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The “Root Cause” of the Middle East Turmoil

Would peace descend if the Arab-Israeli conflict were resolved?

Many are convinced that the conflict between Israel and its neighbors in the predominantly Muslim Middle East is the “root cause” of the ongoing violence in the region and of worldwide acts of terror. Some leading politicians and many pundits have attempted to establish linkage between the Arab-Israeli conflict and the turmoil prevalent throughout the Middle East. But does this linkage really exist?

What are the facts?

Israel is a tiny country, with fewer than eight million inhabitants (1.6 million of whom are Arabs). It is surrounded by 22 Arab countries with 400 million people. Nonetheless, Arab propaganda has convinced the world that Israel is an aggressive invader in the Middle East—a mighty Goliath compared to helpless Arab states. It is a supreme irony that tiny Israel, the size of New Jersey, outnumbered 50 to 1 and encircled by implacable enemies obsessed with its destruction, is considered a mortal danger to Muslims and to peace on earth. The linkage theory is that if Israel would make peace with the Palestinians, peace would descend upon the world and Islamist terror would cease.

But Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict are clearly not the root cause of the strife and turmoil in the Middle East. Israel was not involved in the deaths of the millions who perished in the Iraq-Iran war, nor in the current Sunni-Shiite civil war in Iraq. Peace between Israel and the Palestinians would do nothing to stop Iran’s headlong development of nuclear weapons and its goal to achieve Middle East hegemony. Israel has no part in the Syrian civil war, which has so far killed more than 60,000 people, nor has it played any role in the chaotic “Arab Spring” that is still roiling Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia. Neither does Israel have any influence over the intractable conflict between warring Palestinian factions—Fatah in the West Bank and the terrorist group Hamas in Gaza.

Is Israel an intruder in the Middle East? The state of Israel resulted from the same process that created a dozen or more nations in Europe and the Middle East from the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires by Western democracies and the United Nations. For three thousand years Jews have continually inhabited what is today Israel and Judea and Samaria, the so-called “West Bank.” In short, few countries born in the 20th century have a stronger claim to national self-determination than does Israel—and certainly not the Arabs, who have never had a state in Palestine nor a capital in Jerusalem. Yet it has been Arab nations, unable to

countenance a Jewish state, that have waged numerous unprovoked wars against Israel.

And how about terror? Many believe that Israel is the root cause of the terror that Islamists have visited—and visit to this day—upon the world. But consider the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, murderous attacks on

the London subway system and in Mumbai, India, as well as the assassination of a U.S. diplomat in Sudan and most recently the U.S. Ambassador and three other consular officials in Benghazi, Libya. These and dozens of other acts of cowardly terror would have taken place even if there

“This lust for war and terror will cease when Arab-Muslims come to terms with the West and accept its leadership role.”

were no Israel. Rather, they are a reflection of the hatred that radical Islamists harbor against the West and its institutions. That hatred has nothing to do with Israel. Yet many believe that if only the United States would withhold its support of Israel—or “force” Israel to make peace with the Palestinians—Middle East terror would cease and we would no longer have to fear the scourge of suicide bombings, a uniquely Arab invention. Israel’s role and responsibility in Arab discontent is an illusion. Arab and Islamist hatred toward the West and their deadly internal struggles would continue even if Israel ceased to exist.

Many claim that Arab and Islamist terror is the result of despair, hopelessness and poverty. But the facts prove otherwise. While Middle East Arabs are some of the richest people in the world, instead of using their enormous wealth to benefit their people, they squander it in luxurious excesses for a privileged few. The nineteen 9/11 hijackers were not poor or desperate. They were, without exception, well-educated people, members of upper-middle class families. The leaders of such Arab-Muslim terror organizations as Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda and Islamic Jihad are educated people, from the upper reaches of their societies. No, terror is not a response of Arab-Muslims to alleged injustice by Israel, but is rather a customary strategy used by Arabs and Islamists to express their grievances against any enemy, even their own brethren. This pattern would not be any different if Israel had never existed or would cease to exist.

The cause of violent revolution and attacks on the U.S., Israel and other Western states is dysfunctional Arab-Muslim governments and the exploding influence of radical Islamism. This lust for war and terror will not end with an Israeli-Palestinian peace, but rather will cease when Arab-Muslims come to terms with the Jewish state’s right to exist and the West’s leadership role in the fight for human and democratic rights.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
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