

Politicide

*Ariel Sharon's Legacy and the Palestinians**

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's political troubles began when a mainly grass-roots movement rose up inside Israel and demanded the construction of a barrier around major Israeli urban centers. Supporters of the fence—which in some strategic locations, such as Jerusalem, is being built as a wall—hoped it would prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel. The settlers and most of the Israeli far right opposed the fence because it could create an implicit border, repartitioning Palestine and leaving many settlements outside of the state's boundaries. Many feared it would also mean the end of the Greater Israel ideology. Most of Sharon's cabinet strongly opposed the project, as did his fellow Likud party members in the parliament and the party's central committee.

Supporters of the wall were motivated less by ideology than by anxiety about the Palestinian suicide bombings of civilians, which the Israeli military seemed unable to prevent. Sharon, however, saw advantages in

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separation or “disengagement,” a tactical initiative that included not only building the security barrier in the West Bank, but also withdrawing troops and dismantling settlements in the Gaza Strip as part of a supposed master plan. This plan amounted to nothing less than the politicide of the Palestinian people: a combined military, political, diplomatic, and psychological process with the ultimate goal of dissolving the Palestinians’ existence as a legitimate, viable, and independent entity, socially, politically, and economically. Despite losing a Likud party referendum in May 2005, the prime minister has managed to keep his plans on track, partly with support from the opposition Labor party.

Two Zionisms

The split between Sharon and his core constituency is not surprising. Sharon’s school of Zionism, Labor Zionism, is the traditional rival of romantic Revisionist Zionism, the historical ancestor of the ruling Likud party. Revisionist Zionists envisioned establishing a Jewish state within the borders of Greater Israel, including what is today the territory of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, without specifying how they would achieve it or how to deal with the fate and reaction of the Arab inhabitants of the country and the region. The basic assumption of the Revisionist school was that the Jewish people had an incontestable historical and moral right to the entire ancestral land and that this right would be self-implementing.

The approach of Labor Zionists to building a Jewish nation in Palestine was completely different. They believed less in rights and more in incrementally established facts on the ground. They considered the changing local and international balances of power between the Jews and the Arabs and among their respective supporters in the international arena. The basic tactic was to acquire by purchase, and later by sword, the maximal amount of territory with the minimal number of Arab inhabitants. Labor Zionism had no fixed or sacred borders, but only loosely conceptualized and changeable frontiers. In the Labor Zionist view, the amount of territory under Jewish control was flexible, always subject to complex calculations balancing the ability to hold on to it as well as political, social, military, and demographic considerations.

Such a pragmatic and sophisticated approach to colonizing Palestine was one of the principal causes of the incredible success of the Zionist project, which, from the start, seemed to be working against all odds. Over the past

four decades, the boundaries between the two camps have blurred. Sharon himself, a disciple of Labor Zionism, was elected leader of the rival Revisionist camp. Yet the essential distinctions between the approaches remain, and an aggressive version of the Labor Zionists' vision underlies Sharon's attempt to resolve the central dilemma of the Israeli state.

Israel's Dilemma

Since the 1967 war, Israel has become entangled in an ongoing and deepening existential crisis caused by basic internal contradictions that accompanied the gradual and selective absorption of the occupied Palestinian territories and population into the Israeli state. The absorption created an unprecedented economic boom and increased social mobility, which obscured the crisis and became a part of it. By opening the borders of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israeli labor market was flooded with cheap labor, the Palestinian market was opened up for Israeli products, and Palestinian lands became targets for Jewish colonization.

However, the prosperity was conditioned on the continuing good behavior and total cooperation of the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and on their willingness to accept the Israeli policy of fully including them in the Israeli economy while completely excluding them from other spheres of the Israeli state and its Jewish character or identity. For nearly an entire generation, the Palestinians accepted these colonial rules, benefiting from relative economic prosperity while being denied most human and civil rights and deprived of the political satisfaction that derives from self-determination, collective symbols, and the exercise of any ethnic and national identity. Both societies became addicted to this deeply asymmetric situation and grew interdependent. Many Israelis and Palestinians who grew up in this anomalous situation see it as natural and find it hard to imagine other kinds of relationships.

The Israeli colonial system started to crack following the Palestinian popular uprising—the first intifada—which began on December 9, 1987, and was mainly characterized by mass demonstrations and stone throwing by youths at Israeli troops stationed in Palestinian cities and refugee camps. For the first time, Israeli society began to pay some of the costs of the occupation, not only politically and economically, but also socially, through an altered self-image. The first intifada was completely crushed, but neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians won a clear victory or suffered a significant

defeat. The second round was an armed uprising that began in September 2000 when it became clear that the 1993 Oslo Accords would not result in an independent and sovereign Palestinian state. On the contrary, the peace process had perpetuated a worsening economic situation while Israel tried to pacify the Palestinians by granting them imaginary self-rule. The Palestinian economy had already started to deteriorate after the first intifada, when Israel began importing foreign workers. Palestinian labor was cheaper, but also perceived as unstable and a potential security risk.

Quite apart from the economic interest in the territories, a new complication arose after the 1967 war, namely, the desire of Israeli society, both left and right, to incorporate into the boundaries of the Israeli state the perceived historic heartland of the Jewish people in the West Bank, without including its Arab residents. However, formal annexation would mean that Israel would no longer have a Jewish majority. This contradiction created a built-in crisis, leaving the Israeli state and society unable to make the political decisions that were necessary to resolve the conflict and also meet domestic challenges in economic reconstruction, education, welfare, state-synagogue relations, democratization, and the demilitarization of society. As time passed, the crisis became more explicit, and the contradictory interests became aligned with political parties and absorbed into personal and collective identities.

In 1977, when the right wing nationalist bloc came to power headed by the Likud party, the descendant of the Revisionist party, it was expected immediately to annex the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are regarded as part of the Land of Israel. This was, after all, the main plank in the party's platform, and Menachem Begin, the party's leader, had advocated it when he was in the opposition. Annexation of the territories was also the reason why Sharon, promptly after leaving the military in 1973, urged some small and medium-sized right wing and centrist parties to unite behind the veteran Revisionist leader.

However, except for East Jerusalem and the Syrian (Golan) Heights, no additional territories were formally annexed, even though they were considered to be the mythical motherland of the Jewish people. This restraint was due to the rapidly growing Arab-Palestinian population in the occupied territories, which together with the Arab citizens of Israel, as mentioned above, would at once transform the Jewish state into a binational entity even if the annexed population was not granted rights of full citizenship, suffrage, and access to social welfare programs. Today, despite the

unprecedented immigration of more than 1 million non-Arabs—Jews and non-Jews—from the former Soviet Union, the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River contains about 5 million Jews and non-Arabs and 4.5 million Palestinians, both Israeli citizens and noncitizens. Current demographic projections indicate that by the year 2020, a total of 15.1 million people will live on the land of historic Palestine, with Jews comprising a minority of 6.5 million.

As a result, two deeply rooted existential anxieties exist within Jewish Israeli political culture. One concerns the physical annihilation of the state, an issue that many Israeli politicians and intellectuals frequently use, abuse, and emotionally manipulate. The other concerns the loss of the fragile Jewish demographic majority on which the supremacy and identity of the state rest. The loss of that demographic majority is seen as a prelude to eliminating the Jewish state physically. Thus, Israel has found itself in an impossible situation: the patriotic imperative to possess the sacred land contradicts the patriotic imperative to ensure a massive Jewish majority.

As Aluf Ben asserted, there is an “unspoken but crucial factor” behind Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s decisions to unilaterally withdraw Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip, build a separation barrier in the West Bank, and approve a controversial law preventing any Palestinian who marries an Israeli from becoming an Israeli citizen. All of these measures aim to preserve the Jewish majority, which is seen as a pillar of long-term national survival, and they force Israelis to address head-on the most fundamental and delicate questions about their national identity. When Israeli Jews mention demography, what they really mean is their fear of becoming a minority due to the Arab population’s higher fertility rate. Public threats by their adversaries that “the Palestinian womb” will eventually decide the decades-old contest for Palestine fuel this fear. The recent intifada, the four-year Palestinian-Israeli war of attrition, convinced many Israelis that their country’s future as a Jewish state, as opposed to a binational one, depends upon winning the demographic war. Even die-hard right wingers, former believers in Greater Israel, now advocate partition along ethnic lines, with a large Jewish majority on the Israeli side. And in recent years the demographic left has grown stronger, certainly compared with Israel’s shrinking ideological left. In the end, it seems, “births have helped the Palestinian cause more than bombs and bullets.”¹

A large portion of the electorate that voted for Sharon twice—from both Zionist schools—expected him to solve these internal existential contradictions. They also expected him to address the renewed Palestinian armed

resistance against the Israeli occupation following Prime Minister Ehud Barak's failure in 2000 to negotiate a deal with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat at Camp David that would end, or at least mitigate, the conflict.

The Military Phase

Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories had been successfully pacified by a combination of carrots and sticks until the massacre at the Patriarch's Cave, a site holy to both Judaism and Islam. On February 15, 1994, Baruch Goldstein, a fundamentalist, religious Jew, massacred twenty-nine unarmed, praying Muslims and wounded many others. Until then, expressions of Palestinian armed resistance were rare and lacked broad popular support, despite the growing colonization of the West Bank and obstacles to Palestinian economic growth and foreign investments implemented by Israeli authorities.

The Patriarchs' Cave massacre changed the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians at once and created perceptions of religious warfare. It also triggered a reaction from the Palestinians, who had long been frustrated by their national and economic oppression. After the forty-day Islamic mourning period ended, Hamas and other Palestinian religious groups began their vendetta against the Jewish civilian population inside Israel. This, more than the formally acknowledged start of the second intifada in 2000, was the real beginning of the most recent uprising and its escalating chain of mutual violence.

The use of suicide bombers—martyrs, in the Palestinian conception—was initially considered an appropriate response to the immense disparity in the balance of power between the powerful Israeli military and the powerless Palestinians. The bombers' early success was so great that the mainstream Fatah militias, especially the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, joined in these guerrilla operations. They did so both because the suicide bombings panicked and demoralized the Israelis and because they feared losing internal political support to the Islamists. However, the bombings had two unintended and unexpected consequences. The first was the collapse of the Israeli mainstream peace camp, which went beyond Barak's declaration after the failure of the Camp David talks that there was "no Palestinian partner" for peace. The second unintended consequence was the growing sense among Israelis and abroad that military force against the whole Palestinian people, including excessive force, was legitimate.

In 2001, the newly elected Sharon had his own idea about how to solve the Palestinian problem. His was a concept dating to the 1948 war—namely, to commit politicide against the Palestinians. The process of politicide, in addition to breaking the Palestinians' political identity and institutions, may also (but not necessarily) include their gradual, partial, or complete ethnic cleansing from the territory known as the Land of Israel, or historic Palestine, as was attempted during the 1948 war.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the mainstream peace camp tried to solve Israel's demographic dilemma by giving up most of the occupied Palestinian territories together with their inhabitants. Rabin was assassinated for this policy, and during subsequent elections, a majority of the Jewish population seemed to reject or at least be ambivalent toward Rabin's solution, which was regarded as a deviation from the Labor Zionist approach. Sharon's government opted almost explicitly to reverse the approach encapsulated in the Oslo Accords.

Sharon's program included military and political stages. The military stage of Sharon's politicide strategy was implemented after an especially deadly terror attack. During the first night of Passover, on March 27, 2002, a suicide bomber murdered 29 people and wounded 150 others who were attending a seder, the ritual Passover meal, at a small hotel in the coastal town of Netanya. Two days later, Israel called up many of its reserve units and initiated a series of extensive military operations known as Operation Defensive Shield. The actions had been planned long before, but the suicide attack, which had stirred domestic and world public opinion, provided the perfect pretext for beginning operations. The objective was to dismember any organized Palestinian security forces and obliterate the internal foundations of the authority of Arafat's regime. At the same time, and for the same purpose, Israel also systematically attacked most of the Palestinian national and public institutions and infrastructure, even destroying databases such as the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics. There is no doubt that every state has a firm obligation to protect its citizens from indiscriminate terrorist attacks and killings; Sharon, however, has used this obligation to go far beyond self defense and to legitimize Israel's own prosecution of state terror.

The frequent and deep incursions into and sieges of Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps, along with the extrajudicial executions of Palestinian military and political leadership, were intended to demonstrate Israel's military might as well as its readiness and political ability to use

it. The aim was to prove to the Palestinians that they were vulnerable and defenseless against Israeli aggression. The Arab states and the international community paid only lip service to defending the Palestinians, mainly to silence internal unrest, because they suspected the present Israeli government of harboring a penchant for regional war.

During the military phase, Israel enjoyed nearly unconditional American support. Under the umbrella of U.S. President George W. Bush's administration—whose spirit lies close to Christian fundamentalism—Israel is considered, as never before, a moral and political extension of the United States.

Political Stage of Politicide

During the politicicide's military stage, which began with Operation Defensive Shield, Sharon gained immense popularity among most of the Jewish population. However, as he moved to the political phase, namely, disengaging from the Katif bloc of the Gaza Strip and building the separation fence, Sharon faced considerable internal and external opposition. Opposition to the settlement evacuations came mainly from the settler movement and the radical right, but the opposition to the fence was from many and different sources. Palestinians and part of the Israeli left opposed it because it was being built on Palestinian land rather than the Green Line, annexing *de facto* large amounts of Palestinian land to Israel. Rightist elements perceived it as dividing Israel and the occupied territories, signaling the end of the Greater Israel vision. Sharon also encountered opposition from the International Court of Justice, the legal advisory opinion of which stated that the wall should be dismantled and compensation paid to Palestinian owners of property confiscated to build it. As expected, this nonbinding opinion did not change Israel's decision to build the fence, nor did it affect the route, although construction later slowed down.

All of the Sharon government's activities were designed to lower Palestinian expectations, crush their resistance, isolate them, and make them submit to any arrangement suggested by the Israelis under U.S.-led international auspices. Sharon's various versions of his politicicide plan, which are compatible with the pragmatic Labor Zionist approach, are certainly incompatible with the Revisionist and religious messianic dreams of an exclusively Jewish Greater Israel. Nonetheless, according to polls, the majority of Israeli citizens supported Sharon's plan, and many abroad are attracted

to the public image, reinforced by mass media, of a breakthrough toward settling the conflict.

Many who are oriented toward compromise are presumably aware of Sharon's real intentions but support his policy anyway for reasons that sound sophisticated. First, the Israeli casualties suffered from protecting the few settlers of the Gaza Strip were disproportionate to their limited geopolitical importance. The settlements were isolated and vulnerable, demanding army protection. Second, dismantling the settlements might set a precedent for dismantling other settlements. Third, Sharon could always convert himself into a peace maker, playing the role that de Gaulle did in Algeria, or de Klerk did in South Africa.

When Sharon implemented the political phase of his politicide project, namely, the disengagement, he did so pragmatically. He was aware that international norms would not accept either large-scale ethnic cleansing or transforming the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan into a Palestinian state, in accordance with his initial approach that "Jordan should be the Palestinian state." Therefore, he tried a more subtle approach toward controlling the greatest amount of territory possible. He dismantled all of the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, which housed about 9,500 settlers, and evacuated four small, isolated settlements in the northern West Bank. In exchange for this concession, Sharon requested that President Bush and the Likud party support retaining the major Jewish settlement blocs, inhabited by about 400,000 settlers in the West Bank.

Sharon had a clear vision for managing the conflict. He said that, with the implementation of the roadmap—the Bush administration's initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—Israel would create a Palestinian state on a contiguous area of territory in the West Bank, allowing Palestinians to travel from Jenin to Hebron without passing through Israeli roadblocks or checkpoints. However, Palestinians would be separated by walls and fences from Israel and the Jewish settlement blocs.

The contours of the vision are obvious enough: the Palestinian state would comprise four or five enclaves around the cities of Gaza, Jenin, Nablus, and Hebron, lacking territorial contiguity. The border fence would enclose all of the major settlement blocs containing about sixty settlements, many of which lie deep inside Palestinian territory, such as Kiryat Arba, the settler town near Hebron. According to the 2005 report issued by B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights organization, the fence's total length is supposed to be 423 miles long. As of the end of 2005, 35 percent (145 miles) of the

barrier was completed, 25 percent was still under construction, 20 percent was authorized though construction had not yet begun, and a remaining 20 percent had not yet been authorized.² The route of the fence, which runs inside the West Bank and joins about 10 percent of its territory to Israel, seriously interferes with the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and cuts up the West Bank into at least three enclaves in addition to the Gaza Strip enclave.

A large cluster of Arab communities will be located on the Israeli side of the fence, isolating them from other Palestinian communities and contradicting even the presumed security logic of keeping Arabs out of Israel. The plan to connect the Palestinian enclaves with tunnels and bridges means that there will be a strong Israeli presence in most other areas of the West Bank, making the situation there comparable to that in the Gaza Strip, where Israel, after the supposed disengagement, retains control over access to the territory by land, air, and sea.

Dov Weisglass, Sharon's close aide and envoy, divulged the true intent of the plan in an interview with the newspaper *Ha'aretz* on October 8, 2004. He admitted that

the disengagement is actually formaldehyde. . . . It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians . . . when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a [genuine] Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders, and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda . . . all with a [U.S.] presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of [the U.S.] Congress.

On June 30, 2004 the Israeli High Court ordered changes to nineteen miles of the route of the West Bank barrier. The ruling was meant to ease the immense hardships experienced by Palestinians living in the most problematic areas of the fence's route. However, the Israeli court accepted the wall in principle, and affirmed that "the current route adequately represents Israel's security requirements" as part of the so-called unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians. As such, the court supposedly granted to Israel legal legitimacy for the entire enterprise. However, as mentioned above, the International Court of Justice at The Hague ruled in July 2004

that the entire separation fence contravenes international law because it is being built on Palestinian land rather than on the Green Line separating Israel from the occupied territories.

When Sharon encountered strong opposition within the Likud party toward his disengagement plan, he created a new political party, Kadima. Following a quick dissolution of the Knesset, an election was held. Three months before the elections that would have thrown the entire Israeli political system into an unprecedented tailspin, on January 4, 2006, Sharon suffered a massive stroke. He was replaced by Ehud Olmert, Sharon's deputy in his new political party.

The election results reflected the unusual circumstances. The Israeli constituencies were confused and had difficulty forming clear political attitudes in the vertigo-inducing situation they encountered. One result was an unprecedented low rate of voter participation, about 60 percent as opposed to 70 to 80 percent in previous elections. The protest vote for the harmless Pensioner's Party won it seven seats, though it had yet to set a clear agenda. Shinui, a centrist-secularist party, completely disappeared from the map. The ruling Likud party collapsed and was left with only twelve seats. It seems, however, that the most noticeable result is a weakening of the overall power and decision-making capacity of the entire political system. After many generations, the traditional right wing and Orthodox-nationalist parties may have lost their superiority in parliament. The two major parties were reduced to only a medium level of influence and did not win enough votes to have a clear and decisive mandate on any issue; consequently, they were forced to establish a coalition containing considerable internal discrepancies. Further complicating the election was the choice of a controversial Labor candidate, Amir Peretz, whom was not accepted by substantial numbers of the party's traditional supporters, veteran Ashkenazi middle class and elite groups. Except in times of war, the Israeli political arena had never undergone such dramatic and abrupt changes in such a short time.

Arafat's Death and the Palestinian Elections

As mentioned, from the start, all of Sharon's activities were designed to lower Palestinian expectations, crush their resistance, isolate them from the rest of the world, and make them submit to any arrangement suggested by the Israelis under U.S.-led international auspices, or the so-called quartet of the United States, Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union.

At present, it seems that this aim has been at least partially achieved by the crushing victory of Hamas in the January, 25, 2006 elections for the Palestinian Authority legislative council—a victory that supposedly proves again that Israel does not have a partner for a negotiated peace settlement.

The Palestinian cause was further harmed by Yasir Arafat's death. Despite his corrupt and oppressive regime and his personal limitations as a political leader, as opposed to his virtues as a guerrilla leader, Arafat's personality symbolized the national revival and unity of the Palestinian people. At present, no one can really replace him. Even the religious fundamentalist factions never openly challenged his authority. Now, the tensions among natural rivals—older and younger leaders, locals and former exiles, Islamists and nationalists, and different local strongmen—are set to become a war of all against all. If these internal struggles cause the Palestinian political leadership to descend into chaos, there is no doubt that the Palestinian people will be even more vulnerable to politicide.

One of the most important rivals in this struggle is Hamas itself. Founded in 1978, Hamas, or the Islamic [Suni] Resistance Movement, is historically closely related to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Rejecting any Jewish claim whatsoever to the land of Palestine, it seeks to establish an Islamic state in the entire area. To achieve this goal, Hamas claims the right to conduct an armed struggle, or holy war (*jihad*), against the Jewish state established on holy Islamic lands (*waqf*). Hamas is considered to be a terrorist group by most of the Western world and, naturally, Israel. Most human right organizations have condemned its indiscriminate attacks on Israeli civilians and other human rights violations as war crimes. During the al-Aqsa intifada, Hamas took responsibility for most of the suicide bombings in Israel and later for the Qassam rockets that targeted southern localities in Israel. These attacks began before the massacre in the Patriarchs' Cave.

The movement's popularity stems partly from its provision of welfare and social services to the Palestinian poor; it is involved in building community centers, nurseries, schools, and hospitals, and fights against drug dealers. Mainly, however, popular support comes from its continuing armed struggle against Israel and its position that Fatah's accommodation with Israel was a betrayal. Hamas is well funded and known to make generous payments to the families of holy martyrs (*shahids*) and suicide bombers. Its leadership is also not thought to be as corrupt as Fatah's.

Hamas has demonstrated some pragmatism by offering, as early as January 26, 2004, a ten-year truce (*hudna* or *fadya*) conditioned on Israel's

complete withdrawal from the territories captured in the 1967 war and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, one of the leaders and founders of Hamas, stated that the group could accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, another of Hamas's leaders and founders, confirmed that Hamas had concluded that it was "difficult to liberate all our land at this stage, so we accept a phased liberation." Israel responded by assassinating Yassin and Rantissi in 2004. These assassinations and others only strengthened the image of Hamas as a hero of the Palestinian resistance and liberation movement. Perhaps ironically, Israeli secret services had initially helped to establish Hamas as a counterweight to Fatah, believing that a religious movement was more convenient for Israel than was a national movement.

The transformation of Hamas from a terror group to a ruling political party will be lengthy. Internal differences need to be resolved and there will no doubt be a power struggle with Fatah, which will not relinquish power easily. The great electoral success of Hamas surprised most parties involved, including Hamas itself. It will take some time before they resolve their dilemmas about what kind of internal regime they want to establish and how they will handle their relations with Israel, the Palestinians of the Diaspora, the Arab states, and European and American donors who provide about 90 percent of PA salaries and expenses. Many Hamas supporters in the West Bank and some of its leaders are not religious zealots, but moderates who voted for Hamas to protest Fatah's incompetence and corruption. It remains to be seen whether or not these moderates can fashion Hamas into a relatively less ideological and more pragmatic ruling party.

Some Concluding Words

A conflict can be thought of as a system in which at least two interdependent players participate, with additional indirect partners in concentric circles around the core partners, including, in many cases, players from the entire world system. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, the outlying players in the conflict, with varying involvement and influence, are the United States and European Union, the Arab states, the Islamic world, Russia, American Jewry, the Palestinian Diaspora, and others. Meanwhile, the two core players are not homogeneous entities, consisting of many groups with different identities and, at times, contradictory interests.

The conflict presented in this paper has many facets, including identities,

symbols, prestige, territories, and economic issues within and between the societies. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have passed through several critical historical phases within a relatively short span of time. Each group's societal developments have shaped not only its own side, but the other as well, even if the other group's reaction was either delayed or not immediately visible.

An additional facet of this seemingly intractable conflict is that both parties participate in a kind of wishful thinking: the delusion that one side will wake up on a clear morning and discover that the other party has miraculously vanished and that the whole situation created during the last hundred years was just a nightmare. This way of thinking is reinforced by the myths and historiographies created by both societies and cultures and it is disastrous for both sides. Such ideological constructs render both peoples, excepting some minorities among each, completely confident in the absolute justice of their cause, and confirm them in their inability to empathize for their counterparts in the struggle.

