

# Local Forces Who Defeated ISIS in Syria Defend Their Territory

The outcry against Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Syria reveals an appetite for regional hegemony, writes As'ad AbuKhalil. It also minimizes the capacity of native militia to defend territory for which they fought and died.

## A Wise and Rare Decision

By [As'ad AbuKhalil](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



President Donald Trump's announcement that he will withdraw 2000 U.S. troops from Syria has caused great alarm in elite circles. [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#) both warned it would leave Israel "abandoned" and "isolated" and would embolden enemies of the U.S. Martin Indyk, a former Mideast envoy for Democratic administrations, [complained](#) that Trump did not factor in the national security interests of Israel.

Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state who lost the presidency to Trump, tweeted: "Actions have consequences, and whether we're in Syria or not, the people who want to harm us are there & at war. Isolationism is weakness. Empowering ISIS is dangerous. Playing into Russia & Iran's hands is foolish. This President is putting our national security at grave risk."

Hollywood celebrities have also [jumped into](#) the act.

The strong reaction to Trump's decision (which fulfills a

campaign promise to disengage militarily from the Middle East) highlights his gap with a mainstream media and foreign policy establishment that supports a more aggressive U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. The only time these detractors ever strongly supported Trump was when he ordered the bombing of Syria. Establishment spokesman Farid Zakaria, a favored CNN host and pundit, said Trump had finally become “presidential.” The only reservation was that the bombing should have been more massive.

The latest [civilian death toll in Syria](#) is over 107,000. The media has, by and large, disregarded the extent to which U.S. bombs have contributed to this enormous loss of life. When the history of the Syrian war is written, it is very likely that the destruction of Raqqa will be categorized as a U.S. war crime—to be added to the many war crimes committed by all sides in the protracted war.

### **Exaggerations of US Role**

The outcry against Trump’s withdrawal announcement include exaggerations of the role that 2000 U.S. troops played in defeating ISIS (which exclude personnel involved in covert actions).

[In a Tweet](#), Rukmini Callimachi of *The New York Times* oddly attributed the loss of 99 percent of ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq to the work of the U.S.-led “coalition” (so broadly defined to include Sweden and Bahrain among others). This estimate typically ignores the contributions and sacrifices of native Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi fighters, many of whom are foes of the U.S.

While it can’t be determined mathematically the extent to

which the U.S. and others contributed to the demise of ISIS, it is certain that the bulk of the fighting against ISIS—and the dying—was done by locals, the majority of whom opposed the U.S.

This was the case in Lebanon, where the fight against ISIS and al-Qaida, over the last two years, was carried out almost single-handedly by Hizbullah, which the U.S. State Department designates a terrorist organization. Similarly, Russia and its allies in Syria did most of the fighting against ISIS despite the contributions of pro-U.S. Kurdish militias and some rebel groups.

The economic power of ISIS—in terms of the oil trade—was largely destroyed by Russian, not U.S., bombing. In Iraq, the virtual collapse of the U.S.-trained Iraqi Army in June 2014, when Mosul was overrun, was a major factor in the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and beyond.

In Iraq, the process of mobilization and recruitment against ISIS began with the formation of Hashd, or “mass,” militias formed at the behest of [Ayatollah Sistani](#), the senior Iranian Shia cleric based in Iraq. [Qasem Soleimani](#), commander of the [Quds Force](#) of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards became directly involved. While these natives fought back and destroyed ISIS in Iraq the U.S. provided air cover. Locals did the fighting and the dying.

Trump’s agenda poses a danger to the U.S. and the world. But the global agenda of the Democratic and Republican (establishment) is even more dangerous. It would expand wars in the Middle East and beyond. It would intensify U.S. enmities to places such as Russia, China, North Korea and

Iran and abort any attempts at reconciliation. It would prevent the U.S. from leaving a military occupation. It would challenge the enemies of the U.S. and Israel with direct U.S. military projection of force throughout the Middle East.

### **Presidents Obey the Military**

Trump's fault, in the eyes of those who criticize his decision to withdraw troops from Syria, is that he did not follow the advice of his military. The notion that a president must follow military orders is entirely undemocratic. But since Sept. 11, 2001, it has been established—especially by Democrats—that the commander in chief should do just that. Thus, President Barack Obama went against his own views and agreed to expand the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

Due to its strong popular support, the U.S. military often operates outside the reach of congressional supervision or public accountability. By occasionally challenging the generals, as with this decision to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan, Trump has proven more politically courageous than Obama, who was afraid to defy the brass. (While Obama resisted his own foreign policy advisors' pressures to intervene more deeply in Syria, the U.S. military at that time was less enthusiastic about intervention.)

Israel was clearly unhappy with Trump's announcement of troop withdrawal from Syria, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was one of the few world leaders briefed by Trump before announcing his decision. (Is there a matter

of any significance over which the U.S. president—whether Bush or Obama or Trump—does not brief Netanyahu?)

To satisfy Israel, the U.S. must deploy troops in all Arab countries and to join Israel in its unending wars against the whole Arab world. (Paradoxically, Israel is loathed by the Arab people while cruel Arab despots in the Gulf—such as those leading Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar—race to establish relations with Israel and often try to ingratiate themselves with the U.S. president and Congress.)

Israel, through its powerful lobby, has been agitating for the U.S. to wage war on Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and the Palestinian territories. And Western media—no matter how much Israel accumulates by way of its massive arsenal of WMDs, and no matter how much Israeli gives itself the right to bomb at will in Syria and Palestine—still treats Israel as a vulnerable entity in need of permanent U.S. military protection.

All of this explains why Clinton is more popular than Trump. She had promised more military hegemony in the Middle East. And she was just as enthusiastic as Trump about propping up Middle East despots. For instance, as secretary of state, Clinton supported Egyptian dictator Husni Mubarak at all costs. When Mubarak fell she wanted the head of the secret police, Omar Suleiman, to be his successor.

The underlying causes for U.S. withdrawals from Syria can't be known and some wager it won't pan out. But it is unlikely that it's part of a large geo-strategic scheme on Trump's part. Nor is the move likely to predict a U.S. strike on Iran. After two years in office, Trump is showing more self-

confidence in his foreign policy decisions than when he started. It is likely that he will follow his original isolationist instincts. Those instincts are at odds with the bipartisan consensus in D.C., which has heaped an avalanche of criticism upon one of the rare wise decisions of an often rash president.

ISIS is indeed on the run, and it has lost the bulk of its territorial base. It retains some fighters in its remnants in Eastern Syria, but its ability to expand is drastically limited. The major enemies of ISIS—those who drove ISIS from most of its territory—remain on the ground in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. While overlooked by Western reporters and columnists, they are ready to go to war again to fight back an ISIS offensive.

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# Miscalculations in Israel Could Pave Way to Wider War

Following a number of foreign-policy miscalculations, Israel and its allies in the Trump administration could be setting us up for more trouble in the Middle East, warns Alastair Crooke in this analysis.

By Alastair Crooke

Last week, Israeli political leaders were rolling with guffaws and ribbing each other in delight as Vice-President Mike Pence proved that, as a Christian Zionist, he was more Zionist than the Zionists in the Knesset (minus, of course, its evicted Arab members – see [here](#)). But one might wonder what the more sober Israeli security echelon figures were thinking as they listened to Pence's Knesset speech, which was rife with Biblical references and declarations of his "admiration for the People of the Book."

Perhaps they were speculating how far they might be able to go in influencing Pence and his boss, Donald Trump, to wield U.S. military power to advance Israeli interests.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, via the Trump family go-betweens – Jared Kushner, and the Trump family lawyers – has certainly had an impact in Washington. The Middle East landscape has changed considerably over the last year as a consequence, but the nature of that change is what is at issue. How many of these changes have actually benefited Israel's – or the U.S.'s – security interests?

When Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) began his coup last June, ultimately resulting in this 31-year-old assuming absolute power, President Trump characteristically took full credit. "We've put *our* man on top!" he bragged to his friends, according to Michael Wolff in his book, *Fire and Fury*. Yes, Trump was right – partly.

"Our man" came out on top, but it was Netanyahu, working the levers behind the scenes, and Mohammad bin Zayed (MbZ)'s "man" in Washington, United Arab Emirates Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba, who did the heavy lifting in order to change the U.S.'s settled preference for Prince bin Naif, as Successor to the Throne. And it was MbZ, in the first place, who had advised MbS that it was *Israeli* support that was both the necessary, and the sufficient condition, for him to become Crown Prince. Netanyahu (and Israel) cannot escape some responsibility for the condition in which the kingdom now finds itself.

Are the more sober-minded Israelis now still congratulating themselves with enthusiasm for their “new man at the top”? One has some doubts, as Saudi Arabia transforms into a ticking bomb of internal, family, and tribal hatreds – and as the peripheral Emirates wonder what is to become of them in this new era of Saudi hyper foreign policy activity; or what might be their futures, were this Saudi “bomb” somehow to self-detonate. (“Not pretty” is likely to be their conclusion.)

And, for the second major aspect to Israel’s influence on the Trump administration, one has to look no further than the Kurds: Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked said, just before Masoud Barzani’s independence referendum, that “Israel and countries of the West, have a major interest in the establishment of the State of Kurdistan.” She added, “I think that the time has come for the U.S. to support the process.”

(Netanyahu supported the Kurdish bid too, and reportedly, urged Barzani to press on, despite the opposition amongst the Kurds themselves, and from all the surrounding neighbouring states). That ploy did not work out too well.

First came the Barzani fiasco, with his initiative squashed within 24 hours, and now we have Plan B: a Kurdish “statelet” in northern Syria. And that too is now unravelling.

Israel, having failed to get the buffer zones it sought along the Golan armistice line, or on the Syrian-Iraqi frontier; and having failed to keep the Iraqi-Syrian border closed, prevailed upon a receptive U.S. administration to implant a Kurdish wedge in north-eastern Syria. This was an outcome intended to keep Syria weak (the oil and gas assets being denied to the Central Government, and the Syrian state divided, and at odds with itself), and to keep open the connectivity of the Syrian mini “state project” to the Kurdish population of northern Iraq.

The Israeli “project” with the Kurds is a longstanding one, and very much “hands on.” It was most clearly formalized in the so-called *Oded Yinon* plan which was published in 1982, and which advocated the fragmentation of the Middle East, in terms of a logic of sectarian division. So, when Minister Shaked advocated for a Kurdish state, saying that it would be integral to Israeli efforts to “reshape” the Middle East, it is highly likely that she had the Yinon plan in mind, which advocated an Iraq fragmented into separate states.

But again (in spite of the Barzani fiasco), there was overreach: Moscow and Damascus offered the Kurds a compromise that would allow for a measure of autonomy, but insisted on the preservation of state sovereignty over all of Syria. The Kurds forcefully declined (apparently believing that Washington had



their backs). And U.S. Centcom overreached: they gave the Kurds advanced anti-tank weapons, and man-portable surface to air missiles, too.

Of course the Turks “got it.” Such weapons in the hands of the Kurds change the whole strategic balance. Such weapons have nothing to do with pushing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to agree a modified constitution for Syria. That narrative is quite implausible. This weaponizing was about empowering the Kurds à la *Oded Yinon*: not just in Syria and Iraq, but as a ploy to weaken and fracture Turkey as well: No wonder the Kurds of Afrin were so full of themselves. Senior Turkish commentators, such as Ibrahim Karagul (a leading commentator who is close to Erdogan) were unsurprisingly plain in identifying Israel’s hand in wanting Turkey’s state fragmentation.

So, what has been achieved? Ankara now is profoundly (and perhaps irrevocably) disenchanted with Washington. Damascus is quietly sorting out Idlib (now depleted by armed opposition groups, commandeered by Turkey to assist in Afrin). Pressure on Assad is relieved; and Turkey has shifted more deeply into the Russian-Iran-Iraq axis. Washington is now ruing the Turkish anger, but what did they expect?

The writing was on the wall at the May 19 press conference held by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Joseph Dunford, and Special Envoy to Counter ISIS Brett McGurk, in which they attempted to smooth over frayed relations with Ankara regarding disputes regarding Washington’s support for the Kurds.

But then came Netanyahu’s third major input into U.S. policy: encouraging President Trump to ditch the JCPOA, the Iran nuclear deal.

Pence stated that Trump will refuse to sign the U.S. nuclear sanctions waiver this May. But as Washington now rues the Turkish reaction to its Kurdish initiative; so Israel may yet come to rue the loss of the JCPOA. Does the Israeli leadership seriously believe that Lilliputian MbS, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are going to Gulliverise Iran and its allies? And does the Israeli armed forces truly trust the U.S. to have its back completely, if it comes to regional war?

And finally, there is the “deal of the century”: sending VP Pence to threaten Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinians with withdrawal of funding completes the picture of an Israel hoeing in an extremely narrow, and highly partisan, Zionist seam of American (and global) support – a seam consisting of Jared Kushner (Trump’s son-in-law), David Friedman (Trump’s specialist in bankruptcy), and Jason Gleenblatt (a real estate lawyer, and the former chief legal officer working for Trump’s various companies).

Even Haim Saban, the strongly pro-Zionist founder of the U.S. Brookings' *Saban Center* described the team to Kushner last month as "a bunch of Orthodox Jews who have no idea about anything."

"The team has an entrepreneur – you – a real-estate lawyer, a bankruptcy lawyer. I don't know how you've lasted eight months in this line-up. There's not a Middle East macher in this group," Saban said, using the Yiddish word for bigwig.

Kushner responded that while the team was "not conventional" it was "perfectly qualified," defending Friedman's reputation as "one of the most brilliant bankruptcy lawyers and a close friend of mine, and the President."

Haim Saban noted that indeed, the situation in the Middle East, never had been so "bankrupt."

Perhaps Netanyahu may come to reflect that, in mining this very narrow seam, he has placed Israel in a precarious place. He may rejoice at the Palestinians' present humiliation by Trump and Pence, but as the Israeli PM catalyzes American foreign policy in ways that are deeply antagonistic to the region as a whole (not just Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, but to treaty partners, Jordan and Egypt, too), come the next crisis, Israel may find itself friendless and alone. Even Gulf States are re-positioning – hedging, if you prefer – in the face of the deep uncertainty in Saudi Arabia.

America today is deeply polarized, with each side reflexively rejecting the views (on both domestic and foreign policies) of the other. Even within the wider seam of *cultural* nationalism that is apparent in America and Europe today, Trump's rather narrow Middle East team line-up, is not even representative of 'Alt-Right' culture in general, which ultimately forms Trump's base. The evidence – for all the Alt-Right's insistence on a common Judeo-Christian basis – is that those identifying with the Alt-Right view their culture more narrowly. Rather, the unqualified support that Israel believes it now enjoys, may prove to be highly ephemeral.

The errors of judgment are obvious to Washington establishment figures, who see the consequence in mixed messages emanating from the administration and in the erosion of the unitary state into rebellious departmental fiefdoms, which the White House seems unable to control (see here on Turkey).

The Middle East (and the wider world), just skirted serious conflict in 2017, but we may not be so lucky in 2018. Trump is regarded as Israel's "best friend," but is that really so? Israel's future seems much less secure one year after he assumed office. The landscape has darkened. Israel misjudged Syria; it misjudged

its Syrian proxies; and (probably) will find that it has misjudged MbS – and now, a further miscalculation, this time with Turkey.

It may misjudge Iran next.

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## China Tip-Toes into Mideast Peace

The pro-Israel lobby has been so effective dominating U.S. policy toward the Middle East that the success, paradoxically, has made Washington increasingly irrelevant to the peace process. That has created a vacuum that China and other nations may try to fill, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

China this week got about as far as it ever has gotten into the Middle East peace process by hosting back-to-back visits by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This was still only, as [the \*New York Times\* coverage](#) put it, a dipping of China's toe into that process. The odds are that Beijing will not be wading much farther into that water any time soon.

The new Chinese leadership certainly has plenty on its plate right at home, including uncontrolled corruption, near-catastrophic environmental degradation, and the need to adapt to a slowdown in economic growth. Moreover, continued festering of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not hurt Chinese interests as severely and directly as it hurts the interests of the United States, because of the latter's association with the Israeli occupation and other controversial Israeli actions.

But if President Xi Jinping and his colleagues nonetheless were to involve themselves more deeply in efforts to resolve this conflict, we should applaud them, for several reasons. The principal reason is that the outside power that has now been looked to for decades as the peace process's *deus ex machina*, i.e., the United States, continues to demonstrate that it is too politically crippled to perform that role.

The combination of an Israeli government devoted to continued colonization of conquered and occupied territory and of political forces in the United States devoted to an unquestioning, right-or-wrong backing of that government have had this crippling effect.

President Barack Obama has already dispelled any hope that things would be appreciably different in his second term. His Secretary of State clearly wants to try to make new things happen, but the President seems in effect to have told him, "Good luck, my friend, in seeing what you can do, but don't expect much help from me with the heavy lifting."

A second reason to welcome greater involvement by the Chinese is that their own positions and posture toward the conflict are substantively very sensible, reasonable, and in line with the characteristics that any plausible settlement of the conflict would require.

Prime Minister Li Keqiang was on target when he told Netanyahu that "the Palestinian issue is a core issue affecting the peace and stability of the Middle East." When Li said, "As a friend of both Israel and the Palestinians, China has always maintained an objective and fair stance," he was more truthful than if a similar claim were made by the United States, which as Aaron David Miller has accurately put it, has more often functioned as Israel's lawyer.

Xi presented to Abbas a "plan" that called for establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 boundaries and with East Jerusalem as its capital, with full respect for "Israel's right to exist and its legitimate security concerns." About the only editing one might want to do to the Chinese formulation would be to refer explicitly to the possibility of land swaps, as in a recently restated version of the Arab League peace plan.

A further, subsidiary reason greater Chinese involvement with this issue would be good is that it is the type of constructive global engagement that it would be good to see China practicing in general. It would bring China closer to carrying its fair share of the weight of dealing with sticky international issues, and might encourage positive habits that would have spillover effects on otherwise unrelated issues.

Another outside power that one might expect to take up the peace process slack that the United States has proven unable to take up is the European Union. Some of the possibilities were raised by an open letter published last month by the collection of former senior officials known as the European Eminent Persons Group.

The letter is admirably clear and blunt in detailing what needs to be done, and the deficiencies in what has been done so far, including by Europe. But there are limitations to what the Europeans are ever likely to do, some of which are mentioned in Mitchell Plitnick's look at the eminent persons' initiative. The letter-writers are only former officials, after all.

The EU has the impediments to action that come from still being a collection of governments and something less than a full federation. The Europeans also have some historical baggage of their own on Arab-Israeli issues that may make it easier for the Israel lobby to reach across the Atlantic and slap them down, as in a derisive dismissal by Elliott Abrams of the eminent persons' letter as a "useful reminder of European attitudes." A similar dismissal would be more difficult to direct at China.

In any case, anyone looking for leadership on this issue from a non-U.S. outside power should not place all his hopeful eggs in one basket. An earlier phase of the endless and fruitless Middle East peace process involved a "quartet." Maybe it's time to try a European-Chinese duet.

If President Xi needs additional incentive to take some action and some risks on this subject, how about this for a motivation: personal leadership on this subject would be a good way to distinguish himself from all those colleagues of his who dye their hair the same shade of black and wear identical suits. It would give him a historical legacy beyond all the problems back home that he shares with the collective leadership.

Xi ought to aim for a Nobel Peace Prize. Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin won the prize for their work on the subject even though what they did failed to bring lasting peace, and Jimmy Carter also got a Nobel in large part for his work on the same subject. Barack Obama won the prize just for getting elected and not being George W. Bush.

If Xi dove into the subject and made any progress at all, he would have a good chance of making it to Oslo, and deservedly so.

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## Netanyahu's Pyrrhic Victory

**Exclusive:** In a whirlwind trip to Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu behaved less like a visiting head of state and more like a pro-consul arriving in a conquered land to lecture its titular leader on the limits of his independence and to receive acclaim from subservient lawmakers. But ethics professor Daniel C. Maguire warns that Netanyahu's brash behavior cannot conceal

the dangers ahead.

By Daniel C. Maguire

May 27, 2011

What a moment for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he spoke to a joint session of the U.S. Congress this week. Republican and Democrat lawmakers bouncing to their feet like yo-yo's to cheer his every utterance as he mocked the U.S. president's policies.

Days earlier, sitting in the Oval Office, Netanyahu publicly scolded Barack Obama as if the U.S. president were a schoolboy. No foreign power ever held such sway over the government of the United States of America.

Bibi, as Netanyahu is called, could return home and boast that Israel's American acolytes remain as compliant as the Stepford wives. And Israel's expansionism, euphemized as "settlements," can proceed apace.

Dictators enjoy mandated enthusiasm from their own minions. In Syria, Bashar Assad could get it from his parliament; so too Stalin from the Supreme Soviet.

But as Israeli Uri Avnery, former Jewish member of Israel's Knesset, points out Netanyahu was getting it from a powerful foreign nation whose politics in the Middle East he effectively controlled.

No American politician could dare to withhold applause and still get reelected, it seemed. And the American press was also in yo-yo mode. No problem there, not even from the liberals at MSNBC.

When Israel identified and then attacked the U.S.S. Liberty on June 8, 1967, killing 34 crew members and wounding 171, the United States humbly bowed.

George Ball, a former undersecretary of state, said: "If America's leaders did not have the courage to punish Israel for the blatant murder of American citizens, it seems clear that their American friends would let them get away with almost anything."

Congress' giddy response to Netanyahu renewed that promise of immunity.

But wait. There is another America that is stirring from its long slumbers. Also, many in the Arab world and in Europe have never been cowed into sleep and they are between impatience and outrage.

The United Nations General Assembly is about to give to the Palestinians the same status as a nation that Israel got in 1948 and it is springtime in Arab

lands.

There are cracks in the Israeli immunity dike that are not sealed by sycophantic congressional clapping.

Unpracticed as I am in singing lauds to Republican leaders, I must praise Dwight Eisenhower and George H.W. Bush for showing the only way to stop Israeli expansionism.

In 1956, when Israel had occupied Sinai and the Gaza strip, Ike threatened to "halt all foreign aid and eliminate private tax-deductible donations to Israel if it did not withdraw" from those occupied territories.

And guess what! They quickly complied.

President George H.W. Bush reminded the Israelis that East Jerusalem was occupied territory and not part to Israel.

His Secretary of State James Baker told AIPAC in May 1989: "Now is the time to lay aside once and for all the unrealistic vision of a Greater Israel. ... Forswear annexation. Stop settlement activity. Reach out to the Palestinians as neighbors who deserve political rights."

President Bush then threatened to withhold a substantial portion of America's \$10 million a day of financial aid to Israel unless the settlements were stopped between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

To back up his word, Bush held back \$700 million and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir halted construction. Still, the Bush administration deducted \$400 million, the amount estimated to have been spent on the illegal settlements.

As soon as Bush left office in 1993, the "settlements" resumed.

Even President George W. Bush in 2008 stated: "There should be an end of the occupation that began in 1967. And we must ensure that the state of Palestine is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent. ... Swiss cheese isn't going to work when it comes to the outline of a state."

There I have done it. I have praised Republicans. But where are those brave and just voices now?

Unsupported by U.S. action or at least credible threats of action, impotent pleas to halt the expansionism called "settlement" avail nothing. They never have; they never will.

*Nemo gratis mendax.* We pay a price for our lies. Likud policy rests on two and a

half lies.

*Lie one:* Israel is and deserves to be a Jewish democracy. That, as Jewish Israeli historian Shlomo Sand says, is an oxymoron. Israel, he says, is an ethnocracy.

You can't have a Jewish democracy when 20 percent of your citizens are Muslims and Christians. A Jewish democracy makes no more sense than a Lutheran democracy. You can't privilege one religious or ethnic group and still call yourself a democracy.

*Lie two* is the parity lie. Even critics of Israel, like Rabbi Michael Lerner, offer this moral equivalency defense: "The list of atrocities is long on both sides."

This blurs the basic moral distinction between the invader and the invaded, between the occupier and the occupied, as well as the comparative statistics on military strength and deaths of civilians including children.

For example, over 1,400 Gazans were killed in reprisal for four Israelis killed in December 2008. Operation Cast Lead could not be called a "war" because a war implies some military parity on both sides.

Attacks on Gaza by the fourth strongest military in the world (and the sixth strongest nuclear power) versus Hamas, which has neither an army, a navy, an air force, or even an air field, is not a war. It is a massacre. (Note from history, the "Boston massacre" involved five American deaths.)

*The half lie:* "security" is Israel's hackneyed excuse for expansionism. That is hollow. Israel is the 800-pound gorilla in the Middle East.

As for the Palestinian side, homemade missile attacks are stupid and only give an excuse for disproportionate reprisal. Palestinians need a Gandhi and good sense.

Hamas has said and needs to say again that it will recognize Israel within the 1967 borders with reparations for refugees, and it needs to change any of its documents that contradict that.

In March 2002, the Arab League offered to recognize Israel's right to exist and have normal relations with Israel. The offer had been repeatedly reconfirmed.

In April 2002, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, approved by Iran's delegation, endorsed this. The condition was Israel's compliance with the United Nations Resolutions 194, 242, 338. Hamas agreed.



But what of the truth side of Israel's claim of insecurity, the other half?

The truth part can be found in changes in military science and in the rapidly changing Arab world. The nuclear genie is out of the bottle, and bombing Iran will not put it back in.

Suitcase-size atomic bombs exist, as do small packages of biological weapons. The protective wall provided by the U.S.-bribed dictator President Hosni Mubarak is no more.

Against miniaturized weapons, the massive military might of the United States and Israel have no adequate defense.

Head of Jewish studies at Baylor University, Marc Ellis, says, in the light of all this: "The scenario of Israel going down and bringing the Middle East down as its last act is hardly far-fetched."

But Israel could find the practical wisdom and true security it needs in its own holy scrolls.

You cannot build "Zion in bloodshed," said Micah the prophet. (3:10); Zechariah added: "Neither by force of arms nor by brute strength" would the people be saved. (4:6)

Isaiah 32:17, in a text that deserves Nobel prizes in Economics and in Peace, said until you plant justice (*Tsedaqah*) you cannot have peace (*Shalom*).

The price tag for American support of Israel also is coming to light. The alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attack, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, cites the one-sided American support of Israel as a motive for the attack, as reported in the 9/11 Commission Report.

Gen. David Petraeus has testified to Congress that American over-identification with Israel is endangering U.S. troops in the Middle East.

Even former Vice President Dick Cheney told the American Enterprise Institute in 2009 that the nature of U.S. support for Israel has become one of the "true sources of resentment."

Overwhelming military superiority no longer produces peace. As Andrew Bacevich says, Israel and the United States are proving that.

Pillars are shaking. Israel can have peace or expansion; it is currently choosing expansion.

BOOK SUGGESTIONS:

*Judaism Does Not Equal Israel* by Marc Ellis, The New Press, 2009

*Quicksand: America's Pursuit of Power in the Middle East* by Geoffrey Wawro, The Penguin Press, 2010

*We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work* by Jimmy Carter, Simon and Schuster, 2009.

*The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship* by James Scott, Simon & Schuster, 2009

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