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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Ongoing Devastation of October 7

By Paul Scham

It seems like – and is - a different world now since our last IH issue, back in early September of this year. The events of Oct. 7 - and their aftermath – have upended Israel and the thinking and feelings of those of us who care about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obviously, it is infinitely more intense in Israel itself. As *Ha'aretz* correspondent Amir Tibon put it on a podcast, “every day is October 7.” You can listen to the interview free on the *Tel Aviv Review* podcast, Dec. 11 edition.

Amir was formerly *Ha'aretz's* D.C. correspondent from 2017 to 2020, where I got to know him. His politics seemed like mine; supportive of Israel as a nation with staunch opposition to the Netanyahu government and its policies.

You may have heard Amir's personal story of Oct. 7, as it's been all over the news. He and his family, who live on Kibbutz Nahal Oz, 1 km. from Gaza, spent most of the day hiding in a shelter while Hamas massacred 14 of their neighbors and took more as hostages. Luckily, he was able to call his father (his father is a

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major-general, retired), who sped down from Tel Aviv, collected a few soldiers on the way, and rescued Amir and his family. There are innumerable similar stories of Israeli civil society rising to the occasion while the government faltered.

Amir is totally supportive of the Israeli military's offense in Gaza (though absolutely opposed to and bitterly critical of the current government), and I wince at his words. I cannot criticize a man who went through that and who – together with the large majority of Israelis (including many Palestinian Israelis, according to polls) - demands that Hamas be destroyed, so it can never threaten Israel again. He genuinely regrets the 15,000+ killed in Gaza so far, the vast majority civilians: men women, and children. However for him, the horror of Oct. 7 and the widespread and gruesome massacre that Hamas perpetrated appear to take precedence over humanitarian feelings, “proportionality,” and even the growing fury in the Arab world, and elsewhere, which he, as *Ha'aretz's* current diplomatic correspondent, must be acutely aware of. In this, he is typical of most Israelis as far as I can see, even many of those on the (denuded but still definitely existing) Israeli Left.

I sympathize and try to empathize with Amir and the majority of Israelis who support the war, but I cannot agree with their take on it as it's currently (Dec. 14) being conducted. At the same time, I and [Partners for Progressive Israel](#), as well as our fellow members of the [Progressive Israel Network](#), are not signing on to the numerous statements calling for a cease-fire. Partners rejects the prevailing orthodoxy that claims we cannot both support Israel and be outraged (not just sad) at the number of Palestinian casualties and the level of daily destruction in Gaza. We maintain our position as supporters of Israel, but are also convinced that the declared Israeli goal of destroying Hamas is unattainable, while the damage being done to Israel's stature in the Arab world, until recently high and rising, is now low and in free fall. A recent and credible [poll](#) by the internationally respected pollster Khalil Shikaki reports that 44%

of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support Hamas, up from 14% in the West Bank before the war and 38% in Gaza. Thus, the only way Israel could “destroy” Hamas is by destroying almost half of the Palestinian population. In my view, the security implications of this hatred, which may endure for a generation, are more dangerous for Israel than what remains of Hamas's military capabilities.

We need President Biden to succeed very soon in his attempt to broker, or quietly but forcefully demand, a halt to the fighting, whether it is called a cease-fire or a humanitarian pause, perhaps even by the time you are reading this. That pause must also free the 100+ remaining hostages – and, tragically, to demand an accounting of all those who Hamas contends have died since they were captured.

I fully realize that I am not on the ground in Gaza and cannot assess either the extent that Hamas retains its military capabilities, nor how Israel assesses the risk and extent of civilian casualties it inflicts, though [a recent article in 972 e-magazine](#) seems both believable and horrific. Even though I follow the war closely, I am of course not privy to the most important day-to-day happenings on the ground. Nevertheless, it seems beyond serious contention that the toll on the civilian population is unconscionably high.

There is another reason I am critical of the military campaign, and I hope it will be clear that I am not in the slightest attempting to justify or remove the opprobrium that rightly falls on Hamas, or “blaming the victim.” This point can be summed up as “When you live next to a tiger, don't be surprised if it attacks.” Hamas is armed, dangerous, and ideologically committed to Israel's destruction.. I write as someone who believes that ideology is not destiny, and who thought, during the previous decade, that Israel might have come to some sort of larger peace deal with Hamas. But not now.

As long as Hamas retains the conviction in any form that Israel should be replaced by an Islamic Palestine, even if there is some sort of agreement between it and

Israel, it is both Israel's right and its responsibility to not just deter, but to actively prevent, foil, and engage with any possible attack, no matter how unlikely it seems. And as long as Palestinians are bottled up in Gaza or in all important respects ruled by Israel in the West Bank, the tiger will feel itself fully empowered to attack. We, and more importantly, the tens of thousands of Israelis living near Gaza, as well as the Israeli Bedouin in the area, had thought this was completely understood before Oct. 7. We were wrong.

The slaughter of October 7 should not have succeeded. The intelligence and operational "lapses" that allowed it to succeed have been recognized by all senior Israeli security officials, who are expected to resign their posts at the war's conclusion. The only notable leader who has not "accepted responsibility" is Bibi Netanyahu himself, who bears the most culpability. But that is for another time. Meanwhile, while Hamas is rightfully blamed for the attack and its gruesome brutality, Israelis must be absolutely certain that the IDF – and future Israeli governments – will not make this mistake again. The Gaza border will likely become the most heavily guarded border in the world, perhaps second only to the one between North and South Korea. Whatever the tiger says is not really relevant to the need to take full precautions against it.

Why don't we join in the demand for "ceasefire now"? Part of the answer is that we value our solidarity with the Israeli left. We accept that Israel is doing what must be done – and that to impose a cease fire is to spit in its face. We are not willing to countenance that at this time.

A phrase from the Talmud, which I've quoted before, comes back to me: "[Do not appease your friend at the time of his anger, and do not comfort him while his dead still lie before him.](#)" *Pirkei Avot* (Wisdom of the Fathers) 4:18. Israel's dead still (metaphorically and some in reality) lie unburied. I urge Israel to accept a ceasefire for reasons both political and moral,

but I am not willing to join in the public demand for one, as it is a word that has now become toxic, synonymous with tying Israel's hands in response to the horror of October 7. We are on the record as calling for an [additional and urgent pause in the fighting](#) so humanitarian aid can reach civilians, as it did in the first pause a few weeks ago.

Partners thanks Dr. Alon Ben-Meir for permission to republish his thoughtful article on Israel's End-Game in Gaza, which originally appeared in his "Update" newsletter.

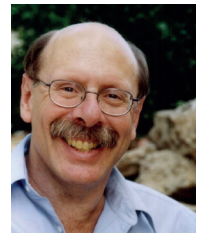
It is not a matter of joining one side or another in the ceasefire debate taking courage; no one in this country is called on for courage in this war. However, we do need to break the false dichotomy that says that one side is always right and the other always wrong, that one side is the eternal victim while the other is the eternal oppressor. Believing that absolutely leads to the righteous extremism that we have too much of today on all sides.

Sincerely,



Paul

Paul Scham is President of [Partners for Progressive Israel](#) and a Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland, where he teaches courses this semester on the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on the Israeli Right.



By Alon Ben-Meir, November 17, 2023



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

As the Israel-Hamas war grinds on, the international call for a ceasefire or at a minimum another pause in the fighting for a few days to allow for the delivery of badly needed necessities and agree on the release of some of the hostages is absolutely essential at this juncture. It is glaringly evident that there is large and growing international sympathy towards the Palestinians, given the magnitude of destruction and loss of life. This humanitarian crisis of such incredible scale is overshadowing the unconscionable slaughter of 1,200 people in Israel and the kidnapping of 248 others, of which about 100 have been returned home.

Sadly though, although Israel has the right to self-defense, the campaign to eradicate Hamas is being seen increasingly as a war of revenge and retribution.

It has caused tremendous destruction and human suffering. After only nine weeks, over 15,000 in Gaza have been [killed](#), nearly three-fourths of them women and children, and there is a horrifying scarcity of food, medicine, water, and fuel, albeit this was marginally alleviated as a part of the negotiated agreement to pause the war for four days. Moreover, over 80 percent of Gaza's entire population of 2.09 million are now internally [displaced](#).

This calamity is unfolding in front of our eyes and must stop, even for a few more days, to help save the lives of many of the tens of thousands who are wounded, bury the dead, and avert widespread starvation. And even though a temporary cessation of hostilities benefits Hamas, it is still worth undertaking not only to alleviate the horrifying

suffering of the entire population in Gaza but also to open a window for negotiating the release of as many hostages as possible, especially **all women and children**, in exchange for an extended pause in fighting.

Whereas Israel's stated goal from the onset was and still justifiably is the destruction of Hamas, Israel has not offered as yet any clear exit strategy nor endgame. Once Hamas is ultimately defeated, which is still a tall order, Israel with the support of the US and Saudi Arabia in particular should offer a sound alternative that meets the Palestinians' aspirations and renders Hamas irrelevant.

President Biden should demand that Prime Minister Netanyahu and his military brass develop, **in coordination with the US**, a clear exit strategy and an end-game consistent with Israel's, the Palestinians', Jordan's, and the US' national interests in the region.

The protests that have taken place across major cities in the US and worldwide are arguably some of the biggest that we've seen in a long time. These calls for a ceasefire or another pause in the fighting for humanitarian reasons are exerting pressure on Biden to change his near-unconditional support of Israel's war efforts, which he can no longer ignore. This is particularly important because the US's unwavering support of Israel makes the Biden administration complicit in the unfolding tragedy, which is intensely criticized from the ranks of leading Democrats as well.

What should be the end game? I believe there are three possible scenarios, two of which are impractical in the sense that they will not lead to a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli control over Gaza

First, Netanyahu is claiming that he wants to maintain security over Gaza, but he's not saying who will govern and administer the Strip. Does he want to reoccupy all of Gaza or just the northern half? The former option may explain why he wanted the Palestinians to head south. President Biden is very

correct to suggest that the reoccupation of Gaza, be that in part or in full, will be nothing short of a disaster for Israel and will only guarantee the prolongation of the viciously growing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Moreover, it should be emphasized here that given Israel's experience in the occupied West Bank, maintaining security was only marginally successful at best as evidenced by the continuing violence between Israeli forces and Palestinians, which has been increasingly escalating. Netanyahu is a fool to assume that he can maintain control over Gaza by establishing a security apparatus when the Hamas-affiliated militants in Gaza will subject the Israeli forces to terrorist attacks that will exact a heavy toll in blood and treasure. The violence in the West Bank will pale in comparison to what Hamas' militants in Gaza, whom Israel simply cannot eliminate altogether, will still be capable of doing against Israeli forces without an end in sight; as President Biden recently [stated](#), Israel's goal of eliminating Hamas "is a legitimate objective" but "a difficult task."

Resettling Palestinians in Egypt

The second option, which Netanyahu has been exploring with Egypt, would allow the settling of a few hundred thousand Palestinians in the Sinai; Egypt would assume administrative responsibility in Gaza while Israel maintains security. Egyptian President Sisi flatly rejected any future involvement with the Palestinians in Gaza, other than facilitating through the Rafah crossing the passage of people for justifiable reasons as well as the transfer of goods. The Egyptian government considers Hamas a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is outlawed in Egypt. For this reason, Egypt has also blockaded Gaza to prevent the infiltration of Hamas militants into the country.

Moreover, Egypt has troubles of its own. The economy is in a dire situation, and its concerns over security are mounting. Egypt simply does not want to add more to its domestic problems. Thus, they are not interested in any solution that will further burden them with the Palestinians. That said, President

Sisi was clear that regardless of how this war ends, a framework for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on two states, however complex that might prove to be, must be established, otherwise it will be only a question of time when this war will invite another.

Transitional period for Gaza with UN supervision

The third option would entail a diplomatic initiative that does not wait for Hamas's defeat. This option may well be more viable as it would entail a transitional period whereby the United Nations would assume responsibility. Administratively, the UN should create a transitional authority composed of Arab civilian leaders, experts in various fields and known for their integrity, balanced views, and commitment to a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These individuals will act like ministers, each in charge of various departments. In addition, UNWRA, which has been on the ground for decades providing aid and development services, including education, healthcare, microfinance, and job training, is in the best possible position to assume greater responsibility provided that it will be monitored under a modified and expanded mandate.

In conjunction with the creation of a UN administrative authority, it will be necessary to establish a peacekeeping force to be in charge of security. This force ought to be *comprised exclusively of the Arab states that are at peace with Israel*, namely the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, and Morocco, as well as Egypt.

It should be made clear that although post-Hamas the West Bank and Gaza should be governed by the Palestinian Authority (PA), this should not and in fact cannot happen for at least a year to 18 months following the establishment of a UN administrative authority in Gaza. During this period, the Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza would prepare themselves politically for a new election. The current PA is corrupt to the bone; President Abbas is rejected and despised by the majority of Palestinians

and must go. Only a new, fresh, and uncorrupt elected leadership that enjoys the confidence of the people can succeed.

On the Israeli side, no one should hold their breath waiting for Netanyahu and his gang of zealous coalition partners to agree on anything that even resembles an independent Palestinian state. Once the war ends, Netanyahu will face an inquiry about the unprecedented disaster that took place under his watch and he will have to resign or be ousted. Here too, a new government will have to be established in Israel which must commit itself from the onset to a two-state solution.

Once the above two prerequisites are in place, the UN administrative authority will then relinquish its role and responsibility to the PA.

The Arab states should condition their commitment to provide a peacekeeping force **upon Israel's acceptance of a two-state solution**. That is, once such a peacekeeping force is created, the peacebuilding process ought to commence in earnest toward that end. Any interim solution must be used only as a stepping stone toward a final resolution, otherwise, it would serve as nothing less than a respite from waiting for another disaster to unfold.

The role of the US and Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia and the US can play a major, in fact indispensable, role in this regard:

The US has and continues to be the ultimate guarantor of Israel's national security, and President Biden has done more than any of his predecessors in this regard and demonstrated that in the most unambiguous way by his unflagging support of Israel. He must make it very clear (and is in a position to do so) to Netanyahu or his successor that the US' unwavering support bears considerable political cost to America both domestically as well as internationally. Many countries around the world view the US as complicit in the unfolding horror in Gaza. President Biden must put in place a framework for a two-state

solution consistent with the above proposal, which he has been advocating for many decades.

The negotiating peace process will certainly take more than a year to complete. 2024 is an election year in the US, but regardless of who the next president might be, Biden will have to stick to the plans because another Israeli-Palestinian conflagration will inescapably involve the US. **It's time for President Biden, who believes in a two-state solution, to put his foot down,** no longer give Israel *carte blanche* to do as it pleases, and condition further support, financial and military, to genuine efforts to negotiate in good faith and reach a peace agreement.

Absent of UN action, the US should convene an international conference that includes representatives of the EU, the leading Arab states, the US, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. The conference should issue a joint statement reinforcing the need for a two-state solution and the initiation of a process of reconciliation.

Saudi Arabia can complement the US initiative with its own most significant role by seizing on the breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian relations and offering an unprecedented breakthrough to bring an end to the conflict. The Saudis should make it clear that once the war ends, they will be ready to normalize relations with Israel on the condition that a new Israeli government agree to a two-state solution and negotiate continuously until an agreement is reached. This war must end, leaving Hamas dramatically weakened and in disarray with limited arms. Nevertheless, Hamas' ultimate defeat will not be on the battlefield, it will be by creating an alternative to Hamas' governance from which the Palestinians will greatly benefit. That contrast ought to be made clearly and immediately to demonstrate to the Palestinians that Hamas was not only the enemy of Israel but the enemy of ordinary Palestinians. Yes, all Palestinians in Gaza want to live in peace and prosper but they were deprived of living a normal life because of Hamas' violent resistance to Israel,

squandering every resource to fight Israel while leaving the people despairing and hopeless.

Israel should not prolong this tragic war by even one unnecessary day. Indeed, if this war lasts another two or three months, it is almost certain that 20,000 to 30,000 Palestinians, mostly innocent civilians, and scores of Israeli soldiers will be killed. The continuation of the terrifying death and destruction in Gaza along with Israeli losses will only deepen the hate, enmity, and distrust between Israel and the Palestinians and make a solution to the conflict ever more intractable.

Every Israeli should ask him/herself the painful question: do we want to memorialize the death of 1,200 innocent Israelis butchered by Hamas by killing, however inadvertently, 20,000 or more Palestinians? Is that how the Israeli victims should be commemorated? This is something that every Israeli needs to think about.

Yes, Israel can and will win every battle against Hamas, but it will lose the war unless a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians begins once the war comes to an end, under the auspices of the US, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt with the support of other Arab states, which must lead to a two-state solution.

Alon Ben-Meir is an American expert on Middle East politics and affairs, specializing in peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states.



The Abraham Initiatives: Working for a Shared and Fully Equal Israel

By Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu and Dr. Thabet Abu Rass



Abraham Initiatives Co-Executive Directors support a protest tent in front of the Knesset against violence in the Arab community.

This essay, originally published prior to the horrific events of October 7, is a part of our series of 'Kolot: Voices of Hope' profiles of Israelis and Palestinians furthering the cause of peace and equality.

[Find all the profiles in this series here.](#)

The Abraham Initiatives was founded in 1989 by Alan B. Slifka z"l and Rabbi Eugene Weiner z"l. In those early years, when all eyes were focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the ongoing First Intifada, those two visionaries understood that relations between Jews and Arabs inside Israel proper were of critical importance to the future of Israeli society.

During the Oslo period, The Abraham Initiatives (originally known as the "Abraham Fund") filled an important gap. Much of the work being done by the various organizations in the field involved cross-border activities between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians

living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. That work was important, but it too often neglected an important population: Palestinian citizens of Israel, who, under this peacemaking paradigm, were oftentimes considered neither full Israelis nor full Palestinians. A different approach was needed and the Abraham Initiatives filled that void.

Israel's Declaration of Independence ensures "complete equality of social and political rights to all [the country's] inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex." But, like many national founding documents, the declaration's promise has not been consistently

fulfilled. For the first 18-plus years of Israel's existence, Arab citizens lived under a "military administration". While they could vote in elections, and send members to the Knesset, their freedom of movement and speech were highly restricted. To this day, Palestinian citizens of Israel face discrimination in employment, housing, education, and the distribution of public services.

The creation of a Shared Society and coexistence has been The Abraham Initiatives' guiding mission since it was founded – fulfilling the promise of equality between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Over time, however, our organization's strategy to bring Jews and Palestinians together evolved, as the limitations of our original dialogue-centric projects became clear: attempts to integrate Palestinian citizens into Israeli society will fail if they are not twinned with serious efforts to address systemic inequalities.

Today, our main theory of change is Advocacy Through Action. First, we advocate, both in the public media sphere and in government settings, for shared society. Employing data and expert research, our Arab-Jewish team presents a compelling case for effective state interventions. Second, we launch and operate pilot programs that are designed to eventually be adopted and scaled up by the state. We are happy to share several examples below.

Education for A Shared Society: Breaking Down Segregation and Racism

By design, Israel's education system is de facto segregated. Separate streams exist for non-religious Jewish, religious Jewish, and Arab schools – a system that enjoys much public support. Unfortunately, this means that many Israelis do not experience meaningful encounters with "the other side" until their late teens. In the case of Jewish teens, their first direct personal exposure to Palestinians generally comes during their mandatory military service.

In 2020, The Abraham Initiatives launched the Shared Learning project in response to mounting evidence that ultra-nationalist and racist viewpoints were common among Jewish Israeli youth, alongside a deepening sense

of alienation from Israeli society on the part of Arab children and teenagers. When these sides confronted each other, interethnic violence would often ensue.



The Abraham Initiatives' May Arow teaches intensive Arabic language course to Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality social workers.

Such was the case in May 2021, when the latest war between Israel and militant groups in Gaza spilled over into the country's so-called "mixed cities" (locales where Jews and Arabs each make up more than 10% of the population), which witnessed riots and street fighting between Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel. (Adding nationalist weight to the issue, most of these cities, such as Jaffa, Haifa, Lod, Ramle, and Akko, were majority-Palestinian before 1948.)

The concept of Shared Learning is simple: classrooms from Jewish and Arab schools visit each other and hold a series of classes together (usually in English, so that Jewish and Arab children start off more or less at the same level). In this environment, the students learn to cooperate with one another to achieve shared educational objectives. A 2021 report by the Henrietta Szold Institute confirmed the effectiveness of Shared Learning as both a pedagogical tool and a means to combat prejudice.

In the 2021-2022 school year, mere months after the May 2021 violence, The Abraham Initiatives brought Shared Learning to hundreds of students in the mixed city of Akko and to the Gilboa region. It was challenging to implement these programs with tensions still high, but the enthusiasm of the children served as motivation to press ahead and we were

able to successfully deliver results. In early 2022, the Ministry of Education decided to adopt the program, which means that schools across the country will soon be able to access the Shared Learning model.

With Shared Learning tested, proven, and adopted, we are now focusing on expanding our anti-racism education program in high schools and *mechinot* (pre-army leadership academies). Here, we directly and substantively expose Jewish and Palestinian students to the complex realities of each other's societies. The effect on a personal level can be transformative. As one student from a right-wing family in the settlements wrote to our Palestinian director of the high school initiative: "You opened my eyes to the world of an entire population that I had not seen, against which I had covered my eyes so I could ignore them and even hate them. A population that is full of people who are citizens like me, people like me, who watch the same TV series, who have feelings, opinions and a history."



A "mechina" (pre-army leadership academy) class in which the Abraham Initiatives introduces young Israeli Jews to Palestinian society in Israel.

Safe Communities

Over the last decade, violent crime, particularly murders and serious assaults, have increased dramatically in Arab communities in Israel. While the causes of the violence are complex, two stand out. The first is the growth of organized crime syndicates in large Arab cities, such as Nazareth, which terrorize local businesses through the protection racket. Second, these groups are able to exploit a large portion of the nearly one-third of Arab youth who are neither employed nor in school.

Making matters worse, the Israel Police are often unwilling to take crime in Arab communities seriously. Since October 2000, when police shot and killed 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel during protests, there has been a noticeable withdrawal of the police from Arab-majority locales. While this may have reduced political tensions temporarily, it allowed violence to spread wildly and left Palestinian citizens abandoned.

In the halls of national government, The Abraham Initiatives has successfully driven this issue to the top of the agenda. In 2019, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu established an inter-ministerial taskforce to study the problem and formulate policy solutions. This resulted in the passage of Government Resolution 549, which committed the Israeli government to spending billions of shekels to boost safety in Arab cities and villages, and to improving relations between the community and the police.



Abraham Initiatives course in Ramla and Lod to train Jewish and Palestinian women how to run municipal elections campaigns.

The Bennett-Lapid "government of change" established in June 2021, which for the first time in Israel's history included an independent party representing Palestinian citizens of Israel, was especially eager to work on this issue. A deputy minister was appointed in the Ministry of Internal Security specifically to work with and in Arab communities. Although the government was in office for only a little over a year, it managed to effect the first decline in murders in the Arab community since 2015.

Unfortunately, 2023 is shaping up to be the bloodiest year in Arab society in several years, with the murder rate already more than double that of 2022. The current minister in charge of the reconfigured and renamed Ministry of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has made his political career demonizing Palestinians. Much of the cooperation that took place between the ministry and Arab municipalities has now stalled. And while it is impossible to cite one single cause for this year's extreme uptick in murders, it is clear that it will not slow down so long as the government fails to take the concerns of residents seriously. In response, The Abraham Initiatives has vigorously campaigned in public and in the media to draw attention to this issue. We will not let up until a substantive plan of action – and a minister with the credibility and experience to implement it – materializes.

From “Mixed Cities” to Shared Cities

The devastating May 2021 violence strengthened the perception through much of Jewish society in Israel that mixed cities are powder kegs due to their demographics – the implication being that homogeneous communities are safer and therefore preferable.

The Abraham Initiatives seeks to upend the discourse in which mixed cities are considered a problem. We believe

these cities are microcosms of the country, and where shared living is not only possible but is already happening in many respects. So we launched the Shared Cities Initiative to create more opportunities for cooperation between Jewish and Arab citizens and transform these cities into positive examples for the country.

Our efforts in these cities include working with the municipal governments and relevant national ministries to ensure that all residents are treated fairly and have equal access to public services. In this context, we advocate on behalf of mixed cities and their residents in the Knesset, which ultimately sets funding levels in the national budget. We also established the Shared Cities Leadership Forum, which brings together Jewish and Arab elected officials in the mixed cities to work together, share best practices, and respond collectively to crises.

The challenge is immense, but we have started to see results. Members of the Leadership Forum have effectively defused tensions, including during the events of May 2021. Issues of concern to mixed cities are regularly being discussed in the media and in the Knesset, with The Abraham Initiatives serving as a repository of expertise with deep connections to the affected communities.



A panel about women in politics in mixed cities organized by Abraham Initiatives staff member, Nouha Abu Shehadeh-Eljamal.

Ultimately, the people of the mixed cities will need to find a way to coexist, and we are committed to cultivating and bringing together leaders dedicated to doing exactly that.

Shared Society Work Under the Current Government

At present, all our work is being done in exceptionally difficult political circumstances. Key ministers in the current government and prominent coalition MKs are deeply hostile to the vision of shared society. There is no simple way to overcome this challenge. Our work is a constantly shifting balance between public advocacy and direct interaction with the government on areas where cooperation remains possible. So while we speak out against the racism, division, and creeping authoritarianism emanating from the government, we continue to lobby within those ministries where we believe shared society can be advanced. Despite the political environment, we still manage to work effectively there, mainly with the echelon of career civil servants.

Meanwhile, the funding promises made to Arab communities by the Bennett-Lapid government remain binding on the current one. The Abraham Initiatives is dedicated to holding the government accountable for keeping these commitments.

We hope the efficacy of our work continues, but we remain cognizant of the capricious nature of a government such as this one – and we are ready and prepared for all eventualities in defending the principle of shared society.

To learn more about the Abraham Initiatives, visit their [English website](#), follow them on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), and check out their [YouTube channel](#).

Amnon Be’eri-Sulitzeanu and Dr. Thabet Abu Rass are the Co-Executive Directors of The Abraham Initiatives.



END-OF-YEAR APPEAL

Support Partners' efforts to build an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming pro-Israel Jewish-American community, committed to a progressive future for Israel and Palestine!

This coming year will be crucial in forging a new partnership with Israel’s Left. When the war ends, there will almost certainly be new elections in Israel and a tremendous amount of change and political reshuffling. With your help, Partners will build ties with the new parties and NGO’s building the post-Bibi Israel.

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By Lenny Grob

Partners for Progressive Israel's fourth digital symposium in our Fall 2023 Series took place on four Sundays from October 22nd through December 3rd. Unlike previous years, this symposium was divided into four sessions during the fall and an additional four in the upcoming spring. As in earlier symposia, two two-hour sessions were held on each Sunday, each with 90 minutes devoted to a panel of speakers engaging in dialogue with participants and the final half-hour devoted to participants reflecting on what had just transpired. Participants were on camera during the entire time, and thus able to pose questions directly to the presenters.

The fall's first symposium session took place just two weeks after the October 7th massacre, obviously requiring some rewriting of our original session descriptions to reflect our wrestling with new and difficult issues during wartime. Our symposium schedule was introduced as follows: "As horrific scenes of bloodshed, war, and chaos unfold before us, we at Partners find inspiration in those on the ground who refuse to dehumanize 'the other' or see one another as enemies." And those "on the ground" who served as speakers for our eight sessions did not disappoint; they were points of light

in the darkness. Presenters came from a variety of NGOs and movements, including The Parents Circle-Families Forum; Combatants for Peace; Roots; A Land for All; Rabbis for Human Rights; Givat Haviva; Itach-Maaki/Women Lawyers for Social Justice; and Standing Together. We intensively discussed issues centered on both Israeli and Pales-

tinian citizens of Israel, as well as on Palestinians in the West Bank and Israelis living or working there. We also examined the roles of and difficulties faced by marginalized communities during wartime, including women and LGBTQ residents.

The spirited dialogue between

presenters and participants during the fall - as well as the vigorous dialogue among the participants themselves - helped provide to all involved a sense of community during an extraordinarily emotional time.

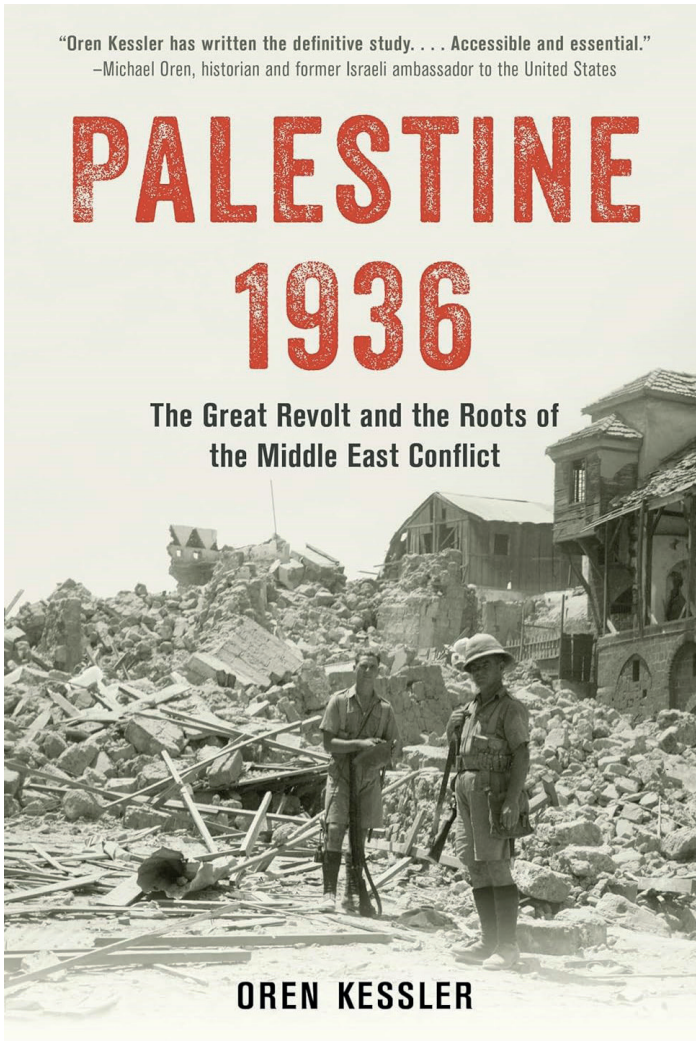
We will notify all readers of Israel Horizons as soon as the eight sessions on four spring Sundays are scheduled. We can be sure that next spring will be an extraordinarily intense time for Israelis and Palestinians, and will do our very best to provide you with top-flight background and analysis.



Oren Kessler, *Palestine 1936: The Great Revolt and the Roots of the Middle East Conflict* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2023)

BOOK REVIEW

Review by Peter Eisenstadt



A few weeks ago, a few weeks after it happened, I was talking with my friend Ayala Emmett, whose novel, *After the Disappearance*, I reviewed in the last issue of *Israel Horizons*. She told me the very sad story of her maternal grandmother. Ayala was born in Palestine in 1935, and in the late 1930s her parents were living on Kibbutz Kfar Yavetz. Her grandmother came to Palestine from Poland. Almost every night during her stay, the kibbutz was attacked by Palestinians during the Great Revolt. When they retreated to their safe room, her abiding memory of her grandmother was singing a Yiddish song to her to try to comfort during the fighting. But Ayala's

grandmother decided that if the point of Zionism was to create a safe haven for Jews, it was clearly failing. So she returned to Poland, and in 1941 she was murdered by the Nazis. I doubt she was the only European Jew in the Yishuv during the years of the Great Revolt, the Palestinian Revolt of 1936-39, who thought that life in Europe, despite the growing threat of Hitler, was a safer place for Jews than Palestine. As the events of October 7th demonstrated, Israel is still not a safe place for Israelis. As its aftermath has again demonstrated, Palestine is not a safe place for Palestinians.

Zionism is in many ways a typical example of late 19th century and early 20th century European nationalisms, with their characteristic strengths and weaknesses. Zionists saw their movement as strengthening and enhancing an ethnicity (Jewish, in this case) both politically and culturally, rediscovering/inventing a heritage (the Hebrew language), and an opposition to the "assimilation" of group members to a dominant culture (which in this case meant an opposition to the entire culture and structure of Jewish life in Galut.) But there were several factors unique to Zionism, most obviously that Jews, unlike almost every other national movement, did not really have a specific geographic area, dominated by their ethnicity, that could be considered their obvious "homeland." But another distinguishing feature of Zionism was that it, perhaps more than any other ethnic nationalism, regarded the physical safety of its members as a paramount concern. Jewish nationalism always confronted the reality that Jews were not merely ethnically and religiously marginalized but were the targets of a widespread and ancient prejudice, and that Jew-hatred always had the potential to become murderous and was becoming more so. Zionists thought they could combat antisemitism in two ways; by creating a haven for the Jews, and by imbuing Jews, wherever they lived, with a new measure of toughness

and courage, creating a new Jewish psychology.

Herzl's ears rang, probably only metaphorically, with shouts of "Death to the Jews" when he was writing *Der Judenstaat*. By the 1930s the calls for the mass murder of Jews could no longer be dismissed as mere rhetorical excess. As Vladimir Jabotinsky, head of the Revisionist Zionist movement, testified before the British Peel Commission in 1937: "The phenomena called Zionism may include all kinds of dreams—a 'model community,' Hebrew culture, perhaps even a second edition of the Bible, but all this wonderful longing for toys of velvet and silver is nothing in comparison with the tangible momentum of irresistible distress and need by which we are propelled."

But as Oren Kessler shows in *Palestine 1936*, his new history of the Great Revolt, these were the very years, 1936 to 1939, in which the safety of Jewish lives in Palestine became more uncertain than ever. Jews, Palestinians, and the British overlords of the Palestinian Mandate waged a brutal, triangular war, marked by numerous atrocities and acts of terror. The rise of Hitler and the Great Revolt were deeply connected. The movement to Palestine of more than 60,000 German refugees after 1933 exacerbated existing tensions with Palestinian Arabs over the presence of Jews, Jewish land purchases, and new Jewish settlements in Palestine. The new migration was welcomed by Jews and feared by Palestinians as a likely harbinger of the millions of additional Jews from Europe that Zionist leaders hoped and promised and hoped would come to escape the threats to their safety.

Safety and Fear are perpetually warring siblings. When one advances, the other retreats. In life, whether on an individual or collective basis, there are two main strategies for diminishing fear of a potentially hostile "other." The first is developing trust. The second is domination. When trust works, and it is usually a long, complex, and often painful process, it can be tremendously rewarding and fulfilling. But the problem with trust is it always involves giving the other freedom of action, and you never quite know how much you can trust a former enemy. The problem

of domination is that however much you subdue your enemy, if you don't eliminate them entirely, they will forever study you, unsentimentally, probing for gaps and chinks in your defenses, waiting for the right moment to strike back. The dominator can never entirely banish their fear of the dominated. Over the long course of the Israel-Palestine controversy, both negotiation and domination have been used, by both sides, to try to purchase the simulacrum of safety. Neither tactic has really worked.

Oren Kessler claims that his is the first general interest account of the Great Revolt, and that both Israeli and Palestinian historiography have their own reasons for downplaying its significance. I am sure he is bibliographically correct, but I don't think the revolt is quite as forgotten as he claims, especially by Palestinians. Hamas's military wing, the Qassam Brigades, the primary perpetrators of the October 7th massacre, is named after Izz-ad Din al-Qassam, a Palestinian military leader killed in the early phases of the Revolt. The Revolt was the last, and the best, chance for Palestinians and local Arabs to derail the Zionists. If the Revolt had been more successful, it is easy to imagine how Palestine's British suzerains could have washed their hands of the Zionist enterprise sooner than they eventually did. But this is not what happened.

Kessler is a journalist, not a historian, and his book breaks no new ground. The book is well-researched and well-written, and provides a useful review of main events of the period. Its basic argument is that Revolt established the "roots of the Middle East Conflict" and set the basic parameters for its future developments. Much of its contents are familiar—the elevation of tit for tat violence into something more organized, the real birth of the Haganah, the gun and Bible-toting legend of Orde Wingate, the Koran and gun-toting anti-legend of the Grand Mufti; Jewish organization, Palestinian disorganization, the Peel Commission, the White Paper, the end of the Great Revolt in 1939 as prelude to greater tragedies.

The final toll of the Great Revolt was brutal, especially

for the Palestinians. The three years of fighting saw about 500 Jews killed and some 1,000 wounded. British troops and police suffered about 250 fatalities. For the Palestinians, there were between 5,000 and 8,000 Arabs killed, a goodly number of those the victims of inter-Palestinian strife, along with at least 20,000 serious injuries. I thought that Kessler somewhat underplayed the extent and viciousness of the British military actions against the Palestinians, with many villages reduced to rubble due to bombardment from the air. The Great Revolt was a prelude to military tactics the British army and the RAF would carry out during World War II. Future Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery, who commanded the most brutal phase of the British campaign, has what amounts to a passing mention. Arthur “Bomber” Harris is unmentioned. For those wanting a grittier account of the Great Revolt, Caroline Elkins’s *Legacy of Violence* is recommended. For the Jews, the revolt was both a forced alliance with the British against the Palestinians and a declaration of independence against the British or any other superintending colonial power. This became clearer, when, in May 1939, the British government issued Its White Paper, curtailing Jewish migration, and the beginning of British efforts to pass the perpetual hot potato of Palestinian politics to a plausible successor. The roots of Ben-Gurion’s famous chiasmus, “we will fight the war against Hitler as if there was no White Paper, and fight the White Paper as if there was no war against Hitler,” can be found in the years of the Great Revolt.

The Peel Commission report on July 1937 opened with “An irrepressible conflict has arisen between the two national communities within the narrow confines of one small country.” Some 85 years on, not a syllable need be changed. The conflict seems, if anything, more irrepressible now than in 1937. Kessler argues that the Great Revolt effectively hardened both sides, marginalizing more moderate voices, and quotes, with approval, the statement of the Palestinian American historian Rashid Khalidi, “by 1939 the Yishuv had achieved the demographic weight, control of strategic areas of land, and much of the weaponry and military

organization that would be needed as a springboard for taking over the country in less than a decade.” It was the Peel Commission that first held that the only way forward for the Jews and Arabs in Palestine, was partition, and this was the birth of the “two-state solution.” Ben-Gurion and the mainstream Zionists grudgingly accepted partition, along with the hope that once it was achieved, it would be possible to transfer the Jews out of the Palestinian state, and, especially, transfer the Palestinians out of the Jewish state.

Again and again, in Kessler’s book, one reads of both Palestinians and Jews who recognize the basic justness of the claims of the other side, such as Ben-Gurion for the Jews, and Musa Alami for the Palestinians. (Alami, who negotiated with Ben-Gurion in the 1930s, and spent his last years in Israel-occupied Jericho on the West Bank, is one of Kessler’s main characters, and his account of him, and of the Palestinian historian, George Antonius, author of *The Arab Awakening*, provide some of the most interesting parts of his book.) But this became less a means of mutual understanding than of mutual suspicion, a feeling that nothing will shake the other side’s sense of their own legitimacy, and that the collision between two just and irreconcilable causes can only be resolved by force.

The great African American religious thinker, Howard Thurman, whom I often write about, discussed growing up in Jim Crow Florida in the early years of the 20th century. “When I was a boy, it never occurred to me to regard white persons as falling within the scope of the magnetic field of my morality. White people were not read out of the human race—they simply didn’t belong to it in the first place. Behavior to them was amoral. They were a world apart, in another universe of discourse. To lie to them or to deceive them had no moral relevancy; no category of guilt was involved in my behavior.” There was, of course, a great asymmetry of power between whites and Blacks, but both groups operated from the same lack of moral concern for the other. To the extent interaction was unavoidable, it passed with the least possible amount of empathy or insight. There were exceptions, of benign or even

friendly relationships, but they proved nothing. They were mere anomalies. For the most part, that is how Jews and Palestinians have interacted since the Great Revolt, with a deep and steely understanding of the other that is reserved for one's intimate enemies, outside of the respective "magnetic fields" of their morality. This spirit animated Vladimir Jabotinsky's famous essay, eerily prescient and chilling, "The Iron Wall," which, as Kessler argues, became one of the bases of Zionism's understanding of the Palestinians, Revisionist and Labor Zionist alike. As it happens, in November 2023 the essay celebrated its 100th anniversary since its initial publication in a Russian-language Zionist journal. In it, Jabotinsky argues that the native Palestinian Arabs will never accept a permanent Jewish presence in Palestine, and the various paternalistic ameliorations offered by mainstream Zionists in the hope that economic cooperation could blunt Arab opposition to a growing Jewish presence were but mere wishful thinking. Only if Zionists demonstrate enough military force could they gain the respect, and grudging consent to their presence by the Palestinians.

But after October 7th, Israeli Jews, and Jews everywhere, for the first time in many decades, feel unsafe. Many on the Jewish left have concluded that erstwhile allies might not quite be antisemites, but they don't seem to like Jews very much. As for Israel, it certainly has the right, indeed the obligation, to defend its residents against the savagery of Hamas. However, the strategy of the government seems to be trying to restore the feeling of safety by battering Gaza to rubble. Dominating another people always seems like the most foolproof way of feeling safe, but it always becomes the safety of fools. You will never be able to achieve safety by trying to take away another's people's safety. It has not worked in the hundred years since the publication of "The Iron Wall," and during this Hundred Year's War, Israel has been victorious in all the major battles but never wins the war.

How does *Palestine 1936* speak to us, after October 7th? More broadly, how should we read the history of Israel and Palestine after October 7th? Some have

argued that the only way to move forward is for everyone to forget about their histories, which both Jews and Palestinians wield as weapons, and turn their narratives and grievances into plowshares and pruning hooks, and as blank slates embrace the new day. I sympathize with the sentiment, but I can't agree, lest I be drummed out of the historians' guild. On the other hand, the point of too many histories on the subject has been to convince people that, as [Avishai Margalit said](#) in the *New York Times* recently, "there is a sense that if you think you have a solution, it means that you don't understand the problem and you are naïve." But this also makes history irrelevant, since, by this standard, whether or not we study the past, we are condemned to repeat it, so why bother? I can't accept that either. What history can do at its best is to let us imaginatively connect to the political and emotional realities of times past. What we have in common with the Jews and Palestinians in *Palestine 1936*, like Ayala's grandmother, is that all of us, whether living in our respective homelands or in the extensive Jewish or Palestinian diasporas, have been plunged into an era of radical unsafety and uncertainty. And as in the late 1930s, we stand at a frightening, uncomfortable, and bewildering historical crossroads, uncertain of our path forward. Perhaps we don't need history to remind us that "from the river to the sea" both peoples can only really be free if they learn to feel safe in the presence of the other.

No one knows how, or when, or if this will happen, but if there are lessons to be learned from history, Oren Kessler's fine book returns us to a time that in many ways was not all that different from our own. The years of the Great Revolt provide us with a blurry mirror in which, perhaps, we can see ourselves with more clarity.

Peter Eisenstadt is a member of the board of *Partners for Progressive Israel* and the author of *Against the Hounds of Hell: A Biography of Howard Thurman* (University of Virginia, 2021).



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