

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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The Human Side of the Conflict

Photo by IsraNet

Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection ®



MARK TWAIN SAID, “If you don't read the newspaper, you're uninformed. If you read the newspaper, you're misinformed.” This is so true for the most complex societal issue of our time, commonly called “The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict.” We are bombarded daily with phrases like cycle of violence, occupation, two-state solution, Palestinian refugees, illegal settlements, roadblocks to peace, Palestinian territory, and apartheid wall in the mainstream news media. Without an informed context in which to interpret these terms, the average news recipient remains woefully ill informed and swayed toward an international media bias against Israel.

Context for Conflict

In the diplomatic sense, there is no Israeli–Palestinian conflict, because there is no Palestinian sovereignty with which Israel can have an official fight! Israel has never declared war on the Palestinian Authority (PA), the representative of the Palestinians, but has pursued them continually as a peace partner. The conflict is broader than hostility between Israelis and Palestinians, a struggle against Islamist terror factions, or even the threat of aggression by Israel's neighbors. The conflict runs all the way out to the entire Arab world that denies Israel's legitimacy and incessantly seeks its destruction.

The conflict is not about land, religion, or even peace. As my colleague says, "It's not about peace, but about Israel piece by piece." The Arab–Islamist strategy is to piecemeal Israel's sovereignty until it is too weak to resist the next all-Arab invasion. Way beyond a tit-for-tat between Israeli tanks and Palestinian rock throwers, the conflict is about Israel's very existence as a Jewish state being anathema to global powers.

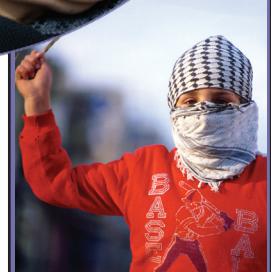
In its 65 years, Israel has withstood nine wars and nine major terror events. No modern nation has endured so much. Most of these fights involved the Palestinians, but they were all aided and directed by much broader powers. Even as the PA and Arab League feign diplomatic activity toward a two-state solution, they promote terror, weaken Israel's resolve, and maintain a constant threat of war. Dennis Prager effectively defined the conflict when he said, "This may be the hardest problem to solve, but it's the easiest to understand. One side wants to live in peace with security. The other side wants them wiped off the map. If the Arabs laid down their arms today, tomorrow there would be peace with Israel. If Israel laid down their arms today, tomorrow there would be no more Israel."

The Human Side of the Conflict

Since no superpower or super diplomat is likely to end the conflict any time soon, let us shift our concern to the most neglected element in the struggle: the people. On both sides of the conflict, there are men, women, and children with legitimate longings, trying to manage their daily lives in the midst of all the punditry and proclamations about their problem. We need an approach that brings us closer to the people's core needs. We're not talking about a solution to the conflict, but an approach to making a real difference in the lives of real people, both Palestinian and Israeli.



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Hostilities erupt with demonstrations and rock-throwing.



"If Israel laid down their arms today, tomorrow there would be no more Israel."



Border policeman

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"Palestinians rate Israel's democracy as the one they most admire in the world."

Who Cares For the Palestinians?

When we say "Palestinian," we're talking about a refugee population of about 5 million Arabs. Sixty-five years ago, they were but 12% of that number. How did a refugee population grow, instead of shrink, as it should have through normal absorption? The United Nations (UN) works to reduce the refugee population for all people groups around the world but one: the Palestinians. Distinct within the UN structure, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees has held the Palestinian people captive to their refugee status since they rejected the state offered them in 1948. Today, this displaced people suffer from a lack of identity and self-worth perpetuated by diplomats and their own leadership. We might find compassion for a stateless people who are manipulated by Arab despots, Islamist clerics, and even the very UN that purports to be their provider.

If their own leaders haven't pursued the core need of the Palestinians, who has? The answer may surprise you: Israel. Consider the evidence:

- Taking control of the West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria) in 1967, Israel removed internal barriers allowing free movement for the Palestinians for the first time since Jordan's illegal occupation.
- Under the so-called "Israeli occupation," unemployment plummeted, life expectancy soared, and the population doubled in 26 years.
- Israel modernized Palestinian infrastructure, creating 2,000 manufacturing plants.
- Israel established seven universities for the Palestinians, taught modern agriculture, opened over 100 health facilities, and brought the people freedom of the press and religion.
- Because of Israel's steady withdrawal from the territories under the Oslo Accords, 98% of Palestinians are now governed by the PA (Israel 101).

There are two official languages in Israel: Hebrew and Arabic. The Jewish state's official religion is not Judaism—Israel has no official religion, but grants full freedom to all faiths. Muslims retain control of their holy places, including the Temple Mount, and the Israelis safeguard these. Israel is the only place in the Middle East where the Arab-Christian population is thriving. Finally, Palestinians rate Israel's democracy as the one they most admire in the world (Telhami).

Medicine and Other Means

Israel provides a remarkable amount of free medical care for hurting Palestinians. In 2012, over 210,469 Palestinian patients were expertly treated in Israeli hospitals. Twenty precious, Palestinian babies received life-saving treatment including bone marrow transplants, kidney transplants, and obstructed bowel surgery. Israel even trains Palestinian health professionals. An

Israeli report concludes, "We will continue to help and assist the Palestinian population...in holding workshops, as well as practical and theoretical daily seminars in Israel, in order to provide the Palestinian doctors better tools and also improve the health system in the Judea and Samaria region and in the Gaza Strip" (COGAT).

Several years ago, I asked an Israeli doctor if he hoped through his compassionate pediatric care to improve Palestinian attitudes toward Israelis. He sighed, "I used to have that hope, but not so much anymore. You see, we only get to care for the mothers and their children for a few hours, but every week they hear from their Imams that we are pigs and dogs." Hence, the bitter reality of anti-Semitic indoctrination by the Palestinians' esteemed "holy" men.





Only a small portion of the security barrier is a concrete wall; the rest is a chain link fence.

Photo by Will King

The media has us convinced of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza caused by Israel's "illegal" blockade. Gaza has no humanitarian crisis. Israel's maritime blockade is in keeping with international law and screens out materials used for terror while facilitating the transfer of huge amounts of food and other necessities to the people of Gaza. The GDP (gross domestic product) in the Gaza Strip has increased more than 30% since 2010, and the unemployment rate of 25% is the lowest recorded in the past decade. One hundred exit permits for businesspersons are issued every day in addition to the passage of Gaza residents for humanitarian reasons and the entry of international organization employees. Israel even enables the import of luxury cars (Halevi).

Overcoming Insecurity

Terror groups Hamas, Hizbullah, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad threaten Israel daily. In the last decade, 1,178 Israelis were killed in over 25,000 Palestinian terror attacks. Noncombatant civilians accounted for over two-thirds of these losses. Another 8,022 Israeli men, women, and children were injured while countless others suffered trauma and untold grief (IDI).

To stem this tide of terror, in 2002 Israel began erecting a security barrier along the West Bank. Its detractors now bemoan the "Apartheid Wall." Only 3% of the barrier is a concrete wall; the rest is a chain-link fence erected only in response to infiltration from PA administered areas. It is a passive defense against terror that has reduced successful attacks by 90%. The intermittent concrete portions hinder gunmen from taking pot shots at passing motorists. By limiting the number of tactical operations necessary to disrupt terror activity, this unwanted barrier has saved many Palestinian lives, as well as Jewish (MFA).

Israeli checkpoints aren't popular either, but these are the means for letting the Palestinian population enter Israel where all can go about their business in safety. When statesmen assail Israel for forcing Palestinians through "humiliating" checkpoints, do they ever stop to think that non-citizens are entering a sovereign state with access to jobs, family, friends, medical care, and all the other benefits of Israeli freedom and culture?

Two analogies from everyday life can help put Israel's security dilemma in perspective:

Police and a Bad Neighborhood: The police force is charged with safeguarding the innocent and deterring criminals. In areas where crime is more prevalent, they have to establish a tougher presence to get the job done. They can't help but appear oppressive when viewed out of context of the level of crime they are thwarting. The leftist media scorns them as a menace rather than praising them as guardians of safety.

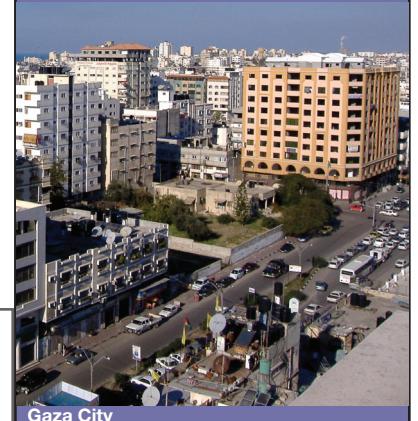
Airport Screening: Security teams are there to screen out the bad guy so the general public can board their flight with a reasonable sense of security. None of us enjoy being slowed down, questioned, and body-scanned, yet this very procedure frees us to move with ease and safety beyond the barricade. While these humiliating checkpoints and the professionals who run them are a nuisance, their presence is a necessity of modern society.



The security barrier has reduced terror attacks by 90%, saving many lives.



A prosperous Gaza City belies a supposed humanitarian crisis.



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"The GDP (gross domestic product) in the Gaza Strip has increased more than 30% since 2010."



A man's car is checked at an Israeli checkpoint near Bethlehem.



Construction underway in a Jewish community.



My wife and I once spent a long hour being thoroughly screened at an Israeli checkpoint. Did they humiliate us? No, but they couldn't trust us until we were checked out, having traveled in terror-infested areas. It sure felt good to be back in arguably the safest place on the planet: the State of Israel!

Common Ground—Uncommon Settlement

The media might have us convinced that “illegal” Israeli settlements are the “roadblock to peace” for the entire Middle East. From what we hear, the Israelis continue to build communities on Palestinian land in arrogant defiance of the superpowers that tell them to dismantle them. There have been a few illegal building efforts, and Israeli law enforcement promptly goes after those, but the settlements that prove so contentious to the world community are actually legal, wonderfully developed towns and cities that provide significant benefit to all the people of the region.

It may not seem it from the news media’s portrayal of the situation, but most Arabs and Jews actually know how to get along and have been doing so for centuries. Mutual cooperation is based on the basic human need of home, family, work, and community. The problem comes when political, religious, and terror operatives hold sway over the people to achieve their own destructive ends. Stories of Palestinian-Israeli cooperative efforts abound—just not shared with the rest of us by the outlets that make their money on strife and dissension. Take the Barkan Industrial Zone, near Ariel: Palestinian workers at a plastics factory say they prefer to work with the Israelis because they get paid double than what they would make working for a Palestinian employer. Machinist Ramadan Islim said, “We work here together, and for the 5 years I’ve been here, there haven’t been any problems...we are here to work. We have a home and family to support” (O’Sullivan).

All families of the region need access to opportunity. The fact is that the thriving Israeli communities in the West Bank grant access that the Palestinians would not otherwise have. Here are a few more facts:

- The last legal sovereign was the British Mandate, ratified by the League of Nations; Mandate guidelines called for the Jews to settle the region.
- The so-called “West Bank” got its name during Jordan’s illegal occupation of biblical Judea and Samaria, the cradle of Jewish civilization.
- There was a continuous Jewish presence in their ancient heartland from antiquity until 1948 when they were all killed or expelled by Jordan.
- For decades before 1967, Arab states and terror squads launched repeated attacks against Israel from the Territories.
- After 1967, the areas needed settlement (per UN Resolution) to enhance security pending permanent security arrangements.
- Israeli communities were built on undeveloped, uninhabited areas covering only 2% of the entire West Bank (Israel 101).



A legal Jewish town being built in Samaria.

Israel has shown itself willing to uproot its fully developed, completely legal communities—cemeteries and all—to seek peace with the Palestinians. All of Gaza was given over and is now in chaos under Hamas. Israel’s heartland, Judea and Samaria, is next on the world’s chopping block. How far does Israel have to go to purchase peace? Are we to imagine the Jews without their Judea? And what about Jerusalem, the Jewish eternal capital since it was established by King David—is it to be divided to satisfy the baseless demands of a usurping PA? Zion, the anchor of an ancient people’s hopes and dreams, will never submit to being a chess piece of diplomats.

Foreign Aid and Arguments

The Palestinian people receive substantial aid from the world community. Large numbers of dollars, foodstuffs, and supplies look good on ledgers, but these do not always get to the needy. Corrupt PA leadership often redirects the gifts for their own benefit and fails to provide accountability to the givers. Palestinians have received the highest per capita aid transfer in the history of foreign aid, and the first source may surprise you: Israel! In its first 20 years, Israel gave more to help the Palestinians than all Arab states combined. The US has given over \$3 billion to UNRWA. Through the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, the international community gave (US) \$7 billion to the PA, half of which is still unaccounted for.

Israel's critics decry US aid to Israel as excessive, but the context of the US package should silence the critics. In its first 20 years of statehood, Israel received a total of \$60 million from the US, while the Arab states, Israel's foes, received a combined \$170 million. After Israel's 1979 Egyptian peace treaty, the US committed \$3 billion annually to Israel and \$2 billion annually to the Egyptians. The superpower spends vastly more protecting other countries than Israel, but those dollars are accounted for in its defense budget while Israel's package is found in its foreign aid budget. Still, this "foreign aid" is motivated by US self-interest and the world's need for security in this volatile region. The dollars the US gives Israel enables the Israelis to turn around and purchase weapons and defense materials from the US. Sufficiently armed, Israel provides a reliable Near East base of security for keeping oil flowing out of the Arab nations for the benefit, including security, of the Western nations.

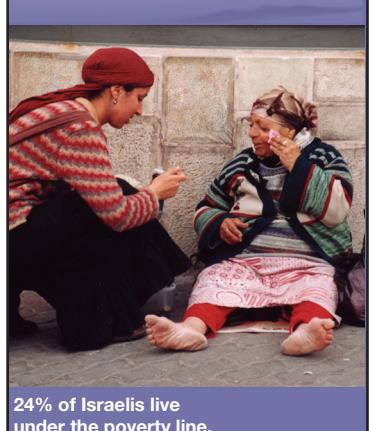
Former US Secretary of State, Alexander Haig observed, "Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region for American national security." Add to this that Israel gives back to the US an advanced level of research and development along with combat-proven field experience; one can argue that the US actually saves more dollars than it spends on Israel.

Who Cares For the Jews?

My auto was in for repair when the mechanic asked me what kind of work I do. When I explained I'm with an organization that helps the Jewish people, he replied, "What...the Jews need help?" In his unaffected way, my mechanic revealed the stereotype of the wealthy, self-sufficient Jew. This view has kept most people, including church people, far from the idea of actually doing anything to help the Jewish people. Historically we have left it to Jews to care for Jews. That almost works, until the next expulsion, pogrom, terror campaign, or Holocaust finds its way to this hunted people.

Dispense with the stereotypes! Israel has a poverty rate of 24%; the West Bank's poverty rate is 18%! (CIA). Israel's poverty results from absorbing immigrants at the highest per capita rate in the world while nation building on a 65-year wartime footing. World agencies are very aware of Palestinian humanitarian need, but who in the world is addressing the needs of the Israelis? Certainly not the top ten Christian aid organizations—these aren't touching the Jewish people, other than with the finger of accusation. These groups funnel millions of dollars into Palestinian organizations, but rather than help Israelis, they keep their distance and join voice with the academic elite who blame the Jews for the Palestinians' problems.

But there are a few, smaller, organizations that are doing justly toward the people of Israel. Over the last half-century, Bridges for Peace and a handful of other Christian-charitable organizations have arisen for this very purpose. Acting on the biblical injunction to care for, strengthen, and advocate for God's chosen people, these Bible-believers are inscribing a new, hope-filled chapter in Israel's history of pain and sorrow. Christians have discovered in the pages of Scripture that when we lend a hand to this people, we are touching "the apple" of God's eye (Zech. 2:8). Yeshua (Jesus) went as far as to say that whatever we do for the poorest of these, His brothers, we do for Him (Matt. 25:40). While it is very right for Christians to help poor Palestinians, it is at least equally important for Christians to help poor Israelis.



24% of Israelis live under the poverty line.



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Israelis Yearn for Peace

Israelis have fashioned a decidedly peace-loving society. The greeting “Shalom!” (Hebrew word meaning peace) reflects their universal longing, but immense and relentless security threats have pushed Israel to assume a tough posture regarding its neighbors. Still, Israel is always a peace partner—giving up its land, uprooting its people, innovating in science, technology, agriculture, business, security, and medicine to prosper the region and the world, and finding humanitarian solutions to benefit its enemies. They have a profound respect for human life—all human life, Jewish or Gentile—living by the conviction that one who saves a life saves the entire world (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 4:8 (37a).

This quest for life and peace is epitomized in the story of Sgt. Gilad Shalit and the terrible cost Israel was willing to pay to bring just one son home. Held hostage by Hamas thugs in Gaza, Shalit was kept from any outside contact, including the Red Cross, for over five years. The entire Israeli society agonized over this young soldier, debating the price they were willing to pay for his return. In the end, he was traded for 1,127 Palestinian terrorists, many with Jewish blood on their hands. But during the ingathering of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles), Gilad came home to his family, and his entire nation.

Your Path to Helping

You can't solve the Arab-Israeli conflict any sooner than the heads of state, diplomats, generals, or pundits who are working on it night and day, but you can participate in the humanitarian approach to the problem. You can remain aloof and have only a distant opinion on the topic, or you can stay informed, give financially, pray, and reach out to hurting souls who wouldn't mind a respectful touch borne out of sincere compassion.

Your path to helping on the human side of the conflict is simple: partner with a reputable aid organization that is meeting present needs with strict accountability. Should you decide to help needy Israelis in this way, remember Bridges for Peace.

By Rev. Bill Adams, DD MDiv
US Deputy National Director



Jewish children praying at the Western Wall.

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Bridges for Peace is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews worldwide through education and practical deeds expressing God's love and mercy.

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