping from a burning ship, they grab onto any lifeboat. But just because a thing looks like a boat does not guarantee that it will float, and devoting the same amount of effort to swimming could bring us to shore.

A two state solution puts Palestinian and Jewish ultimate goals on indefinite hold in favor of an arrangement that freezes in place some of the deepest grievances of the conflict. Such a system of structural separation would require a massive international effort to institutionalize and stabilize. Rather than being a flexible, interim step toward ultimate reconciliation, it would be an alternative to it. The "utopian" dream is likely to prove more practical and achievable than the pragmatic "compromise."

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Terms of conflict

Hatred and connection

Hate is the traumatized child of love. To hate someone, you must believe that they have harmed, or are a threat to, that which you care dearly about. This is true without exception. It is true for Hitler, it is true for Bin Laden, it is true for Meier Kahane. We may not have the capacity to feel compassion for such people but we must still understand them.

The nationalist fervor which gripped the United States following the 9/11/2001 attacks saw a leap in recruitment into the U.S. armed forces. Recruiting stations were flooded with hopeful applicants eager to respond to--what was to them--an inexplicable assault by incomprehensible forces. Young navy recruits described experiencing an awakened sense of identification with their fellow citizens, a "great tenderness" toward strangers in the street in the aftermath of the atrocity.⁵⁴ The U.S. response to the attacks represented--in the big picture-- a major social contraction in which the circle of solidarity shrank dramatically. Most of the world was suddenly reviled as either enemies of God or weak-minded fools who were too soft to stand up to these enemies. For these young soldiers, however, raised as they were in a narrow culture of self-absorption and shallow entertainment, it was experienced as an expansion of their circle of compassion. It gave them a new feeling of awakening and connection to their compatriots and offered them a place in the heroic mythologies of their people.

This same sense of compassionate expansion is described by Jihadist activists drawn to the militant Islamist movement by the spectacle of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Something must be done, they felt, to secure protection for the Ummah, the global Islamic community. Someone must put up a credible defense against the combined military might of Israel the United States. The response must rely on Muslims themselves. To become involved in the growing and-wide ranging Islamist movement meant a return to religious values that had been eroded during years of nationalist domination of Arab governments and commercial penetration from the West. It offered a way to connect to Muslims in lands all across the globe. So, as the world became more polarized in the big picture, young Islamists experienced an expansion of their own circle of compassion to embrace all of the Islamic world.⁵⁵

Humans make the best choices we can from the options that we can see. The brutality to which we treat each other is the product of conditions and perceptions that limit the options on our menu. Re-writing that menu requires that we create conditions that permit the expansive, connective mode to seem like a realistic choice. This can only be written in the language of action.

Guerrilla war and attrition

The doctrines of British Major General Orde Wingate are cited by Zionist leaders as a major influence on their military thinking. Some of them, including Moyshe Dayan and Yigal Allon, served under Wingate in British-organized police units to help suppress the Palestinian uprising of 1936-39. Jewish units were used “in preemptive and reprisal attacks on Arab villages believed to be hiding insurgents, and what now must be described as ‘torture’ to extract intelligence from suspected insurgents.”⁵⁶

One line of thinking that Wingate would develop emphasizes disrupting the enemy’s capacity to plan and direct its forces effectively--in short, its “brain.” In the context of the fight to expel the Palestinians, this concept is evidenced in the application of chaos on the populace through arbitrary attacks, the disruption of necessary services and in the targeted assassination of top and middle level leadership of the Palestinian groups. This is meant to keep these forces continually off balance and unable to secure the time and continuity of leadership required to counter Israeli strategy and retake the strategic initiative.

Palestinian military vision was born during the era of “prolonged people’s wars” and popular insurrections. It has gone through a number of changes based on experience gained and changes in conditions. Airline highjacking was introduced as a way to gain the world’s attention for a struggle that was consistently ignored when it pursued redress by means of appeals to international institutions. Today’s conditions are what interest us here. There are a number of advantages Israel enjoys on the current military field. One is that the Palestinians have no viable staging areas beyond Israeli reach. This deprives them of any opportunity to develop beyond guerrilla-level attacks to the establishment of more conventional forces able to directly challenge the Israeli army. Regional geography and politics renders such a strategy untenable. When the PLO fancied itself a conventional military force, establishing entrenched lines of defense to withstand direct assault, it led to their humiliating defeat and withdrawal from Lebanon. No regional regimes are able or willing to provide conventional back-up to Palestinians in the face of Israel’s military capacity (including its substantial nuclear arsenal). This means that Palestinian military strategy is destined to remain essentially a guerrilla one, staging small-scale attacks on Israeli targets.

Discarding the viability of prolonged people’s war (which requires transition to a classical confrontation between armies), there are three functions which small-scale bombing, guerrilla, or terror attacks can serve in a military strategy. The first is to wear down Israeli military and popular will by continually inflicting casualties and establishing an atmosphere of uncertainty. Eventually this leads to the collapse of enemy morale and withdrawal or disintegration of their forces. Hamas has referred to this approach as making the occupation “unbearable” to the occupiers. The second is to provoke a repressive response from Israel which would consolidate support for the guerrillas and spark broader resistance (this also plays a role in ‘non-violent’ campaigns). The third is to force the opposing army to constantly respond to low-level diversionary attacks, thus preventing them from pursuing their own strategic objectives.⁵⁷

The first strategic goal, wearing down the opposition, has been elusive, given that Israel’s social base is in a settler society for whom withdrawal is not an option. Palestinian popular opposition to Israel is already universal, so increasing the repression against the population is not advantageous--it only highlights the inability of the paramilitaries to protect their people. The third proposition is even less satisfactory. Israeli military strategy is oriented toward punishing the Palestinian public to a point that it will leave, and to keep neighboring countries at bay so that they cannot impede it. Guerrilla attacks, far from distracting the military from this strategy, enable it. Especially when they inflict civilian casualties, these attacks provide the pretext for further escalation against Palestinian targets and reinforce internal Israeli public support in each succeeding generation. To expand on this observation: in a classic territorial guerrilla war, government forces may have a strategic goal of isolating and re-taking an area under guerrilla administration. In that scenario, guerrilla harassment can force them into a defensive stance or to divert troops from their forward motion. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict does not feature this kind of war of position. Israel’s goals are to make life untenable for Palestinians in the territories that it wishes to absorb. Paramilitary tactics facilitate this Israeli strategy without delivering any offsetting movement toward Palestinian ultimate objectives. Israel’s atrocities, in turn, elicit new waves of attacks from the paramilitary factions who are under pressure to demonstrate their capacity to respond in some way. After these

tactics fail to achieve any change in Israeli policy they are followed by offers of further concessions to Israel in exchange for the promise of future discussions on core issues.

In other words the military strategy of the Palestinian resistance furthers Israeli strategic interests and plays to Israeli advantages. Primary among these advantages is that Israel does have secure staging areas, a functioning civil administration and control over Palestinian access to resources. That means that while the attrition Palestinians can impose on Israelis is limited to bomb attacks on soldiers and civilians in public places, Israel can impose attrition that includes not only violence on civilians and combatants, but also restrictions on access to water, medicine, crops, food, jobs, education, mobility and so forth. Palestinian forces are not able to create zones within which Palestinians can be protected from Israeli measures. There are indications that this unbalanced war of attrition is beginning to produce results favorable to Israel, with 30-40% of Gaza residents expressing a desire to emigrate.

There is a forth possible objective for which low-level conflict is better suited. That is to force limited Israeli concessions, such as dismantling settlements and returning to the 1967 borders. This approach has been a central part of Palestinian strategy over the years but amounts to little more than seeking the most favorable terms under which to accommodate to the power of the Jewish Nationalist state. It should be clear by now that such a Bantustan “solution” would be neither stable nor satisfactory and would just represent a bloody road to yet another non-solution. It is a military paradigm masking a limited, reformist objective.

Israel’s war of attrition contributes to the sharpening of divisions among Palestinian forces. Just as Israel favored the rise of Hamas during the first Intifada as a counterbalance to Fatah, now they demand Fatah’s ascendancy to undermine Hamas’ power. Without an innovative shift in strategy, neither faction can promise more than the fruitless pendulum swing between concessions and attacks. As Jonathan Kuttab and Mubarak Awad⁵⁸ point out, Israel needs the Palestinians to be either submissive or violent. It is not prepared to confront a movement which is neither⁵⁹.

Given Israel’s advantages in the military arena, the Palestinian movement is faced with a strategic choice: attempt to create a more powerful military apparatus with which to challenge Israel, or shift the struggle to arenas in which military advantage is neutralized. There seems little prospect that increases in Palestinian military capacity could alter the strategic landscape or overcome the self-defeating dynamic that has been described. It would simply replicate it at a greater level of destruction. It would also require increased dependence on outside funding to sustain a higher level of warfare. Organizations that are funded from the outside tend to lose their accountability to their organic social base and, by extension, its support. Grassroots, mass struggles, on the other hand, are not dependent on major financing (or hierarchical structures) to sustain themselves.

Shifting Palestinian strategy to one of a popular fight for human rights would reverse the strategic paradigm: Israel--put on the defensive-- would be forced to respond with concessions or repression, either of which would complement the strategic goals of the popular peace movement. I refer to it in that way because it will, in nascent form represent what Israel fears most: a strategic alliance between Palestine and a growing sector of Israelis (of both Jewish and Arab communities).

Military leaders tend to assess experience in military terms. The setbacks of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan or of Israel in Lebanon offer tempting glimpses of their military weaknesses. The lessons are not particularly useful to Palestine, however. The task of ejecting an invading army is fundamentally different from that of confronting an entrenched settler state. The most applicable lesson from those conflicts is the powerful impact and global reach of the new Arab news media. A dramatic shift in the Palestinian struggle will reverberate around the world.

Asymmetrical conflict and solidarity

Security experts, media pundits and insurgents alike argue that the world has entered into an era of “asymmetrical warfare” in which great military machines confront weaker opponents who, in turn, must develop tactics that compensate for the imbalance in resources. This is not new. Anti-colonial and revolutionary conflicts have always been asymmetrical. They have accommodated this reality with a wide range of strategies including non-violent public campaigns (India, Ghana, Iran, Poland), protracted guerrilla wars (China, Viet Nam, Mozambique, Guatemala, Colombia),

civil-military movements (El Salvador, Nicaragua), civil insurrections (Philippines, Ukraine) and terror campaigns (the Basque country and Northern Ireland). The Vietnamese revolution confronted a force in the field that had the capacity to defeat it militarily. What prevented the United States from employing its full military arsenal (including nuclear weapons) was a configuration of social, cultural and political relationships (including the threat of direct Soviet or Chinese intervention) that would have made it too costly to do so.

The end of the cold war does not give an unrestricted carte blanche to US military power. Much to the disappointment of U.S. neo-cons, there remain constraints on its use. One of these is the economic competition among the large economies, particularly Europe, China and the United States. The U.S. reliance on military force to compensate for its waning economic stature is viewed with alarm in other major capitals and will rebound on the U.S. economy if taken too far. Then there is the imperative to maintain domestic and international political support for their imperial policies. Vietnamese sophistication on this point (those close to Ho Chi Minh liked to describe their war strategy as 80% political and 20% military) helped to secure their victory. Even Vietnamese guerrilla fighters in the field were aware of the impact of their actions on U.S. public opinion. U.S. blindness to these complexities sealed the fate of its occupation in Iraq from its first moments, and its ineffectiveness there has weakened its hand around the world.

The advent of suicide tactics has given militarily disadvantaged groups the ability to elude security measures and deliver destructive power with great precision. Suicide missions--in which the soldiers have little or no chance to survive--have always been a subsidiary part of warfare. In Palestine it has become a primary means of attack. An astute observer has termed suicide attacks "the bombing raids of the poor." This is an apt description in a number of ways. In military terms, bombing raids allow for attacks on targets that would otherwise be inaccessible. They are also at best a supportive tactic to help major forces achieve their main objectives. When directed against civilians they also shift attention away from the core issues of a conflict.

Another impact of suicide tactics on the Palestinian insurrection is that they compliment the strategy of Major General Wingate by removing a steady supply of young activists (the suicide bombers themselves) from the movement before they can gain experience and develop political maturity. This shrinks the pool from which new leadership and innovative perspectives can emerge.

More significant than the use of suicide is the targeting of non-combatants. This has several major strategic consequences. The first--as discussed above--is that it re-enforces Israeli social cohesiveness.

The second is that it weakens the ability of international allies to build effective solidarity. Targeting civilians is contrary not only to international law but also to the moral sensibilities of most religions and philosophies.

This is a sensitive issue. Palestinian activists of all persuasions are rightly resentful of calls for a cessation of Palestinian violence that fail to recognize Israeli atrocities as equally terrorist (and on a more massive scale). Such calls are seen as bolstering the comfort level of supporters rather than the prospects of the Palestinian people. They also tend to lend credence to the false premise that Israeli assaults on Palestinian civilians are merely a response to Palestinian aggression. This critique is valid but does not address the deeper relationship between conflict strategy and international support.

The role of international solidarity in an asymmetrical conflict is both crucial and secondary. It's potential to impact the economy of the perpetrating power, affect the flow of arms and aid and place limits on the repressive apparatus are just some of the ways in which it can make the difference between success and defeat. In the Anti-Apartheid struggle global solidarity eventually forced even South Africa's major backers to institute sanctions. In order to accomplish any of these impacts, a solidarity movement depends on the global perceptions of the struggle. These, in turn, largely derive from the choices of the protagonists on the ground.

The moral imperative to support people under siege is not determined by the tactics of the oppressed, but the ability of the oppressed to garner support depends on their demonstrating to

potential supporters that the struggle is both worthy of support and capable of effectively utilizing it. The tactics of resistance movements must take this into account

If the last thirty years have taught us anything new in the realm of political struggle, it is that perception is not merely a reflection of reality, but a determinant of it. This is something that has been better understood by the Israelis than the Palestinians. One of Ahmad's and Said's frustrations was that they were never able to convince Palestinian leaders to pay more than token attention to the cultural and political inner life of the United States.⁶⁰

Suffering is experienced in the small picture. Whoever murders my loved one becomes my enemy no matter what cause they profess to serve. The trading of atrocities reads like a blood feud, not a political conflict. The net effect is that many people disengage from the issue and turn their attention to conflicts that do not confuse them with mixed moral messages.

An effective political story is one where the big picture and the small picture are in harmony with each other and both reflect my righteousness. If either image shows me to violate the sensibilities of my supporters the resulting dissonance immobilizes them. People view ourselves as innocent and we support others whom we think of as being innocent like us. Israel denies its atrocities and as well as its colonial aggression. This brings the two pictures into apparent harmony. The Palestinian side has relied on its own conviction that its cause is just, and has let international perceptions run their own course.

Israel commands a well-organized complex of institutions and relationships with which to impact media, public and U.S. Congressional perceptions of the conflict. It has long been advocated by supporters of the Palestinian national movement that it invest in a media and public diplomacy infrastructure of its own--particularly in the United States. This is undoubtedly good advice. The story told by Palestinian action, however, will have an even greater impact on public perceptions. That is not to say that the message can get out without an organizational framework. But a paradigm of struggle with a popular struggle sensibility, a moral harmony between large and small picture images, and an understandable and winnable strategy that incorporates Jews as well as Palestinians will expand the bases of individual and institutional support for the struggle exponentially. That will create the conditions for a blossoming of solidarity projects of all kinds, including in the areas of media and public communication.

The strategic imperative to unify your support base and divide that of your opponent applies to the external support from which each side draws sustenance as well as to one's domestic base. The failure to understand this is one of the reasons for the strategic defeats or deadlocks in some of the anti-colonial and secessionist struggles cited earlier. There is a significant sector of Diaspora Jews who recoil at the brutality that Israel perpetrates, supposedly in their name. They are unable to shake the perception, however (in the public and in themselves), that their fellow Jews are being targeted for genocidal elimination, and therefore their intervention is muted. No one has attempted to demonstrate to them that the recognition of Palestinian aspirations does not mean the liquidation of Jewish ones. Changing the paradigm of struggle on the ground will permit a clean polarization in the Jewish Diaspora rather than a muddy one in which Jews divide over the brutality in the occupied territories but unite in defense of the Nationalist state.

The international struggle is a necessary dimension of the struggle on the ground and its laws cannot be dismissed.

Cannibalism or transformation

The conduct of a struggle has reverberations that go beyond the contest with the opposing side and the perceptions in the outside world. You become what you do. Israel, as a discriminatory society, begins to impose tighter and tighter controls on its favored people. A small-scale terrorist strategy also finds a way to turn inward. The gunning down of three small children in Gaza City (whose father is the Fatah security chief) and the cycle of retaliation which followed, illustrates the process of diverting a conflict into peripheral issues. Whether the attack was part of the ongoing friction between Hamas and Fatah or was intended to manipulate and inflame it, such a tactic transforms political conflict into personal and family feuding, as issues of revenge, honor and parity (for which there is no resolution) displace the original core issues as reasons to continue fighting.

Without a strategic analysis grounded in solidarity, the societies in conflict begin to eat their young.

Palestinian society is like the Israeli in that it becomes more cohesive when under attack from outside. Israel's continued brutality will therefore guarantee a significant level of popular support for active resistance, including terror attacks, even among people who are conflicted about its morality. New Israeli atrocities bring about renewed support for hitting back at Israelis. In the long run, though, the terror strategy will likely be undermined by its ineffectiveness. The logic of moral parity --“if you kill my child, am I not entitled to kill yours?”--may seem a compelling one in the face of brutality and loss. It also illuminates the inadequacy of fairness as a substitute for justice. The urge for revenge can sustain a small sector of the people (the young, angry, and unemployed) almost indefinitely, but broader strata of the community need to experience some evidence that things can get better. An endless war of attrition (along with intensified internal feuding) is not likely to deliver that hope.

For a strategy of Lihish’ta’weel to take hold, it must be adopted first by elements of Palestinian civil society (with support from Israeli Jews who can embrace its implications). It cannot be implemented at the level of national leadership alone. Mid-level and community leadership and activists (and, where possible, prisoners) are its most likely point of entry into the conflict and are the base from which the movement can be re-directed.

To refer to campaigns of mass action, protest and disruption as “non-violent” can lead to misunderstandings. Such struggles do take casualties from the repression of the state and its allies. It is also not wise to renounce peoples’ right to protect their homes and families. What is important is to not allow the state to shift the struggle back to the military terrain where it enjoys both material and ideological advantage.

Contrary to public perception, al Qaeda’s support in Islamist circles, and in the Ummah in general, has declined since its high-water mark during the anti-Soviet campaign. This runs counter to the view--promoted by al-Qaeda and its U.S. nemesis--that we are moving into an era dominated by massive terror and indiscriminate counter-insurgency. The fact that these two forces have seized the microphone of global discourse does not mean that either has a real grasp of the political weather--as evidenced by their continuing strategic blunders. The violence against Shi'a civilians perpetrated by the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his faction in Iraq was seen as so counter-productive to the cause that it generated pressure even from al-Qaeda to back off. Although al-Qaeda has no affection for Shia theology, it feared the effects of dividing Islam at the expense of its own chosen battle against the United States. The fact that Bin Laden enfranchised al-Zarqawi in the first place to represent al-Qaeda in Iraq appears to reflect the weakened ability of the former to effect events on the ground and his fear of becoming irrelevant. This also underlies al-Qaeda’s call for solidarity with the Shi'a Hizbullah in its confrontation with Israel: by publicly associating itself with Hizbullah, an organization with a mass following and an actual social program, it sought to rescue its battered prestige (predictably weakened by its actions in Iraq).⁶¹ Hizbullah represents the local, nation-based wing of the Islamist movement which has been in ideological conflict with the global-war faction led by Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. To my knowledge Hizbullah did not deign to respond.

This paper advocates a strategic sensibility more than a specific set of actions (although some are suggested). There is a broad range of possible initiatives that could flow from the framework suggested here. For the sake of both Jewish and Palestinian ultimate goals, the political and moral initiative must shift to civil society and (especially) away from the Israeli state. This most certainly will require allowing the social-political initiatives of Palestinian civil society to displace military activity at the heart of the struggle. Shifting the spotlight of the struggle to the material issues facing Palestinians would create a moral context for Israeli dissidents to move from criticizing particular state policies to engaging in solidarity--that is to say, engaging in a parallel struggle with the Palestinians toward a common goal.

A politics of Lihish’ta’weel widens opportunities for stresses within the Israeli Defense Force to contribute to the peace movement. Obligatory military service ensures that the rank and file of the armed forces are more heterogeneous than would be the case in a volunteer army. Israelis directly involved in the brutal business of policing and repressing Arab civilians have emerged as some of

the most trenchant critics of state policies. They currently face the strain of recoiling at the duties they must perform and the imperative--as they understand it--to protect Israel from outside destruction. As long as the struggle is framed as a Palestinian/Jewish conflict, these two moral imperatives will remain in apparent contradiction with each other. Under the conditions of Lihish'ta'weel politics, the big picture is redefined as a joint human struggle against oppression. This big picture image harmonizes with the soldiers' small picture discomfort at the brutality and allows them see defiance of their government as a necessary act of Jewish liberation rather than treason. The impact of strains within the military sometimes plays a major role in the course of a social struggle and sometimes only a minor one, but it is always a preoccupation of the military administration and one which conditions its range of options.

The year 2004 saw the emergence of the Shministim, a movement of Israeli youth that has proclaimed their refusal to take part in the occupation or the repression. Their open letter to the government in March of 2005, signed by 250 boys and girls is noteworthy for its eloquence and clarity:

The occupation leads to inhumanity and to a massive infringement of the right to life. It tramples on the basic rights of millions of people and inflicts daily carnage and suffering. It leads to the confiscation of lands, to mass destruction of homes and public buildings, to arrests and killings without trial, to victimization and murder of innocents, to hunger, to a denial of medical assistance, to collective punishment, and to the building and expansion of settlements and the negation of any chance of normal living both in the occupied territories and in Israel itself. This flagrant violation of human rights is opposed to our view of the world, as well as being in contravention of international conventions signed and ratified by Israel...

The occupation has corrupted Israel, turning it into a militaristic, racist, chauvinistic and violent society. Israel is wasting its resources on the perpetuation of the occupation and repression in the territories, while hundreds of thousands of Israelis live in shameful poverty. In recent years Israeli citizens have experienced a deterioration of all public services. Education, medicine, welfare, pensions, everything to do with the well being of the citizenry has been neglected and sacrificed for the continued existence of settlements which the majority of the population wishes to be evacuated. We cannot stand idly facing this situation, which amounts to a "targeted liquidation" of the principle of equality. We wish to live in a society which pursues justice, upholding equal rights to every single citizen. The occupation and repression policy is an obstacle to the realization of this vision, therefore we shall refuse to take part in it.⁶²

Commenting on their motivations for the letter quoted above, some of the young activists explain,

For the last five years, the Israeli left-wing has been silent. Thousands of people were killed, more than 100,000 were injured, and still the occupation continues. Every now-and-then a new initiative is born in the Israeli left-wing, but all of these initiatives fall apart quickly. The main reason for that, we believe, is the absurd which is found in the willingness of people who oppose the occupation and think it is not legitimate, to take an active part in it...We don't have any intention to fade away ...⁶³

Predictability is a strategic vulnerability for Israel. The ideological straightjacket of the dystopia principle limits its tactical options to those of repression, military escalation and tightened racial-demographic regulation. This has not been put to advantage by the Palestinian movement whose dominant factions have been locked into an equally predictable menu of dysfunctional responses. A shift back to a popular resistance strategy opens the door to constant innovation, decentralization and surprise, which translates into strategic initiative--especially given the constraints on Israeli flexibility (how could the state respond to a children's march for peace, for example, or--to take a page from Gandhi--to a mass pilgrimage to collect water?).

So far I have emphasized the incapacity of the Jewish Nationalist state to be a partner in the search for peace, and the imperative for a Jewish-Palestinian alliance to replace it with a post-colonial leadership. This analysis does not imply a vote of confidence in the leading Palestinian leadership groups. I am not a partisan of either theocratic rule or machine politics. This paper, however, only

seeks to identify what is necessary to end the conflict, and the Palestinian leadership does not appear to face the same structural constraints to its ability to participate in such a process. This does not guarantee that they will be capable of making the necessary changes to guide the transformation of themselves and the movement. If a transformative strategy captures the imagination of the Palestinian social base, it will put the leadership to the test. A large part of Hamas' electoral support came from people who were voting their rejection of Fatah based on the latter's accommodations with Israel, its administrative incompetence and corruption. Palestine's high levels of education, cosmopolitan sensibilities and de facto women's community leadership do not however guarantee a reliable foundation for Hamas' conservative Islamist theology. Hamas represented the only force willing and capable at the time to respond to Israel's escalating violence. The loyalties of both groups' constituents are to an extent based on personal and family networks and financial relationships rather than ideological purity. The Palestinian people have demonstrated the ability to put their efforts where there is the greatest hope for success. The danger of abandonment by their own constituencies is the threat that can most effectively force a cessation of violence between Palestinian factions.

The conflict we are discussing has gone on for longer than most of its participants have been alive. Looking ahead to the problems of a post-conflict world may seem like a delusional exercise. It is nonetheless instructive to consider the experience of other peoples. Fifteen years after the end of the Mozambican revolution and the civil war which followed it, the state finds its meager budget overwhelmed by a tsunami of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and domestic violence. Leaders of the liberation movement, FRELIMO, believe that this outcome could have been mitigated if they had at least had some idea--during the conflict--that such downstream effects could come to haunt them.⁶⁴ For Palestinians, whose vision usually incorporates return to a multi-ethnic society, a conflict based on racial targeting of non-combatants can lay the groundwork for future disappointments in the struggle to construct the post-Zionist society that must be brought to life.

Jewish oppression and the possibility of wolves

The revolutionaries who founded the African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape (PAIGC) in 1959, began their strategic process by defining their enemy. This crucial analytical step (whether taken up deliberately or by default) sets the stage for a whole cascade of subsequent choices that determine the direction of a movement. It is possible to identify my opponent according to racial, economic, national, religious or political lines of demarcation. The choices I make will determine the opportunities I have to create alliances to my advantage.

To confront the role and implications of racism in the conflict we need to see how it is embedded on either side. We should start with a necessary distinction: racism is inherent to a colonial enterprise while it is not for an anti-colonial movement. For colonialism, racism provides the framework to justify taking land, resources and political agency away from people to whom it belongs and helps maintain social cohesiveness in the face of inevitable resistance. Racist ideology can play a part in the resistance to a colonial power but is not a structural requirement for such resistance. Let us take this a little deeper to examine how it works. We will start with Israel.

Israeli Zionism is correct in defining its primary enemy as being the Palestinian people as a whole. Acting on this basis ensures that Palestinians will be unanimous in their opposition. The advantage of this for Israel is that it eliminates the danger of having to come to an agreement with any sector of Palestinian society, thereby placing in jeopardy the program of an exclusive Jewish state. Racial polarization does not threaten the stability of an Israeli post-conflict program because under the dystopian logic of Zionism (embraced by both the Jabotinski and Ben Gurion factions of the early state) there really is no end to the conflict. This polarization assures Jewish loyalty and averts the dangers of comprise. Periodic confrontation with neighboring states is seen as a necessary condition for continued Israeli dominance and thereby the security of the nation. In short, racism is a structural necessity that flows from the logic of colonialism.

Before examining the influence of racism in the Palestinian movement (and the world beyond) we must take a moment to acknowledge the difference between structural and situational racism. Situational racism is expressed in incidents that bring racism to the fore, exposing attitudes that are based on racial assumptions. Structural racism is the stage on which these incidents play out. In racialized societies, structural racism is largely invisible to the racially privileged sector of the

population. The formal and informal institutions function to their benefit and they regard their higher standards of living and ease of achievement as a reflection of their innate abilities. Those who live on the wrong side of a racial dividing line encounter resistance to their efforts in every area of endeavor, from education to housing, transport, shopping, use of public space, safety from crime or from law enforcement forces, cultural affirmation, access to credit, access to safe work assignments, medical care, business opportunities and recourse to the legal system. This translates into high levels of poverty and incarceration, poor health and educational outcomes and lack of political representation.

Privileged members of a racialized society become aware of racial dynamics when they are expressed situationally. This can take the form of the police beating or killing an unarmed person or in a dramatic act of resistance by a victim to one more instance of racist mistreatment. To the privileged person these incidents are the expressions of personal failings: this person or that one is “being” racist. They may be equally offended by either kind of disruption, and view them as ugly disturbances in a world that is otherwise basically satisfactory. To the privileged person racism happens in the small picture. To be accused of enjoying racial privilege is seen as an insult to one’s personal integrity as a “good” person. To the racial underdog on the other hand, racism is more about being complicit in a daily reality which structurally advantages some people over others. In the United States, the murder trial of Black sports celebrity O.J. Simpson was viewed very differently by people on the different sides of the racial color line. The fault line was not over whether the defendant could have committed the crime but over whether the police were likely to manufacture or falsify evidence in order to convict a Black man. To whites this seemed highly unlikely whereas to Blacks it was a given.

This divide is reflected in attitudes toward Israel and Palestine. White U.S. Americans identify with the Israeli victims of situational violence while those who are intimate with structural oppression tend to sympathize with Palestinian victims of displacement and occupation. U.S. governmental involvement in the “peace process” has focused on suppressing situational violence (specifically against Israel) leading toward a “peaceful” status quo in which the structural violence of the occupation (including continued encroachment on land and living conditions) continues unchallenged.

For Israelis to abandon racism requires abandoning the exclusivist project as a whole and redefining the vision of a secure future for Jews in non-colonial terms. For the Palestinian side a different dynamic operates. Palestine does not have to give up its anti-colonial objectives in order to distance itself from racism since racism is not inherent in anti-colonialism. Racism is, in fact, a obstacle to the success of the anti-colonial struggle itself.

Anti-Jewish racism in the Middle East is not an all-encompassing social-political system under which Jews must live each day, but rather an analytical frame that affects the possible strategic relationships. Palestinian targeting of civilians based on their identity in the current conflict, flows from a racial paradigm set in motion by the racism of the colonial venture itself. Whether or not racial terminology is used to justify this practice, it is the language of action that speaks the loudest. That does not mean that racial targeting is inevitable or represents a useful analysis or that it leads to effective strategy. In practice (seen from a big picture, strategic perspective) it’s embrace primarily benefits Israel by validating the racial framework on which Jewish ultra-nationalism depends, assisting in maintaining Israeli unity and undermining international pressure. The Israeli government would prefer that any resistance collapse entirely, but if it is to persist, it is far easier to contain an enemy that targets your constituency as a whole rather than one that vies for its support. Racism, in this case is not a strategic imperative for resistance strategy but rather an ideological contaminant that distorts the ability of Palestinian leaders to understand the dynamics in play.

But wait a minute! Is there even such a thing as anti-Jewish racism? There are many, including people in the Palestinian support movement, who insist that there is not. They point to the absence of economic exclusion or legal restrictions on people of Jewish descent or faith. In part this perspective is a reflexive reaction to the Zionist propensity to attack even most timid criticisms of Israel as anti-Jewish. But no matter how many times a shepherd boy falsely cries that there is a wolf attacking the sheep, that in itself does not prove or disprove the existence of wolves. It is possible to accept that anti-Jewish racism is not the defining force behind the Palestinian-Israeli

conflict while still not believing that it is merely a Jewish Nationalist fantasy (or that it is irrelevant to the conflict). Let's take a look.

Years ago I was part of an organizing drive at the hospital where I was a janitor. Fellow workers in this complex, multi-ethnic workplace were vocal in attacking “the Jews,” whose greedy nature was assumed to be behind the anti-worker policies in this Jewish-run institution. In international solidarity work I have often been approached by veterans of struggle in Latin America (perhaps my being Puerto Rican made me the approachable Jew) wanting to know if it was true that Jews participated in popular struggles in order to undermine them, if Zionism reflected a Jewish need to control the world, if Jews could be trusted. What is the significance of these anecdotes? Essentially, that the stereotypes and generalizations that accompany racist ideology undermine solidarity and obscure class issues. The existence of Zionism doesn’t make this any less so.

The term “anti-Jewish racism” which I employ here is an inadequate term for describing what could better be called “Jewish oppression.” The commonalities with various manifestations of racism are important to note in order to illustrate that the Jewish experience of oppression does not set us apart from other peoples. There are elements of the historical Jewish experience, however, that require further exposition. First of these is that Jews are not a racial group in that people may choose to join, and they may be--and are--of any “race.” Secondly, Jewish oppression differs from structural racism in that it does not relegate Jews to a permanent underclass. Rather, the position of Jews, for centuries, has been that of a mobile buffer class, alternately assimilated and targeted. In periods of assimilation many Jewish individuals have taken up prominent positions in their host countries and there has often been a significant middle class component to our community. This is part of a cycle in which Jewish economic security is the basis upon which to blame the Jews during hard times. I use the term “anti-Semitism” sparingly for the perhaps obvious reason that Jews and Arabs are equally Semitic peoples.

Observers of racism in Europe will note an eerie echo of past anti-Semitism in the treatment of Muslims today. Shrill rhetoric is directed at outsiders who “refuse to give up their customs,” people who “are Islamic first and Dutch second.” Restrictions on dress, and on employment in certain jobs are being instigated methodically and incrementally. Muslim insistence on being who they are is framed as a threat to their nations of residence and as a sign of ‘intolerance.’ The never-self-conscious Tony Blair can be counted on to make things clear for us: “Our tolerance is part of what makes Britain Britain,” he declared. “So conform to it--or don’t come here.”

Racist ideology is not just about (big picture) structural economic exploitation. For economic buffer groups it takes the form of resentment and distrust that can provide the fertile ground for scapegoating in times of social crisis. In the small picture, racial prejudice is passed from one generation to the next and it is embedded in literature and cultural and religious attitudes. In times of social expansion it may be visible mostly in the fringe--the reactionary groups that serve as a seed bank for bigotry. In times of contraction, some combination of these seeds will find the conditions suitable for taking root. Racism is transferable. A racialized world view allows the social forces that would target Jews at one time to target Turks or Muslims at another.

Backers of Jewish Nationalism assert the claim that there is a massive new wave of anti-Semitism engulfing the world. The principle evidence for this is seen in continued criticism of Israel, the resurgence of fascist parties in places such as France and Russia and attacks or sabotage of religious institutions and symbols. The rise of right wing political forces takes the form of a racist nationalism that demonizes “outsiders,” whether they are Jews, Muslims or immigrants from poorer regions.

The pogroms of 1881 responded to the economic shifts represented by the end of the feudal system in Russia. Today there is a rise in racist and theocratic movements in reaction to the downward economic spiral experienced in much of the world in the wake of the Cold War and the aggressive corporate globalization which has followed. Jews in many countries are among the victims of this contractive trend in world culture. These reactionary forces are responding to opportunities to play on the economic uncertainties in their home countries rather than out of any sympathy with Palestinians.

The left intellectuals who deny that there is such a thing as racism against Jews are for the most

part attempting to distance themselves from Jewish Nationalism and its overblown claims. They accept the Zionist definition of “anti-Semitism” as a tidal wave of genocidal hatred poised to destroy Israel and the Jewish people and, not seeing such a threat on the horizon, conclude that there is no such thing as anti-Jewish racism after all. I heard one such professor say that since there are not pogroms taking place on college campuses, talk of anti-Jewish racism is silly. This is a rather high standard for determining if a group is subject to racism and it seems peculiar for people with an otherwise clear critique of Jewish Nationalist politics to rely so completely on its logic for their definition of anti-Jewish racism.

This puts rank and file Jewish activist in an awkward position. We can accommodate the instances of anti-Jewish prejudice that we encounter in daily life and politics (racist “analysis” is never a healthy influence in activist work), or be accused of embracing reactionary Jewish Nationalist hysteria.

There are dovish activists, such as Tikkun’s Rabbi Michael Lerner, who reject Zionism’s most outlandish claims but accept the idea that questioning Israel’s “right to exist” crosses the line into anti-Jewish racism. The acceptance of a racially exclusive state is determined to be the test of one’s anti-racism!

The implications of this question are not measured only by the amount of damage done to individual Jews. If “low intensity” racist practice is permitted to govern attitudes and relationship to Jews, then racial determinism remains part of the framework through which we view the world. This is a dangerous concession for a social justice movement to make and it deserves to be consistently challenged. A faulty compass does not portend a safe journey.

One can reject the dystopian assertion that criticizing Israel represents anti-Jewish hatred, without embracing the unlikely notion that anti-Jewish racism simply evaporated at the close of the Nuremberg trials. To recognize that anti-Jewish racism exists at certain levels does not mean that we are asserting it to be the one issue that must displace all others or that it overshadows Israeli colonialism or ethnic cleansing. It is possible to hold all of these ideas in our heads at the same time. They will not explode.

What is important here is to determine if and how anti-Jewish racism plays out in the struggle over Palestine.

Jewish oppression and Palestinian struggle

It should not be blithely accepted that anti-Jewish oppression is purely a recent European transplant that has no historical roots in the Arab and Muslim world. The relationships between peoples are complex and contradictory and can contain instances of both solidarity and betrayal. When Jews were expelled by Spain in 1492 at the crowning moment of the “reconquista” of the Iberian peninsula from Moorish dominance, the doors of the Ottoman Empire were flung open to them. Historian Aurora Levins Morales describes it so:

When Spanish and Portuguese Jews were welcomed into the Ottoman empire, the motivations were economic, not humanitarian. They brought all kinds of expertise, trade networks, and some financial resources. Their expulsion from Spain served to consolidate a religious-based identity which united a newly formed nation just being bound together by Isabel and Fernando. That the retaking of territory from the Muslims could be played as religious rather than just about grabbing land required a general story about religious purity. That political need superseded the economic one. Spain lost a huge sector of skilled workers, and gutted sectors of its own economy. The Ottomans were in a position to scoop those resources up and did so, for the time being. They framed this as tolerance and being cosmopolitan. It was a diverse and dynamic society, part of the very wide flung Islamic world which comprised many nationalities, and it was in a position to make use of Jewish immigrants. At other times, when the political and economic needs of the various Muslim and/or Arab countries changed, Jews were persecuted. Same deal as Europe.⁶⁵

The Muslim world, just like the Christian one, was comprised of a complex interaction of religious, ethnic, commercial and political interests. The place of Jews--and other groups-- within that world was conditioned by changes in all of these arenas. For the Jews it meant the

continuation of the precarious tightrope between social stability and convulsive reprisal that has characterized our position in the world before and since.

The ideological framework for anti-Jewish racism in the Middle East was nurtured in the ideological “seed banks” since the Nazi occupation and the Arab-language radio propaganda to which they subjected the region. It has emerged in the rhetoric of leaders and intellectuals over the years. Recent articles and films have framed the conflict with Israel in a racial framework; even re-introducing the racist Protocols of the Elders of Zion as an explanation for Zionist practice.⁶⁶ Holocaust denial has been promoted by figures as prominent as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as an ideological weapon against Israel. It has also been echoed by figures such as Hizbullah’s Sheikh Nasrallah.

The significance of Zionist racist rhetoric is that it is part of a comprehensive racial social system and military policy. Likewise Palestinian racial rhetoric is relevant to the extent that it is expressed in action. Targeting civilians based on their racial-ethnic identity--whether it is articulated as such or not-- reinforces a racial concept of the struggle. We have already discussed the strategic liability that this represents. If individual Israelis understand that they are being attacked as Jews then they will tend to unite across class and political lines with other Jews. If they saw the Palestinian movement as targeting the colonial nature of the ultra-nationalist elite, they would have to decide whether to identify with that elite or position themselves against it. It also has another consequence which relates to the (now seemingly distant) post-conflict society which will emerge. Once racial constructs for explaining conflict have been implanted in the cultural memory, they are difficult to erase. It sets the stage for future stresses on society to be manifested as racial/ethnic targeting.

A counterbalance to the holocaust denial initiatives has come in the form of protests from Palestinian and Arab voices largely ignored in the western media. Ibrahim Ramey of the Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation:

Like many in the global Muslim community, I regard the occupation of Palestinian land and the policies of the State of Israel as issues of extreme importance. I am certainly among those who believe that the occupation of Palestinian territory and the denial of full human rights to Palestinians, and even to Arab people regarded as Israeli citizens, is deplorable.

But I find it to be morally unconscionable to attempt to build political arguments and political movements on a platform of racial hatred and the denial of the suffering of the human beings who were victimized by the viciousness of Hitler's genocidal rampage through Europe.

President Ahmedinejad should recognize that the issue of the Palestinian people must not, and cannot, be transmogrified into the ugly and spiritually bankrupt context of racial hatred. The cause of freedom must never drink from the well of hatred and racism.⁶⁷

Mahmoud Al-Safadi, recently released after 18 years in prison by Israel for his role in the first Intifada, wrote in an open letter to President Ahmedinejad:

"We fight for our existence and our rights and against the historical injustice which was inflicted on us in 1948. We will not win our victory and our independence by denying the genocide perpetrated against the Jewish people, even though the forces who occupy our country today and dispossess us are part of the Jewish people."⁶⁸

Al-Safadi describes himself as a former believer that the Holocaust was exaggerated who was later influenced by his study of history and the positions of Arab intellectuals such as Azmi Bishara and Edward Said.

Solidarity comes in many textures and degrees of purity. Many Europeans who risked their lives to save Jews still harbored anti-Jewish sentiments of their own. Still, their humanity withstood the challenge and what they did was essential. Likewise, anti-Arab prejudice is present in the views of some Israeli Jews who struggle to protect the rights of Palestinians. These are the complex and imperfect threads out of which the human fabric is woven. They are materials from which we

strive to fashion a tighter weave that will not unravel when put to the test by greed and fear.

Under the pressures of colonial assault it is not surprising that racial oppression will give rise to racial backlash. Visceral response, however, is not a substitute for strategic clarity. The genius of the South African anti-apartheid movement's international work lay in its making the structural racial oppression of daily existence into a moral issue for the world. They did this by identifying the struggle as being one about racism while preventing it from becoming a racial struggle. This was not because South African society was less brutal or racist than the Israeli. It was the result of strategic political choice on the part of the movement's leadership.

South African Whites could hardly wrap themselves in the mantle of an oppressed people. The entire nation was an "occupied territory" and the repressive apparatus was massive and brutal. In addition, the White population as a whole was complicit in a system that afforded them special privileges. Many white critics of the regime denounced the violence of the police forces while internalizing some of the ideological underpinnings of the system--the need for control a backward and incapable Black populace and the definition of the racist state as a "democracy." Bitterness toward this exploitative minority was widespread and certainly legitimate. Movement leadership nonetheless determined that the struggle should be directed against the institutions of racial control, including its repressive forces, rather than against Whites as such. This allowed fissures to appear in White South Africa that eventually brought large numbers of Whites into the anti-apartheid cause and weakened the support base for the regime.

Finding the road

Seats at the table

This paper has deliberately concentrated on the agency of the people living in the zone of conflict. The history of the region has been in many ways determined by the interests and manipulations of external powers (\$130 billion dollars in U.S. military aid to Israel is not incidental to the balance of power that has emerged). The wheels of the imperial nations can only find traction, however, if the conditions on the ground permit it. This analysis considers that the people on the ground can shape those conditions and determine the future trajectory of their society, undermining the desires of outside powers to impose their interests.

Any initiatives taken at the heart of this conflict will make waves that will wash up on many shores. The region is dominated by regimes characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty, based on oil wealth shared between local elites and foreign corporations. Western support for these undemocratic regimes is a major source of the resentment that fuels Jihadist, nationalist, leftist and public hostility toward the United States. Under normal conditions one would expect popular opposition to crystallize around these elites and their backers. The role of Israel as an outside threat facilitates the imposition of nationalist unity and the suppression of dissent in these countries. The deflection of anger away from local and global elites and toward their Jewish proxies represents the continuation of the traditional buffer role filled by Jewish communities in Europe. In the meantime, the corporations reap huge benefits from intimate involvement with elites on both sides.

As a sponsor of both Israel and reactionary Arab regimes, the U.S. has taken upon itself the mantle of "neutral broker." This is despite the fact that none of these parties represents Palestinian interests and that the U.S. has been the military and political sponsor of Israel. In Northern Ireland, Britain similarly positioned itself as an "honest broker" between the nationalists and the Protestant paramilitaries (who had functioned as death squads under British sponsorship). By doing so, the British were able ensure that the negotiations narrowly concerned themselves with a cessation of fighting but avoided the core issues of the conflict. This has been the U.S. role in the Middle East under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

Any outside parties engaged to mediate--once that becomes a possibility--should represent either international institutions (or other bodies or governments) who do not have a direct material stake

in the conflict. The shape of a post-colonial society is up to the affected people to define. The world community can claim an interest in two areas: that there be no system of racial privilege established, and that the nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction inherited from the Israeli state come under the purview of the international laws and structures that pertain in other nations.

The shifting ground

To call the conflict a stalemate is perhaps too limited a view. While the principal protagonists appear locked in a rigid paradigm of struggle, the conditions around them are changing in ways that will naturally alter the terms of the conflict.

- 1) The toll taken on Palestinian society is reaching levels that any people would be hard pressed to absorb. The United States pursued a war of attrition against Nicaraguan civilian society in the 1980s. Its proximate goal was to impose the election of a small pro-U.S. political party. Ongoing terrorist attacks on the rural population cost more than 30,000 lives and caused tremendous destruction of crops, infrastructure and homes. It also diverted Nicaraguan state resources from the reforms that benefited the people. What eventually caused the population to accept U.S. demands was not the high cost itself but the cost/benefit ratio. That is, that the benefits for which people were making such great sacrifices were dwindling and it did not appear that they could be salvaged. They made the choice to secure their immediate survival by electing the U.S. candidate and hoping to protect what gains they could under the new conditions. For Palestinians to sustain the level of injury to which they are being subjected will require more than a vision of endless resistance. This is not to predict any weakening of their political convictions but it should not be assumed that they can remain in place indefinitely without hope for a satisfactory outcome. Many of the Gaza residents discussing emigration have their sights on countries far from the zone of battle, which would weaken their leverage as actors in the conflict. There must be light at the end of the tunnel.
- 2) Another factor accelerating change is the decline in United States' power. The humiliation of the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan, and its refusal to support a ceasefire in Lebanon, have contributed to a weakened position in all spheres. The challenges to "free trade" policies and the emergence of populist governments throughout Latin America are evidence of this weakness. This feeds anxiety in Israeli governing circles that time is running short to "remake" the Middle east according to the U.S. blueprint. It might also increase U.S. pressure to impose "stability" in the form of a limited resolution to the Palestinian conflict that would seek to preserve the Nationalist state while trimming its ambitions.
- 3) The third factor is the "demographic time bomb." The dwindling position of Israel's Jewish population in the lands which it controls is fueling a crisis of identity. Tighter restrictions on movement, human rights and marriage are bringing to the fore the contradiction between the imperatives of racial control and the myth of a democratic culture. This is leading to pressures on the one side to at least create a façade of democratic inclusion and on the other, more open calls to complete the removal of Palestinians that was left unfinished in 1948. At the same time that the right is narrowing the definition of who is a Jew, the government is sending emissaries to convert isolated communities in other parts of the world to drop them into the settlements and shore up a threatened "Jewish" majority.⁶

How these processes will unfold and interact cannot be predicted. They can be impacted, though. In a time of flux the initiative can be seized by whoever presents a clear agenda with a broad potential appeal to diverse sectors of the Palestinian and Israeli publics.

Bitter harvests

The traditional Chinese approach to medicine is based on the idea that the courses along which energy flows through the body must remain unobstructed in order that the organs and other components get the nutrients and instructions that they need. The insertion of an acupuncture needle at the right pressure point can generate reactions and changes throughout the system. Appropriate levels of pressure applied with precision at targeted points in the social system are the prescription for political change.

Proponents of a two state "solution" argue that peoples who have subjected each other to so much

destruction will never be able to coexist as equal citizens of a country. The wounds indeed go deep. But injury, loss and bitterness do not reach levels of intensity in Rafah or Netanya that are not also experienced in Aceh or Antioquia or Sierra Leone. The suffering from this conflict is not more profound, the anger no more intractable than other conflicts. The possibility for reconciliation has seemed as illusory before, the road as steep.

There will no doubt be factions who will see any peaceful settlement to be a betrayal. I have seen enough venomous web sites, blogs and mainstream media commentaries to understand that reason cannot penetrate all barriers. It is the collateral damage of brutality. How do you deal with such toxicity?

It is best to approach it as an organizer would. When organizing a workplace or a community you do not attempt to convert the most hostile worker or community member to your cause. You organize from the core. Bring together a nucleus of sympathizers and begin your activities. By the vitality of these efforts you begin to attract more participants. The circle that was vaguely supportive begins to become involved. The indifferent become curious. The skeptical become neutral. As you build momentum the hostile fringe either gets drawn closer in or becomes isolated. Organizing from the core with an effective program creates a gravitational center that draws people toward itself. There will always be a need to watch out for the extremely alienated, especially in the wake of a conflict of this magnitude, but they are only a real danger when the conditions are in place for them to flourish. When you create conditions of social expansion, it becomes more difficult to maintain a popular base for political contraction. Such voices are the product, not the cause, of the difficulties and are certainly not evidence that peace is unattainable.

Recovering from the injuries of six decades of brutality will require targeted resources. It will require expertise. The people have accumulated a tremendous load of grief which must and will find its outlet. Great emotional burdens are often held at bay by the requirements of chronic crisis, but come to the fore as the immediate threat recedes. In this recovery, the role of the artists will be paramount as people struggle to find ways to tell their stories and make sense of experiences that no one should have to live through.

The road to peace

Human beings make the best choices we can from the options that appear within reach. Even the unspeakably inhumane choices made by blood enemies in conflict (whatever the framework of the conflict) do not derive from the inherently evil nature of the perpetrators (however satisfying it is to believe so). They derive from an understanding of the world that makes more expansive options seem too risky. To transform the nature of a seemingly intractable conflict such as that between the people of Palestine and the state of Israel, one must change the conditions that make destructive choices seem reasonable.

The practices that are considered legitimate in war fly in the face of values that are embedded in religious and moral traditions across the map. People are willing to violate a moral principle they hold dear if not doing so would cause them to violate and even greater one (usually the imperative to survive). Lihish'ta'weel is intended to demonstrate that it is possible to satisfy both the self-preservation and connection imperatives of a peoples identity in the course of political conflict.

If, in times of expansive politics, there is a seed bank for bigotry, in times of social contraction there is also a seed bank for generosity. The memories and expansive traditions that have been banished from the public discourse are nonetheless preserved for the day in which conditions will allow them to flourish.

The transformation of politics embodied in Lihish'ta'weel offers a space in which our young people can encounter an alternative to the constrictive fundamentalisms of Jewish ultra-nationalism and reactionary Islamism. Palestinians and Israelis, at the center of conflict in the Middle East, can demonstrate that there is a viable road forward that can embrace the loving, expansive traditions that are at the heart of both cultures. Although there are many other forces at work on the world stage, the Palestinian conflict will continue to exert an inordinate influence on the direction of world politics. It can be a transformative one.

Conclusion

The strategic proposal presented in these pages falls outside of the boundaries of current discourse on the Palestinian conflict. It is the result of an analysis initiated at the time of Israel's 2006 assault on Gaza and Lebanon. I hoped to understand why the Palestinian struggle has not been able to achieve a satisfactory resolution while other contemporary conflicts have long since been resolved. The purpose of this project was to use that understanding to fashion a strategic vision that offers new avenues of action leading toward a just and inclusive peace.

The conclusion of this study is that regime change in Israel--encompassing the entire military-political elite--is the key to peace. I suggest, further, that this would represent not the endangerment, but rather the liberation of Israeli Jews and can be brought about only by their actions. The conditions that can bring about such a profound reversal of Israeli Jewish opinion can be brought into being through a deliberate shift in the strategy and tactics of the Palestinian national movement. The Israeli Nationalist state would be forced to respond to such a Palestinian-Israeli movement in ways that would accelerate its own loss of legitimacy and reinforce that of the movement. The dynamics of the movement itself would produce the conditions for the emergence of a post-Nationalist, non-racial system.

The bulk of this paper is devoted to clarifying the underlying logic of this proposal and suggesting some of the concrete steps that can lead to its realization. Of particular importance is the proposition that the ideological, cultural, religious and political roadblocks that have seemed to be insurmountable obstacles on the road to peace are, in fact, the expressions of conditions that can be transformed through political action. The human and political materials from which political struggle is fashioned are always complex and flawed but they are what we can and must work with. The road to peace leads through strategic transformation, Lihish'ta'weel. It a difficult road, a road of struggle, but in the end, we get there together.

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Postscript

It will be clear from what has been written that I reject the well-meant but deeply flawed notion that only those directly involved in a conflict have the standing to venture opinions. There is no denying that observers residing at a safe distance from centers of conflict too often seek to influence events in ways that serve their own needs or do not correspond to realities on the ground. Attempts to restrict dialog, however, are even more problematic. Being far away from the heat of battle and the scars of its history represents both an advantage (the perspective to observe patterns more readily seen from afar) and a liability (lack of knowledge of the faces, places, and details that make up the reality of daily struggle). This is the power of global dialog: the opportunity to apply insights gained elsewhere--when appropriate--to the specifics of ones own situation. It is up to the people in the field to determine what pieces make sense. When the dynamics of a struggle become stagnant, intellectual solidarity can become the most strategically useful kind. Cutting each other off from that source of oxygen is properly a role for our enemies, not our friends.

The role of friends is to offer what observations we can--without arrogance but without hesitation--and hope that they will be of use.

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