

Muting the Alarm over the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Jerome Slater

The New York Times versus
Haaretz, 2000–06

In 2000 the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for a two-state settlement ended in failure, and the Palestinian uprising (or intifada) broke out. Then, in early 2001 Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister of Israel. In 2006 three events dealt further setbacks to the “peace process”: the Israeli election of Ehud Olmert, the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, and the Lebanon war. Then, the 2007 civil conflict in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah ended with a Hamas victory. As a consequence of these events, the prospect for a two-state solution, necessitating negotiations to create a genuinely viable Palestinian state in Gaza and nearly all of the West Bank, is more elusive than ever.

The underlying assumption of this article is that the present situation is disastrous not only for Israel and the Palestinians but also for U.S. national interests. There is a wealth of information and critical commentary, much of it by Israelis, on the terrible consequences of Israel’s policies and behavior toward the Palestinians—and not just for the Palestinians but also for Israeli security, society, civil culture, and even the future of Israeli democracy.

What is less understood—or even denied—is that U.S. support of Israeli policies is gravely endangering critical U.S. national interests: it exacerbates the expanding threat of Islamic fanaticism; it undermines what remains of Middle Eastern stability and, in particular, threatens the conservative Arab regimes (especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan) with which the United States has de facto alliances; and should radicalism spread, it could threaten U.S. access to oil. But perhaps above all, this support increasingly exposes the United States to the risk that Arab fanatics may seek to engage in acts of retaliatory terrorism, including the use of weapons of mass destruction against Israeli and U.S. cities.¹ To be sure, these arguments are not accepted by most U.S. public

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1. For more detailed arguments about the conflict between U.S. policies toward Israel and U.S. national interests, see Jerome Slater, “Ideology vs. the National Interest: Bush, Sharon, and U.S. Policy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn 2002), pp. 164–206; and John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, “The Israel Lobby,” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (March 23, 2006), pp. 3–12. For an extended version of the Mearsheimer-Walt argument, see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). Despite the enormous uproar that the Mearsheimer-Walt article on the power of the Israel Lobby generated, few have sought to rebut their more important and persuasive argument that current U.S. policy is damaging to both the U.S. and Israeli national interests.

officials, political elites, or the general public. Rather, the prevailing view in the United States is that the Palestinians are overwhelmingly responsible for the continuing violence and political deadlock, and therefore there is little reason or justification for significant changes in the long-standing U.S. policy of nearly unconditional support of Israel.

This article argues that a major explanation for this widespread but erroneous U.S. consensus is the largely uninformed and uncritical mainstream and even elite media coverage in the United States of Israeli policies, a consequence of which is that alarm bells that should be sounded loudly and clearly are muted. In contrast, the debate in Israel is much more far-ranging, and includes a substantial body of dissenting opinion—especially among the elites—arguing that Israel bears a considerable share of the responsibility for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although this is still a minority view, candid criticisms of Israeli policy appear regularly in the Israeli press and news magazines, as well as in public statements by leading scholars, writers, retired military officers, intelligence officials, and even some politicians.

Because public discourse in Israel is often self-critical and vigorous, there is at least the possibility of change in the policies that have thwarted a comprehensive peace settlement with the Palestinians.² Even so, most Israeli critics take for granted that the prospect for substantial change in Israeli policies would be greatly enhanced if demanded by the U.S. government and accompanied by serious and sustained pressures. So long as U.S. public discourse about Israel and its policies toward the Palestinians remains so one-sided, however, this is unlikely to occur—no matter who the president is or who controls Congress—because on this issue, there is no discernible difference between the Republican and Democratic Parties or their leading presidential candidates.³

To illustrate the striking differences between the U.S. and Israeli public discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this article focuses on the two most influential daily newspapers in the United States and Israel: the *New York Times* and *Haaretz*. The first section explains the logic for this focus and concludes with a discussion of what might account for these differences and, more broadly, for the generally uncritical nature of U.S. political discourse about

2. The 2006 electoral victory and then the 2007 military takeover of Gaza by Hamas, the Islamic fundamentalist movement, clearly makes the possibility of a peace settlement even more difficult. Still, there are some indications of potential flexibility in Hamas's political position, and in any case hard-line Israeli policies preceded the rise of Hamas.

3. In the spring of 2007, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, the two leading candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, sought to outdo each other in announcing their unconditional support for current Israeli policies.

Israel. The article then examines the breakdown of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in late 2000 and the ensuing Palestinian intifada; the nature of the Israeli occupation, including the moral issues involved, the significance of the erection of the Israeli wall or “separation barrier,” and Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza; the problem of violence and terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the prospects for peace under Prime Minister Olmert and Hamas.

Why Haaretz and The New York Times?

There is a widespread consensus in Israel and elsewhere that *Haaretz* is Israel’s best and most prestigious newspaper—in effect, the Israeli equivalent of the *New York Times*. Even so, some journal readers are likely to object to the focus of this article on the grounds that the editorial policies, commentary, and news reporting of *Haaretz* are not “representative” of the views of most other Israeli national media or the majority of Israeli public opinion. Indeed, there is no doubt that, on the whole, *Haaretz* is well to the left of the dominant Israeli views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which in the Israeli context means that it is critical of Israeli policies.⁴

This objection, however, is unpersuasive for several reasons; moreover, it is irrelevant in the context of this article. First, many of the critical commentaries quoted in this article were published not in *Haaretz* but in other Israeli media, including *Yediot Aharonot*, Israel’s largest daily mass circulation newspaper. Thus, even in more conservative and populist Israeli newspapers, there is often much stronger criticism of Israeli government policies than in the United States.⁵

Second, many of the commentaries published in *Haaretz*, including some of the most devastating ones, are not from *Haaretz* staff writers but from members of the Israeli political, military, and intelligence mainstream establishments. In addition, aside from its own news analyses and commentaries, *Haaretz* regularly provides detailed coverage of investigations and reports by

4. In this article, the Israeli “left” refers to those who favor the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state, and who hold that Israel is primarily responsible for the failure of such a settlement to be reached; the “centrists” are those who also favor a two-state settlement, but who hold that the main responsibility for the absence of a settlement lies with the Palestinians; and the “rightists” essentially believe that Israel should maintain possession of most of the occupied territories and deny the Palestinians a genuinely independent state.

5. For example, the Israeli academic Tanya Reinhart, whose views would be characterized as on the extreme left, wrote a regular political column for *Yediot Aharonot* until her death in March 2006. In addition, columns from other strong critics of Israeli policy, such as Menachem Klein and Shulamit Aloni, frequently appear in *Yediot Aharonot*. Even *Maariv*, Israel’s more right-wing mass newspaper, occasionally publishes left-wing voices.

the United Nations, international and Israeli human rights groups, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as is cited throughout this article.

Third, *Haaretz* is by no means exclusively on the left: some of its reporters and columnists have centrist views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—meaning that they are more or less representative of the dominant Israeli opinion—and a few are distinctly to the right. Wherever possible, I quote the centrist critics of *Haaretz* as well as those on the left. This should not be taken to mean, however, that the criticism from the left is less legitimate or less reliable than that from the center. The key point is that the factual accuracy of *Haaretz's* news stories and analyses is rarely refuted—or even challenged. Rather critics simply ignore such reports, or try to explain or excuse them away, or argue that the Palestinians engage in worse behavior, or deny the larger implications of Israeli behavior in terms of its incompatibility with a fair settlement with the Palestinians.

Fourth, the fact that the views of *Haaretz* (and other Israeli dissenters) do not currently reflect majority Israeli opinion is irrelevant to the central argument of this article. Because the alarm bells warning of far greater conflict and violence, and even of the deterioration of Israeli democracy, are regularly being sounded, there is at least the possibility that the minority views will persuade the majority of the Israeli public that it must change its opinion, which should then produce change in Israeli government policies.

Indeed, Israeli dissent has already led to changes in societal attitudes toward the Palestinians. In the early 1990s, few Israelis were willing to concede that the Palestinians had a right eventually to have their own state in the occupied territories (i.e., the West Bank and Gaza Strip). Until the June 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza, however, a majority of Israelis had come to agree—at least in principle—that Israel needed to withdraw from most of the occupied territories and grant the Palestinians some kind of independent state. Had this solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not been repeatedly advocated by the Israeli left, particularly in the pages of Israel's most prestigious newspaper, this evolution would likely not have occurred.

As for the *New York Times*, the assumption of this article is that the *Times* has considerable influence on elite public opinion in the United States, as well as in Congress and among other government officials. It exercises influence through its editorials, op-ed commentaries, and news reporting. Although the *Times* is hardly monolithic or completely uncritical in its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the overall effect of its three forms of coverage (especially from 2000 to 2006, the main period discussed in this article) has been to minimize serious and sustained criticism of Israeli policy.

The *New York Times* does not merely report the news; to a great extent, it also

determines what will be considered important news and how that news is likely to be understood. It does so in a number of ways: by its decision as to what constitutes major news and what does not, as indicated by the placement and depth of coverage in its news pages;⁶ by what is omitted or, at least, de-emphasized in its reports; by whether it merely reports what public officials say or “perceive” about issues and events, or goes beyond that to point to obvious contradictions between government statements and observable realities; and, perhaps most important, by whether or not its reportage includes vital historical context.

Some readers may wonder about the explanation for the often uncritical nature of the *New York Times*'s treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially in contrast to that of *Haaretz*. With regard to the central argument of this article, it is the differences between the two newspapers—and their consequences for public policy in the United States and Israel—that are important, rather than an explanation of why these differences exist. Moreover, in the absence of much evidence concerning the internal deliberations at the *New York Times*, any discussion of its policies would necessarily be highly speculative.⁷

It is nevertheless useful to review the factors that account for the overall lack of serious mainstream criticism of Israel in the United States as a whole. There is little historical parallel to the United States' remarkable support of Israel since 1948, which continues today even in the face of growing evidence that in the struggle against radical Islamism, the nearly unconditional identification of the United States with Israeli policies toward the Palestinians undermines U.S. national interests in the Middle East and perhaps elsewhere.

The depth and persistence of U.S. support of Israeli policies toward Palestinians can only be explained by the convergence of a wide range of factors.⁸ The

6. In similar fashion, the *Times* has been criticized for its handling of the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) issue prior to the U.S. invasion. One particularly pointed critique came from its own public editor, who wrote that analyses challenging the George W. Bush administration on the WMD issue were “played quietly as a lullaby” or “buried on A10.” See Daniel Okrent, “Weapons of Mass Destruction? Or Mass Distraction?” *New York Times*, May 30, 2004. For a similar assessment, see Michael Massing, “Unfit to Print?” *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 51, No. 11 (June 24, 2004), pp. 6–10.

7. In an interview about his controversial book, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), which examines the Israeli repression of the Palestinians, former President Jimmy Carter remarked, “You won’t read any of this stuff in the *New York Times*.” When the interviewer asked why not, he responded, “I need to ask *you* that?” Nick Paumgarten, “Jimmy Carter Aloft,” *New Yorker*, December 11, 2006, p. 40 (emphasis in original).

8. Here I differ from Mearsheimer and Walt’s argument that the Israel Lobby largely accounts for U.S. policy. That said, by opening up for serious discussion the argument that U.S. policy is harmful to the true interests of both the United States and Israel, Mearsheimer and Walt have performed a valuable service for scholarship as well as for public policy. Although their argument has generated tremendous controversy in the United States, there has been much less controversy in Israel, where similar criticisms of the lobby’s influence over U.S. policy have long been made.

initial reason for this support—and one that, although supplemented by other factors, remains powerful today—was the widespread and deeply felt belief among U.S. policymakers and the general public that the United States had and still has a moral obligation to help Israel defend itself against its Arab enemies. In the early years, this obligation stemmed from a widespread sense of guilt about the consequences of centuries of Christian and Western anti-Semitism—exemplified most horrifically in the Holocaust. Second, Israel has captured the imagination and sympathy of the American public, which views it as having created and maintained a liberal democracy in a region dominated by despotic autocracies. Third, there are cultural affinities between the United States and Israel, which is seen as part of the West, in terms of the origins of most of its inhabitants, its values, and the kind of society that it has sought—at least in principle—to create. Fourth, more recently organized Christian evangelical movements in the United States have provided nearly unconditional and politically powerful support to Israel—in part because of renewed interest in the “Judeo-Christian heritage” that has come under attack in much of the Islamic world, and in part because for many evangelicals the defense of Israel is crucial to the realization of New Testament prophecies. Fifth, as the Cold War developed and intensified, there was a growing perception in the United States that the strongly anticommunist, pro-American, and increasingly powerful Israel helped serve U.S. national interests in countering the threat of Soviet or communist expansionism in the Middle East and elsewhere. And since the end of the Cold War, the same logic, though an increasingly challenged one, explains the belief that support of Israel helps in the struggle against Islamic radicalism and terrorism.⁹

These five factors have been powerfully supplemented by the practical realities of U.S. domestic politics: the undoubted political and economic power of the well-organized Jewish and evangelical interest groups (the so-called Israel Lobby), with their determined and sophisticated political activism, their substantial economic support of favored candidates, and the importance of the Jewish and evangelical vote in congressional and presidential elections, especially in close elections in key districts and states. Consequently, there have been few countervailing beliefs or politically powerful dissenting views on U.S. policy toward Israel. It is thus the remarkable convergence of felt moral obligations, political and cultural affinities, religious beliefs and identifica-

Most of the stories appearing in *Haaretz* have simply reported on heated debate in the United States.

9. For a powerful review and critique of this argument, see Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.

tions, perceived common or parallel national interests, economic power, and domestic politics that accounts for the nearly unconditional support that Israel has enjoyed in the United States in general, and in all probability, to one degree or another, in the *New York Times* in particular.

Whatever the explanation for the policies of the *New York Times* may be, it seems probable that because of its overall prestige the *Times* has attained considerable credibility and influence over public discourse in the United States on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. As I argue below, however, its credibility is often unwarranted, and its influence, on balance, has been harmful to efforts to establish an enduring peace. To repeat the metaphor, whereas in Israel *Haaretz* and many other Israeli commentators are sounding the alarm loudly and clearly, the impact of most of the news coverage, editorials, and op-eds in the *Times*—even when occasionally critical of Israel—has had the effect of muting the alarm.

Camp David and the Intifada

The *New York Times* bears considerable responsibility for the recent mythology about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a mythology that has caused enormous damage to the U.S. understanding of why the apparently promising peace process begun at Camp David, Maryland, in July 2000 broke down and precipitated the political deadlock and mutual violence of the past several years.

In the first few years after the Camp David summit, many editorials as well as columns by Thomas Friedman, the chief foreign policy columnist of the *Times*, set forth the standard argument: at the summit, the Palestinians rejected a generous Israeli offer for a compromise settlement and instead mindlessly chose the path of violence.¹⁰ Even a number of *Times* news stories began from that premise, as if it were an uncontested fact.¹¹ This perception still dominates

10. For example, the editorial published in the *New York Times* on August 8, 2001, "Mr. Arafat's Role," asserted that at Camp David, Arafat "spurn[ed] . . . Israeli peace proposals" and turned instead to "an inexcusable renewed embrace of violence." The same argument characterized many subsequent editorials and at least two dozen columns by Thomas Friedman, especially between October 2000 and November 2003.

11. For example, following Arafat's death, the *Times* correspondent in Israel, Steven Erlanger, wrote that Arafat had "recognized Israel's right to exist only in a formal and grudging fashion. He showed no evidence of being willing to brook compromise on the status of Jerusalem or the right of Palestinian refugees to return to what is today Israel." See Erlanger, "After Death, Tests for Mideast and World," *New York Times*, November 12, 2004. On the same day, Arafat's obituary in the *Times* declared that he had "rejected crucial opportunities to achieve his declared goal [of an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories]," when he "walked away" from a settlement offered by Barak that "appeared to meet most of his earlier demands." Judith Miller, "Yasir Arafat, Palestinian Leader and Mideast Provocateur, Is Dead at 75." The newspaper later fired Miller for slanting "news stories" on the Iraqi WMD issue, but in this case her editorializing in the guise of

in the United States and underlies the policies of the George W. Bush administration as well as the dominant attitudes in Congress and among the American public.

According to the mythology, at Camp David Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak sought to test whether Yasir Arafat and the Palestinians were ready for a real peace by offering them a comprehensive settlement in which, in return for a definitive decision by the Palestinians to end their long conflict with Israel, they would acquire an independent state in 94–96 percent of the West Bank and Gaza and half of Jerusalem, including all the key Arab areas. In addition, Jewish settlements within the new Palestinian state would be returned and territorial compensation made for the border areas that would be annexed to Israel; and a symbolic number of Palestinian refugees would be allowed to return to Israel, with the others given either the right of return to the Palestinian state or financial restitution.

The Palestinians failed the test, the mythology continues, leaving the Israelis without a partner for peace. Even if Barak's proposals were not yet fully acceptable to the Palestinians, it is said, that did not justify Arafat's (alleged) decision to walk away from continued negotiations and launch the intifada: the correct response would have been to make a counteroffer and then employ diplomacy or even nonviolent resistance to extract further concessions from Israel. And if the intifada was unjustified and unnecessary, then there is little choice but to conclude either that Arafat was interested only in gaining a Palestinian state by armed revolution, or even that he would not settle for a two-state solution at all, but rather had apparently "not given up his long-term aim of eliminating Israel."¹²

Almost no part of this mythology has survived serious examination, not only by *Haaretz* writers but also by numerous Israeli, American, Palestinian, and European scholars and journalists, and especially Israeli and U.S. officials directly involved in the 2000 negotiations.¹³ The main points in the refutation are summarized as follows.

an obituary was entirely consistent with the *Times's* overall posture on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

12. Thomas L. Friedman, "It Only Gets Worse," *New York Times*, May 22, 2001. See also the following Friedman columns: "Suicidal Lies," March 31, 2002; "The End of Something," June 30, 2002; and "The Humiliation Factor," November 9, 2003.

13. The demythologizing literature includes Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 48, No. 13 (August 9, 2001), pp. 59–60; Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David and After: An Exchange: A Reply to Ehud Barak," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 49, No. 10 (June 13, 2002), pp. 46–49; Moshe Amirav, interview by *Haaretz* journalist Aryeh Dayan, "Barak Began Referring to 'Holy of Holies,'" December 9, 2002; Shaul Arieli, interview by Akiva Eldar, "They Just Can't Hear Each Other," *Haaretz*, March 11, 2003; Yossi Beilin, *The Path to Geneva: The Quest for a Permanent Agreement, 1996–2004* (New York: RDV

To begin, it is not clear how far Barak was prepared to go to reach a peace agreement—evidently even to Barak himself. Although he had come to believe that some kind of settlement with the Palestinians was a practical necessity, he continued to be of two minds on the matter. As a result, he made no concrete or verifiable offers at Camp David on any of the many specific areas of dispute, refusing to put anything in writing until the entire package he had in mind was agreed to by the Palestinians. Indeed, he contemptuously refused even to meet directly with Arafat, which angered other Israeli officials at Camp David and may have contributed to the summit's failure.¹⁴ Later, Barak boasted that he gave less to the Palestinians—in fact, “not a thing”—than did his hard-line Likud predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.¹⁵

Even so, there is a general consensus on the broad outlines of what Barak verbally seemed to be offering at Camp David: a demilitarized Palestinian state in most of the occupied territories (estimates range from 85 to 90 percent),

Akashic, 2004); Yossi Beilin, “What Really Happened at Taba,” *Haaretz*, July 16, 2002; Akiva Eldar, “On the Basis of the Nonexistent Camp David Understandings,” *Haaretz*, November 16, 2000; Akiva Eldar, “Shades of Camp David,” *Haaretz*, July 18, 2005; Charles Enderlin, *Shattered Dreams: The Failure of the Peace Process in the Middle East, 1995–2002*, trans. Susan Fairfield (New York: Other Press, 2003); Gershon Gorenberg, “The Real Blunders,” *Jerusalem Report*, November 20, 2000; Akram Hanieh, “The Camp David Papers,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2001), pp. 75–97; Menachem Klein, “Shattering the Myths of Camp David,” *Haaretz*, August 8, 2003; Foundation for Middle East Peace, “Palestinian Response to the Clinton Proposal,” *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories*, Vol. 11, No. 7 (January–February, 2001), pp. 7–8; Jeremy Pressman, “Visions in Collision: What Happened at Camp David and Taba?” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 2003), pp. 5–43; Ron Pundak, “From Oslo to Taba: What Went Wrong?” *Survival*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp. 31–45; William B. Quandt, “Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Limits of Incrementalism,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2001), pp. 26–40; Jerome Slater, “What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 116, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 171–199; Deborah Sontag, “Quest for Mideast Peace: How and Why It Failed,” *New York Times*, July 26, 2001; and Clayton E. Swisher, *The Truth about Camp David: The Untold Story about the Collapse of the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Nation Books, 2004). Malley was a member of the U.S. delegation to Camp David; Amirav, Arieli, Beilin, Klein, and Pundak were either members of the Israeli delegation or close military or political advisers to Barak; Hanieh was a member of the Palestinian delegation. The others are Israeli, American, and Palestinian scholars and journalists.

14. Three books by participants at Camp David blame the failure of the negotiations on both Barak and Arafat, though more so on Arafat. Nevertheless, they are balanced and provide plenty of evidence of Israeli rigidities. See Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004); and Gilead Sher, *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001: Within Reach* (London: Routledge, 2006). Ben-Ami was the Israeli foreign minister under Barak; Ross was head of the U.S. delegation; and Sher was the chief Israeli negotiator at Camp David. In a number of places in his book, Sher emphasizes that he and other Israeli officials believed that Barak's humiliation of Arafat played a major role in the breakdown of the negotiations. Sher quotes Israeli Foreign Minister Ben-Ami's private warning to Barak that Arafat “is a person with a deep need for respect, and he feels that you are disrespectful to him. A large part of his ability to become flexible involves this issue of respect.” Sher, *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001*, p. 87.

15. Ehud Barak, “I Did Not Give Away a Thing,” *Yediot Aharonot*, August 29, 2003.

but with Israel retaining (1) the more populated Jewish settlements, most of them near the Green Line, which marks the areas under Israeli sovereignty prior to the June 1967 war, but some extending deeply into Palestinian territory; (2) most of Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount and other areas in or near the Old City containing sites considered sacred by the Palestinians as well as the Israelis; (3) most of the West Bank water aquifers and a considerable portion of the most productive land in the West Bank, located to the east of the Green Line; and (4) continued direct Israeli military control over the Jordan River Valley and adjacent mountains for a period of twelve to thirty years.

Thus, if Arafat had accepted Barak's concept of a "fair and generous" settlement, the Palestinians would have gained only a tiny, impoverished, and water-starved Palestinian "state," divided into at least three enclaves (Gaza, the northern West Bank, and the southern West Bank) separated from each other by Israeli territory, armed forces, roads, and settlements. Moreover, the Palestinians would have been denied full sovereignty and undivided control over parts of Arab East Jerusalem, including the major Muslim mosques on the Temple Mount (known as Haram al-Sharif by the Palestinians and other Muslims).

Most of the participants in the Camp David negotiations, Israeli and Palestinian alike, considered the impasse over Jerusalem to have been the most intransigent of all the issues—more so, for example, than the Palestinian "right of return," widely believed by less informed officials and commentators to have been the major deal breaker.¹⁶ Indeed, in some ways Barak actually hardened Israel's position on Jerusalem, insisting for the first time not only that Israel must have formal sovereignty over the Old City but also that Jews must have the right to pray on the Temple Mount.¹⁷

Finally, even the minimal Palestinian independence that Barak ostensibly

16. In particular, Sher emphasizes that while the Palestinians would insist on the principle of the right of return, there was much evidence that in practice and in the context of an overall settlement, they would agree on pragmatic solutions that would result in only a symbolic number of refugees returning to Israel, as determined by the Israeli government. See Sher, *Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001*, especially p. 103.

17. When Israel conquered the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli government decided to minimize friction with Muslims. Consequently, it prohibited Jews from praying near the mosques on the Temple Mount plateau. More generally, it allowed Muslim religious authorities to exercise practical control over the area. On Barak's new demands, see Enderlin, *Shattered Dreams*, p. 257; and Sher, *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001*, pp. 52, 74. Later, Danny Rubinstein, the long-time *Haaretz* reporter and columnist on Palestinian affairs, sardonically concluded that "it would have been a lot simpler" if the Palestinians had simply accepted that Israel would have sole sovereignty and control over all of "Greater Jerusalem," meaning not only West Jerusalem and the Temple Mount but also large parts of Arab East Jerusalem and newly created Israeli suburbs that extended well into the West Bank. Rubinstein, "We Came, We Shelled, We Killed," *Haaretz*, June 12, 2006.

was willing to grant would have depended on his good faith in actually withdrawing from the areas supposedly conceded to the Palestinians—which the Palestinians had substantial reasons to doubt, given that Barak continued to expand the settlements, military bases and outposts, and Israeli-controlled roads in the occupied territories at a pace that exceeded even that of the right-wing Netanyahu government. For this reason alone, it was not just the Palestinians who suspected that Barak's true goal was to gain U.S. and international support for the expansion and consolidation of the Israeli occupation in the areas that mattered most to both sides.

On the other hand, it is demonstrably untrue that Arafat refused to commit himself to a negotiated compromise settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From 1988 onward, he and other Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leaders publicly stated and repeatedly reiterated their goals: a two-state solution, with the Palestinian state to be created only in what was left of Palestine after the establishment of the State of Israel and its further expansion in the 1948 war—that is, about 23 percent, based on how the land of Palestine was defined in the League of Nations in 1919.

Indeed, contrary to the standard mythology, at Camp David Arafat offered still further compromises: he agreed to accept the incorporation into Israel of settlements near the Green Line and a number of Jewish neighborhoods in formerly Arab East Jerusalem, as well as the principle of Israeli sovereignty over the clearly Jewish parts of the Old City of Jerusalem. By doing so, Arafat was effectively conceding yet another reduction in the historical remnant of Palestine that would become a Palestinian state.

Even after the outbreak of the intifada, there was no basis for the inference that Arafat's true goal was to destroy Israel rather than gain a genuinely independent, viable Palestinian state in all of the West Bank and Gaza, with full Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the Arab holy sites.¹⁸ Even if one assumes that Arafat eventually gained control over the intifada and could have ended it, he might have concluded that only an armed revolution could convince Israel that the cost of maintaining the occupation was too high. Indeed, in light of the long history of Israeli concessions only under severe pressures,¹⁹ such an assumption would have hardly been unreasonable, al-

18. There is a stronger case that the destruction of Israel is still the true goal of Hamas (and no doubt that of even more radical Palestinian fundamentalists), but Hamas did not come to power until 2006.

19. For example, only after the 1973 war did Israel agree to serious negotiations with Egypt; only after the first Palestinian uprising at the end of the 1980s did Israel agree to recognize Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people and enter into negotiations with them; and only after the cost in Israeli casualties had become too

though it does not necessarily follow that revolutionary violence—and certainly not outright terrorism—was either a morally acceptable or a sensible strategy for the Palestinians. Nor, however, was it necessarily inconsistent with the argument that Arafat's objectives were limited.

Moreover, it is another myth that Arafat walked away from Camp David, seizing upon the deadlock as a pretext to refuse all further negotiations and order a preplanned armed uprising. The time line is crucial: the intifada did not erupt after the breakdown of talks at Camp David in late July 2000. The precipitating cause was not a negotiations deadlock—for increasingly productive secret Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had continued until the election of Ariel Sharon in January 2001²⁰—but Sharon's highly provocative September 2000 visit to the Temple Mount plateau, which contains the al-Aqsa Mosque. Regardless, the evidence strongly suggests that Arafat was caught by surprise by the intifada, which was an outbreak of pent-up Palestinian street rage directed not only at the occupation but also at Arafat's failure to have ended it, as well as at the perceived corruption and ineffectiveness of his own Palestinian Authority.

Although Arafat later apparently gained a significant (but not complete) degree of control over his Fatah fighters, no informed observers believe that he directed the suicidal terrorists from Hamas or Islamic Jihad, the smaller but even more radical fundamentalist Palestinian movement. Thus, far from following a preplanned, centrally controlled strategy that employed the intifada as its main tool, Arafat was riding on the back of the tiger. In effect, this is the conclusion not only of the international (but U.S.-dominated) Mitchell Committee, but of much of the Israeli intelligence establishment.²¹ One could hardly find a more decisive refutation of the standard mythology than that of Ami Ayalon, who headed the Shin Bet (the Israeli internal security service) during the events of 2000: "Yasser Arafat neither prepared nor triggered the

high did Israel in 2000 end its eighteen-year occupation of southern Lebanon. Ben-Ami refers to this pattern in *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, pp. 52, 188.

20. The ongoing negotiations have been discussed by many knowledgeable observers, especially Yossi Beilin and Gilead Sher, who participated in them.

21. The investigating committee was appointed in October 2000, after the outbreak of the intifada. It was widely known as the Mitchell Committee, after its chairman, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell. Despite the assertions of Thomas Friedman—as in "Please don't tell me you can't control your own people. . . . You've sold us that carpet one too many times." ("Dear Ariel and Yasir," *New York Times*, October 23, 2001)—the committee concluded, "We have no basis on which to conclude that there was a deliberate plan by the Palestinian Authority to initiate a campaign of violence at the first opportunity." *Sharm El-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee* [Mitchell Committee], *Final Report*, April 30, 2001. Moreover, Shin Bet and Israeli military intelligence both reached the same conclusion. See the following *Haaretz* stories: Akiva Eldar, "Popular Misconceptions," June 11, 2004; Yossi Ben-Ari, "Arafat Was Not Guilty," April 4, 2006; and Uzi Benziman, "And Now for the Hard Part," April 11, 2003.

Intifada. The explosion was spontaneous, against Israel, as all hope for the end of occupation disappeared, and against the Palestinian Authority, its corruption, and its impotence. Arafat could not repress it. . . . He can fight neither against the Islamists nor against his own base. The Palestinians would end up hanging him in the public square."²²

The Nature of the Occupation: The New York Times versus Haaretz

There are many striking differences between the *New York Times* and *Haaretz* in how they treat a number of aspects of the Israeli occupation. I focus on three: the moral issues, the consequences of erecting the Israeli "wall" or "separation barrier," and the significance and implications of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005.

THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE MORAL ISSUES

In its editorials, the *Times* has consistently criticized the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, and sometimes the level of violence and repression employed by Israeli governments. Until recently, however, the *Times* was largely silent about the overall Israeli occupation—of which the settlements are but one manifestation—and it repeatedly downplayed the devastating consequences of the occupation on the Palestinians.²³ The most important consequence, of course, has been the killing and wounding of thousands of innocent Palestinians.²⁴ Beyond that are the political costs to the Palestinian people of being ruled by others, the psychological costs of the daily humiliation and harassment associated with the occupation,²⁵ and, of course, the economic costs.

22. Ami Ayalon, interview by *Le Monde*, December 22, 2001, quoted in *Haaretz*, January 7, 2002. Avi Dichter, Shin Bet director from 2000 to 2005, confirms Ayalon's statement, saying that interrogations of Palestinians arrested after the start of the intifada "clarified once and for all that Yasser Arafat was not behind the events, which had erupted spontaneously on the ground." Quoted in Ben-Ari, "Arafat Was Not Guilty."

23. Since 2006 some *Times* editorials and news stories have become substantially more critical of Israel's policies, though others continue to lack historical context and evade the central issues. In any case, by then the damage in terms of a lack of understanding among most Americans of the conflict had been done.

24. In November 2004 Israeli human rights organizations estimated that 1,500 innocent Palestinians had been killed by the Israeli army since the outbreak of the intifada four years earlier. See Uzi Benziman, "Up in Arms Over Civilian Deaths," *Haaretz*, November 26, 2004. According to Amnesty International's 2005 annual report, during that year, "[t]he Israeli army killed more than 700 Palestinians, including some 150 children. Most were killed unlawfully—in reckless shooting, shelling, and air strikes in civilian residential areas." *Amnesty International Report, 2005* (New York: Amnesty International, 2005), <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/isr-summary-eng>. And in 2006 Israeli security forces killed 683 Palestinians, nearly three times as many as in 2005—even though Palestinian terrorism had dramatically been reduced, and only 17 Israeli civilians had been killed. See B'tselem, 2006: *683 People Killed in the Conflict*, December 28, 2006.

25. Friedman has acknowledged that "the most underestimated emotion in Arab politics is humil-

Moreover, while moral considerations are sometimes included in the *Times's* criticisms of the Israeli occupation—especially following Israeli “targeted assassinations” that kill many innocent Palestinians—the typical editorial, analysis, or news story focuses primarily on the practical consequences to Israel and its national interests: its loss of international support, the impending “demographic problem” (i.e., the concern that the Arabs will become a majority, forcing Israel to choose between being a Jewish or a democratic state), and the like.

Particularly striking, the *Times* often implies that there is little connection between the violence of the Palestinian intifada and Israeli occupation and repression, muddying or failing altogether to make the crucial distinction between the violence of the occupier and that of its victim, or between Palestinian attacks against Israeli military forces as distinct from those against civilians. In the first few years following the 2000 breakdown of the political process and the onset of the Palestinian uprising, the typical *Times* editorial either treated the violence of both sides as, in effect, morally equivalent and thus to be equally deplored, or even placed most of the blame on the Palestinians. In a not-untypical example, without so much as mentioning the Israeli occupation and violent repression as a possible cause of Palestinian violence, a *Times* editorial asserted: “Both sides, but particularly the Palestinians, are notorious for dashing hopes [for peace]. . . . Palestinian violence against Israel is pointless, and has served only to bring forth overwhelming punishing responses.”²⁶ In other editorials, the word “occupation” does make an appearance, but only in passing, buried in the middle of criticism of Palestinian violence.

On some occasions, the *Times* has ignored the most obvious moral distinctions; for example, a news story reported that after a Hamas attack that killed four Israeli soldiers, Israel retaliated by demolishing dozens of houses in a Palestinian refugee camp, leaving hundreds homeless.²⁷ The story did not mention that the Palestinian attack—on soldiers—was part of an uprising against occupation, whereas the Israeli “retaliation”—directed against civilians—was designed to maintain it.

iation.” He goes on to argue, however, that it is “Israel’s mere existence” that is “a daily humiliation to Muslims, who can’t understand how, if they have the superior religion, Israel can be so powerful.” Thomas L. Friedman, “Mideast Rules to Live By,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2006. By contrast, Israeli critics widely understand that the “daily humiliation” of the Palestinians derives from living under Israeli occupation and various forms of repression, not the “mere existence” of Israel.

26. “Listen to What the Man Says,” *New York Times*, January 25, 2005. See also James Bennet, “Tip-toeing Along in the Middle East Two-Step,” *New York Times*, August 17, 2003. This story discusses, in apparently balanced and symmetrical terms, what each side was doing or not doing to further peace—but failed to observe that the Israeli side was essentially seeking to maintain a repressive occupation, whereas the Palestinian side was revolting against it.

27. Joel Greenberg, “Israel, in Reprisal for Killings, Razes Gaza Refugee Homes,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2002.

To be sure, the *Times*—usually in relatively mild language—has occasionally been more critical of Israeli violence, although often providing a semi-justification for it. For example, following the massive Israeli invasions of Palestinian refugee camps in the spring of 2002, in which dozens of Palestinian civilians were killed and hundreds made homeless, a *Times* editorial stated that the invasion was “unwise” and “counterproductive,” because it was “undermining Israel’s own interests.” It quickly added, however, that “of course, Israel cannot allow Palestinian refugee camps and towns to become terrorist sanctuaries.”²⁸

Similarly, during the Sharon years *Times* editorials sometimes criticized the occupation, especially the Jewish settlements, and chastised the Israeli prime minister for his “ill conceived” policies;²⁹ they hastened to add, however, that the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories and the Palestinian terrorist response “are not equivalent. . . . You cannot equate blowing up children on a bus with building on land that someone else considers his.”³⁰ The problem with this line of argument is that building on contested territory was hardly an adequate description of the full range of Israeli actions, which included not only the continuing expropriation of Palestinian lands and expansion of the settlements, but also wholesale town and city closures, curfews, roadblocks, and military checkpoints; the building of roads throughout the territories that only Israelis could use; the destruction of the Palestinian government and other public institutions; the massive health consequences of the occupation on the Palestinians; the devastation of the Palestinian economy and the resulting impoverishment of the Palestinian people; the demolition of thousands of Palestinian homes; mass arrests; and the assassination of hundreds of alleged terrorist leaders by indiscriminate methods that have resulted in the death or wounding of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including women and children.³¹ A proper characterization of these policies calls for language stronger than “ill conceived.”

28. “Israel’s Unwise Offensive,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2002.

29. “Averting Disaster in the Mideast,” *New York Times*, February 4, 2002.

30. “Middle East Math,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2003.

31. These and other consequences of the Israeli occupation are regularly reported by *Haaretz* and other Israeli newspapers. Indeed, even the news sections of the *Times* sometimes has reported them, although not with the regularity, force, and detail of *Haaretz*, which perhaps accounts for the obfuscation of many of its editorials, including those cited above.

As is discussed later, a number of international and Israeli human rights organizations have issued detailed, extensive, and continuing reports on the various forms of Israeli repression and human rights violations. Of particular note are the regular reports, investigations, and public statements by B’tselem, the leading Israeli human rights organization, and the annual reports of Amnesty International, which usually include a section on Israel and the occupied territories (as does the 2007 report). See also Human Rights Watch, “Israel/Occupied Territories: Human Rights Concerns for the 61st Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights” (New York: Human

Finally, in one of its most morally and intellectually confused editorials, in February 2006 the *Times* criticized the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas, its leader, for failing “to deliver on the security that Israel so dearly needs to have.” It also condemned Hamas, not only for its past terrorism, but because it continued to “defend its right to use arms to combat Israeli occupation.” Indeed, the editorial came perilously close to justifying what could only be called Israeli state terrorism, for it angrily warned Hamas that if it did not stop “its senseless attacks against Israeli targets, Israel will retaliate as it did when it laid waste to Nablus and other Palestinian cities after the intifada began in 2000.”³²

HAARETZ AND THE MORAL ISSUES

Unlike the *New York Times*, *Haaretz* news stories have for years fully reported the conclusions of a number of UN, World Bank, and other studies on the effects of the deepening economic crisis on the Palestinian population, especially in Gaza: the impoverishment of a majority of the population (by 2006 unemployment had approached 50 percent, and per capita income for the majority had fallen to less than \$2 a day); the vast Israeli destruction of homes, factories, workshops, and agriculture; the collapsing public health systems; the draconian restrictions on the movement of goods and labor; and the flight of the middle class (including businesspeople), the key to future economic development.³³

In addition, *Haaretz* editorialists and columnists have repeatedly highlighted the moral issues created by the occupation, and its correspondents in the occupied territories regularly report, in great detail, on how the Israeli-induced hu-

Rights Watch, March 2005); and an exceptionally strong statement by John Dugard, United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian Territory, quoted in “UN Human Rights Envoy Says Gaza a Prison for Palestinians,” *Haaretz*, September 27, 2006. In addition, the scholarship on the Israeli occupation has been growing in recent years. The most authoritative works are two books by Sara Roy: *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2001); and *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (London: Pluto, 2006).

32. “Hamas at the Helm,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2006.

33. See, for example, “Destitution Seen for Palestinians,” *New York Times*, August 30, 2002, covering the findings of Terje Roed-Larsen, a leading UN representative in the Middle East; Amira Hass, “The Economic War Also Failed,” *Haaretz*, March 12, 2003; Akiva Eldar, “Parting Shots,” *Haaretz*, January 10, 2006; Amira Hass, “It’s No Wonder Envoy Is Frustrated,” *Haaretz*, October 26, 2005; Geoffrey Aronson, “It’s the Occupation, Stupid!” *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (February 2006), pp. 6–7; Gideon Levy, “As the Hamas Team Laughs,” *Haaretz*, February 19, 2006; Akiva Eldar, “UN: Israel’s Tightened Security Exacting Heavy Humanitarian Toll,” *Haaretz*, February 28, 2006; “UN Trade Agency Warns of Palestinian Economic Collapse,” *Haaretz*, September 12, 2006; and “UN Human Rights Envoy Says Gaza a Prison for Palestinians,” *Haaretz*, September 27, 2006. By mid-2007 the situation was even worse, a consequence of the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the continuing Israeli economic boycott.

manitarian crisis destroys Palestinian lives. Although since mid-2006 there have been several *New York Times* news stories on the Palestinian economic collapse, neither its news coverage nor its commentary has highlighted the issue with anything approaching the sustained attention and moral passion of *Haaretz*.

Moreover, by contrast with the *Times*, not only writers in *Haaretz* but many other prominent Israelis speak with remarkable clarity, candor, and moral passion not just about the consequences of the occupation for the Palestinians but also about what the Israeli repression reveals about the moral standing of Israel. For example, in March 2004 Meron Benvenisti, a columnist and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, wrote: "The occupation and suppression of millions of people have plunged Israeli society into a profound moral crisis."³⁴ Two months later, *Haaretz* gave prominence to a news story reporting that Amnesty International had concluded that in 2003 the Israeli army had committed "war crimes" when it killed 600 Palestinians, including more than 100 children, as a result of "reckless shooting, shelling, and bombing in civilian residential areas, in extra-judicial executions, and through excessive use of force."³⁵ Since then, *Haaretz* has repeated the charge, in its own editorials, that Israel is committing "war crimes" in the occupied territories.³⁶

Further, in a remarkable editorial published in July 2004, noting that more than 100 years had passed since the Zionist movement had been founded, *Haaretz* concluded: "We must not be afraid to state that 21st-century Zionism will not survive if the new interpretation of the 'Jewish state' is an apartheid state that rules over the Palestinians against their will. We must remember that the suffering of the Palestinians who live under Israeli occupation is as desperate as was that of the Jews of Europe in the late 19th century."³⁷ On a number of occasions, Gideon Levy and the international prize-winning correspondent Amira Hass, the two main *Haaretz* reporters covering the impact of the occupation on the Palestinians, have expressed their anger and frustration at the lack of Israeli moral condemnation of what their nation is doing to the Palestinians. For example, Hass has written, "Average Israelis, including those who are not settlers, are not troubled by such trifling matters like international law, basic

34. Meron Benvenisti, "Still Shooting and Crying," *Haaretz*, March 12, 2004.

35. Joseph Algazy, "Amnesty: IDF Killed 100 Children Last Year," *Haaretz*, May 27, 2004. The Amnesty International report also denounced Palestinian war crimes; and Amnesty International, "Israel and the Occupied Territories," *Report 2004* (New York: Amnesty International, 2004), <http://www.amnesty.org/report2004/isr-summary-eng>.

36. See, for example, "In the Dock," *Haaretz*, September 14, 2005.

37. "The State and the Vision," *Haaretz*, July 9, 2004.

moral values, and the welfare and convenience of the Palestinians.” Meanwhile, Levy has asked, “Where do we get the right to abuse an entire people this way? . . . We stopped talking about morality a long time ago.”³⁸

Still further, in January 2005 a *Haaretz* editorial described Israel’s occupation policy as “depraved,” and called on the Israeli Supreme Court “to save the country from itself and from the intentional and despicable policies of its leaders.”³⁹ Similarly, in a July 2005 article Levy, who is typically characterized as a “leftist,” described the settlements as “criminal from the outset.” In the same issue, however, the centrist *Haaretz* columnist Uzi Benziman wrote that the Israeli settlement process was “politically stupid, immoral, and inhumane. . . . The history of the settlements is full of killing and robbery, disgraceful violations of the rights of the Palestinians, and trampling on their dignity . . . relying on the state’s powerful security apparatuses to eliminate the Palestinians’ resistance to the injustice inflicted on them.”⁴⁰

Similarly uncompromising language has been employed by Akiva Eldar, the chief diplomatic correspondent of *Haaretz*, who in May 2006 wrote: “For years, Israel has been undermining the most basic human rights of the Palestinians—the right to life, freedom, security, health, education, respect, movement, employment, prosperity.”⁴¹ Yossi Sarid, a columnist, former minister of education in the Barak government, and head of the Meretz political party, wrote in June 2006 that the occupation of the Palestinians was nothing less than “heart-hearted,” “evil,” “bestial,” and the last example of “old-time [Western] colonialism”; he added that “Israel looks in the mirror and finds it difficult to recognize itself. . . . It’s a disgusting view in the mirror.”⁴²

Lest one conclude that these kinds of characterizations of the occupation are limited either to writers in *Haaretz* or other to “leftists,” consider the long public statement and subsequent interviews in *Yediot Aharonot*, Israel’s largest newspaper, of four former heads of Shin Bet—Avraham Shalom, Yaakov Peri, Carmi Gillon, and Ami Ayalon—who decided to speak out “to send . . . a warning, an alert, an alarm”:

Shalom: “We are behaving disgracefully. Yes, there is no other word for it. Disgracefully. We debase the Palestinian[s]. . . . Nobody can take this. We too would not take it if it were done to us.”

38. Amira Hass, “Convergence to a Border of Convenience,” *Haaretz*, April 5, 2006; and Levy, “As the Hamas Team Laughs.”

39. “Saving the State from Itself,” *Haaretz*, January 4, 2005.

40. Gideon Levy, “They Broke the Public’s Heart,” *Haaretz*, July 3, 2005; and Uzi Benziman, “Not an Isolated Spectacle,” *Haaretz*, July 3, 2005.

41. Akiva Eldar, “Human Rights for Security,” *Haaretz*, May 25, 2006.

42. Yossi Sarid, “A Lesson in Pickling,” *Haaretz*, June 14, 2006.

Peri: [Unless matters change,] “we really are bent on doom . . . a catastrophe. . . . We will continue to wallow in the mud, and we will continue to destroy ourselves.”

Gillon: “Without an agreement [with the Palestinians,] we are down for the count. . . . If we don’t resolve the present situation and we continue our conflict with the Palestinians, this country will go from bad to worse.”

Ayalon: “Much of what we are doing today [in the territories] is immoral, some of it patently immoral. We are taking very sure . . . steps to a point where the State of Israel will not be a democracy or a home for the Jewish people.”⁴³

THE WALL OR SEPARATION BARRIER

In 2002 Israel began building a physical barrier along what it considered to be its likely final boundaries. The barrier extends well beyond its internationally recognized border, the Green Line. In some places, as in Jerusalem, the barrier is a high wall; elsewhere it consists of a network of trenches and electrified fences with outposts and patrols to guard them. The Sharon government repeatedly insisted that the purpose of the barrier was solely to increase security, by preventing Palestinian terrorists from entering Israel. Although it is true that security played a role in the Israeli decision, and that in many areas the number of terrorist incidents has been reduced substantially (although other factors have also been at work, especially Hamas’s 2005 decision to suspend almost all of its terrorist attacks for the next eighteen to twenty-four months), it has long been obvious that the barrier is also intended to allow the Israeli government to seize Palestinian lands beyond the Green Line and to ensure that the largest and most important Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are permanently incorporated into Israel.

When the barrier is completed in the next few years, Israel will have seized most of “Greater Jerusalem,” which as currently defined in practice (and the definition keeps expanding) extends so far into the West Bank at its narrowest point that it comes close to cutting the West Bank in half. In addition, Israel will have formally or de facto annexed about 10 percent of the most fertile and water-rich sections of the West Bank, and it will have divided the remaining area into a number of barely connected Palestinian enclaves, surrounded by Israeli barriers, checkpoints, roads, and military outposts.

These facts have been discussed in numerous studies and investigations by independent scholars and many NGOs, including Amnesty International,

43. The interview, in Hebrew, appeared in the November 14, 2003, edition of *Yediot Aharonot*. See “Former Heads of Shin Bet Reflect on Israel’s Present and Future, Jerusalem, November 14, 2003,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter 2004), pp. 177–185.

B'tselem (the leading Israeli human rights organization), the UN Human Rights Commission, and the World Bank. In addition, those parts of the barrier that extend beyond Israel's recognized borders have been declared as contrary to international law by the International Court of Justice. The issue has also been covered in great detail by *Haaretz* as well as by other Israeli newspapers and commentators.⁴⁴

Even so, the *New York Times* has treated the barrier issue as if the basic facts were in question, a mere matter of opinion or conflicting "perceptions" of what Israelis say compared with what Palestinians say. For example, in September 2003 *Times* correspondent Richard Stevenson wrote, "Israel says the barrier . . . is intended to make it harder for suicide bombers to enter Israel," but "Palestinians say it is an attempt to take over disputed land and divide Palestinian communities." A few days later, Alan Cowell wrote that there were "conflicting perceptions of its [the barrier's] purpose: Israel says it is a security measure. . . . Many Palestinians call it a land grab that . . . will rob Palestinians of their historical land."⁴⁵

Similarly, in January 2004 James Bennet, then the lead *Times* correspondent in Israel, reported that Palestinian officials had submitted a case against the barrier to the International Court of Justice, "say[ing]" that Palestinians are "being humiliated, locked in a cage and denied work." Bennet went on to write, however, that "the Israelis immediately said [the barrier] was essential

44. The scholarship includes Peter Lagerquist, "Fencing the Last Sky: Excavating Palestine after Israel's 'Separation Wall,'" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter 2004), pp. 5–35; Tanya Reinhart, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine since 2003* (London: Verso, 2006); and Sara Roy, "A Dubai on the Mediterranean," *London Review of Books*, Vol. 27, No. 21 (November 3, 2005), pp. 15–18. The reports by NGOs include "Israel and the Occupied Territories," in *Amnesty International Annual Report, 2004* (New York: Amnesty International, 2005); B'tselem, *Under the Guise of Security: Routing the Separation Barrier to Enable Israeli Settlement Expansion in the West Bank*, December 2005; UN Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, *Report to the UN General Assembly on the Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Territories*, New York, August 18, 2005; excerpts, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter 2006), pp. 178–180; and World Bank, *The Palestinian Economy and the Prospects for Its Recovery* (New York: World Bank, December 2005). On June 30, 2004, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that sections of the separation barrier violated international law and infringed on the rights of the Palestinian population. For a discussion of the decision, see Baruch Spiegel, "Maintaining Proportionality," *bitterlemons.org*, March 12, 2007. (General Spiegel served in the Israeli ministry of defense, with special responsibility for assessing the impact of Israeli measures on the Palestinians.) Several days later the International Court of Justice issued a much more sweeping ruling that the wall was illegal. See International Court of Justice, "Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory" (The Hague: United Nations, July 9, 2004).

45. Richard W. Stevenson, "U.S. Cutting Loan Guarantees to Oppose Israeli Settlements," *New York Times*, September 17, 2003; and Alan Cowell, "Israelis to Go to U.S. to Discuss Barrier Rift," *New York Times*, September 20, 2003.

to stop [terrorist] killers."⁴⁶ He made no effort to provide context or to evaluate the issue.

In February 2004 the *Times* reported that Israel would not participate in International Court hearings on the barrier, because it was "essential to preventing Palestinian suicide bombings and . . . [to] incorporating Jewish settlements." The piece then noted, but without comment, that "Palestinians argued that the barrier's route takes large chunks of land that they are claiming for a future state."⁴⁷ In June 2004 another *Times* correspondent in Israel repeated the formula: "Israel says that the barrier is strictly a security measure," whereas "Palestinians denounce it as a land confiscation that would greatly disrupt the lives of many Palestinians and complicate efforts to establish a Palestinian state."⁴⁸

Again, the contrast between the *Times* and *Haaretz* is striking, for the Israeli newspaper has often observed that if the construction of the barrier was "strictly" a security measure, it would not have been extended beyond the Green Line. In dozens of stories since 2002, *Haaretz* has treated the basic facts of the matter as uncontroversial; that is, the barrier will extend Israel's borders so as to incorporate "Greater Jerusalem" and the main settlement blocs in the West Bank, and that this will have major negative economic, political, and psychological consequences for the Palestinians and their hopes to gain a viable state.

Indeed, it is not uncommon for Israeli writers and journalists to compare the barrier and the Israeli occupation policies that it serves to South Africa during the apartheid years—a fact particularly worth noting in light of the uproar surrounding former President Jimmy Carter's 2006 book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁴⁹ The Palestinian areas will be nothing more than "Bantustans," it

46. James Bennet, "Israelis Mourn Their Dead and Destroy Bomber's House," *New York Times*, January 31, 2004.

47. "Israel Will Not Join Hearing in Hague," *New York Times*, February 13, 2004.

48. Greg Myre, "Israelis to Extend Barrier Deeper into the West Bank," *New York Times*, June 15, 2004.

49. Carter, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*. Carter was attacked in most U.S. media commentary. See, for example, Ethan Bronner, "Jews, Arabs, and Jimmy Carter," *New York Times*, January 7, 2007; Jeffrey Goldberg, "What Would Jimmy Do?" *Washington Post*, December 10, 2006; and Michael Kinsley, "It's Not Apartheid," *Washington Post*, December 12, 2006. In addition, there was widespread media reporting on the bitter comments of Carter's leading academic critic, Kenneth W. Stein. For the most complete statement of Stein's arguments, see "My Problem with Jimmy Carter's book," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 3–15. By contrast, Carter was defended by a number of Israeli commentators in *Haaretz* and elsewhere. For example, *Haaretz* covered the controversy in "Jimmy Carter: Israel's 'Apartheid' Policies Worse Than South Africa's," December 11, 2006; and Tom Segev, one of Israel's leading political writers, praised Carter in his "Memoir of a Great Friend," *Haaretz*, December 11, 2006. In a similar fashion, Yossi Beilin defended the Carter book in "Carter Is No More Critical of Israel Than Israelis Themselves," *Jewish Forward*, January 19, 2007.

is frequently said in Israel, that will cut the West Bank into noncontiguous Palestinian islands, “rip apart the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians,” and “make any future Palestinian state non-viable.”⁵⁰ Earlier, Yossi Sarid had written that “Sharon’s fence is a crime against humanity,” for when “a Palestinian awakens in the morning . . . [he] sees the monstrous wall that separates him from members of his family, from his fields and orchards, from his business dealings . . . [and] separates his children from their school and sees his destitute piece of land robbed from him. . . . Sharon is suited to serve as prime minister of South Africa in the blackest days of the apartheid.”⁵¹

The Olmert government has abandoned the fiction of the Sharon government that the purpose of the barrier is merely to enhance Israel’s security and might only be temporary, for Olmert has publicly stated that the barrier is likely to mark the country’s final borders.⁵² In other words, the separation barrier is an integral element in Israel’s occupation policies. That it is deepening the occupation and resulting in further misery for the Palestinians is empirically demonstrable; in Israel hardly anyone suggests that the consequences for the Palestinians are mere “perceptions.”⁵³

THE GAZA WITHDRAWAL

In August 2005 Prime Minister Sharon ordered the withdrawal of some twenty-one small Israeli settlements in Gaza (containing about 9,000 settlers), which he presented as a necessary step to meet the Israeli “demographic problem,” namely that within a few years there would be more Arabs than Jews living within Israel and the occupied territories, forcing Israel to choose between being a democratic or a Jewish state. The *New York Times* generally presented the withdrawal as a courageous and statesmanlike reversal of Sharon’s previous policies, a first step toward an overall two-state settlement. For example, an editorial commended the withdrawal on the grounds it was in Israel’s

50. For examples, see Haas, “Convergence to a Border of Convenience”; Levy, “Not an Isolated Spectacle”; the *Haaretz* editorials “Fence of Folly,” November 13, 2003, and “Indefensible Fence,” January 6, 2003; and David Landau, “To the Edge and Back,” *Haaretz*, January 16, 2004.

51. Yossi Sarid, “My Affidavit to the Hague,” *Haaretz*, January 21, 2004.

52. Greg Myre, “Olmert Outlines Plans for Israel’s Borders,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2006.

53. For another example of how the *New York Times* sometimes continues to treat historical facts as if they were controversial, see the article by Steven Erlanger, who wrote, “Palestinians say that even before the Arab nations attacked Israel, many Arabs fled or were forced to flee by Jewish fighters.” Erlanger, “Olmert Rejects Right of Return for Palestinians,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2007. There is no serious historical controversy over the events of 1947; the documentation and the scholarship leave no doubt that many, if not most, of the Palestinians who fled their homes and villages did so either out of fear of Jewish terrorism or because they were directly driven out by the Israeli army.

interest, both because it was “a rational response to the demographic changes” and because it freed up Israeli soldiers from having to defend “far-flung clusters of Jewish housing surrounded by hostile Palestinians.”⁵⁴ Evidently the *Times* did not think that there was also a moral issue, for not a word was said about the right of the Palestinians to be free of a particularly onerous manifestation of the Israeli occupation. By unavoidable implication, then, the only issue for the *Times* was what Israel’s alleged interests required.

Similarly, another editorial (revealingly entitled “Ariel Sharon’s Statesmanship”) approved of Sharon’s right to be proud of his actions, and concluded that the burden was on the Palestinians “to show that they can govern themselves.”⁵⁵ Again, not a word about the alternative interpretations of Sharon’s motivations and policies that were common in Israeli political discourse, or about the extent to which Israeli policies—many of them continued even after the withdrawal—had made it extremely difficult for the Palestinians to govern themselves.

By contrast, numerous *Haaretz* editorials, op-eds, and news stories challenged the view that the Gaza withdrawal signaled the start of a larger reversal of Sharon’s policies on the settlements and occupation in the West Bank. Although the settlements and the military outposts that guarded them are gone, *Haaretz* writers repeatedly noted that even after the Hamas 2006 electoral victory, Israel continued to exercise effective economic and military control over Gaza (although much less so since the June 2007 Hamas military takeover); Israeli control of Gaza was often said to amount to a “siege.” Since the start of the intifada, Israel has repeatedly attacked Gazan militants in raids and shellings that have killed hundreds of innocent Palestinians; it controls all the borders and roads between Gaza and the outside world; it has cut off Gaza from the West Bank; it has refused to allow the Gazans to build an airport or a seaport; it has full control over both the electrical network and water sources of the area; it has seized Palestinian tax revenues; and it has regularly cut off trade between Gaza and Israel as well as the rest of the world—actions that have effectively strangled the Gazan economy and increased the misery of Gaza’s inhabitants beyond even the dire straits they were in before the Israeli withdrawal.⁵⁶

54. “Only the Beginning,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2005.

55. “Ariel Sharon’s Statesmanship,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2005.

56. Even Ari Shavit, a *Haaretz* reporter and commentator who usually defends Israeli policies (and who is often quoted in the *New York Times*), has denounced these actions: “Almost a year and we are back inside. Not in the form of settlements but with 155 mm shells. Not in the form of communities, but in ground incursions. In the destruction of infrastructures. Cutting off power, cutting off water, setting buildings ablaze.” Shavit, “A Matter of Opinion,” *Haaretz*, July 7, 2006.

As for the overall Israeli occupation, not only *Haaretz* commentators but also former high Israeli political leaders as well as international human rights officials have argued that Sharon's real plan was to cut Israel's losses in Gaza—which was of little strategic, historic, religious, or economic importance to Israel—so that Israel could gain international legitimacy and solidify the occupation over large parts of the West Bank, including much of its most fertile and water-rich lands. For example, in October 2005 Amira Hass wrote, "The Israeli plan [is] to dismember the Palestinian territory that international resolutions have intended for a Palestinian state, i.e., the West Bank and the Gaza strip, on the borders of June 4, 1967 . . . [and] to effectively cut off Gaza from the West Bank and allow the Palestinians in the West Bank to live in between the expanding Jewish settlement blocs, in a few enclaves, between which the transportation connection is subject to Israel's mercies."⁵⁷ Similarly, Tom Segev wrote about Sharon's plan, "The idea was to annex to Israel as much territory as possible along the Green Line and the Jordan Rift Valley and to concentrate the Palestinian population in enclaves that were either completely isolated from one another or connected only by narrow strips of land. Gaza was the first enclave that he created. The main change in his position wasn't in any recognition that the Land of Israel must be divided, but in his readiness to call the Palestinian enclaves a 'state.' This was the price he had to pay in return for broad, almost unreserved support from President Bush."⁵⁸

Among the former high Israeli officials who have spoken out in strong language are Avraham Burg, a former high Labor Party official and speaker of the Knesset, who dismissed Sharon's disengagement from Gaza as "a vast fraud: [a] sacrifice of the unimportant and insignificant settlements in Gaza . . . in return for perpetuating the wrongs and perversions of the Israeli soul [in the West Bank]";⁵⁹ and Shlomo Ben-Ami, foreign minister in the Barak government, who wrote, "Sharon's hidden agenda . . . remains unchanged. The sterilization of the Palestinian national movement . . . and the confinement of a Palestinian homeland within scattered enclaves surrounded by Israeli settlements, strategic military areas, and a network of bypass roads for the exclusive use of the Israeli occupier."⁶⁰

Finally, in late September 2006 *Haaretz* covered a report by the head of the UN human rights mission in Gaza, John Dugard (a prominent South African professor, jurist, and long-term opponent of apartheid), stating that Israel had

57. Amira Hass, "It's No Wonder Envoy Is Frustrated," *Haaretz*, October 26, 2005.

58. Tom Segev, "Maximum Territory, Minimum Arabs," *Haaretz*, January 13, 2006.

59. Avraham Burg, "End of an Era," *Haaretz*, August 4, 2005.

60. Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, p. 297.

turned Gaza “into a prison for Palestinians . . . [where] life is intolerable, appalling, tragic.” In addition, Dugard charged that even in the West Bank, the separation barrier and other severe Israeli restrictions on free movement were creating such misery and impoverishment as to force Palestinians to give up and move elsewhere: “In other countries this process might be described as ethnic cleansing, but political correctness forbids such language where Israel is concerned.”⁶¹ The *New York Times* did not cover this story.

Violence, Revolution, and Terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Discussion of the problem of political violence, both in general and in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, must distinguish between armed revolution and terrorism. In its coverage of the Palestinian intifada and the Israeli response, the *New York Times*—but not *Haaretz*—has repeatedly failed to provide crucial historical context or make critical moral distinctions; in particular, the *Times* has failed to point to, or at least has de-emphasized, the obvious distinction between Palestinian and Israeli violence, namely that the Palestinians have used force in an effort to end a repressive occupation, whereas the Israelis have employed much greater force so as to maintain it. Absent these distinctions, there can be no intellectually or morally serious analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Terrorism—deliberate attacks for political purposes on civilians—is morally prohibited, even in a just cause. That is not necessarily the case in armed revolutions, however, for it is an established tradition in the West (and certainly, for obvious reasons, in the United States) that an oppressed people may have a right of revolution, although subject to crucial constraints. First, it must be clear that political methods and other nonviolent strategies have failed or have little prospect of success. Second, armed force must be directed only against the oppressive state and its military forces, not against innocent civilians. Third, there must be a reasonable prospect that revolution, as a last resort, will not only succeed but will do so at a cost in human lives that is not incommensurate with the attainment of a just cause.⁶² Applying these criteria to Palestinian violence against Israel raises a number of difficult empirical as well

61. Quoted in Shlomo Shamir, “UN Human Rights Envoy Says Gaza a Prison for Palestinians,” *Haaretz*, September 27, 2006.

62. These are the widely accepted criteria in just war philosophy, as they have been developed over the centuries. The most authoritative contemporary discussions of them are found in Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument without Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); and Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

as moral issues. Yet, unlike the *New York Times*, *Haaretz* has sought to do so in both its coverage and its commentary.

PALESTINIAN TERRORISM

Although in earlier phases of their struggle, the Palestinians had turned to terrorism, the intifada was not initially marked by terrorist attacks. Indeed, there was little Palestinian armed violence even against Israeli soldiers and police—despite the killing in the first few days of between 65 and 100 Palestinians by Israeli police and military units, some of them firing directly into the Temple Mount mosque area—after which the intifada became an armed uprising.⁶³ As Shlomo Ben-Ami, the Israeli foreign minister at the time, summed it up: “Israel’s disproportionate response to what had started as a popular uprising with young, unarmed men confronting Israeli soldiers armed with lethal weapons fueled the Intifada beyond control and turned it into an all-out war.”⁶⁴

After the election of Ariel Sharon in January 2001, the Palestinians began large-scale attacks on civilians inside Israel. As morally unacceptable as this turn (or return) to terrorism was, an examination of this issue must consider whether or to what extent it was precipitated by Sharon’s increasingly repressive policies. Despite their criticisms of Sharon, the *New York Times* editorialists and many of its columnists have rarely been willing to draw an explicit connection between Israeli actions and Palestinian responses.⁶⁵ That is not the position, however, of many Israeli observers—including journalists, intellectuals, and even some retired military officers, intelligence officials, and political leaders—among whom there is a far more reflective and self-critical discussion of the terrorism issue than there is in the United States. The citations in the paragraphs that follow underscore the importance of this issue.

The *Times* mentions only rarely claims by Hamas and Islamic Jihad officials that many of their suicide attacks were carried out in retaliation for Israeli

63. Sher, *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999–2001*, p. 157.

64. Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, p. 267. The Israeli reaction was first revealed by Amira Hass, “Lies Accompanied by Bullets,” *Haaretz*, October 11, 2000. It was later confirmed when Amos Malka, former chief of army intelligence, revealed that the Israeli army and security services fired 1.3 million bullets in the first few days of the intifada in an effort to “finally ‘beat’ the Palestinians, to ‘vanquish’ them and lead them to negotiations in a weakened and exhausted state.” Reuven Pedatzur, “More Than a Million Bullets,” *Haaretz*, June 29, 2004.

65. In one of the rare *New York Times* news stories that at least allowed the Palestinians to state their case, Erlanger reported that the brother of a suicide bomber had told him that terrorism must be understood as a reaction to “the Israeli occupation, the checkpoints, the inability to travel, the nightly raids, the joblessness.” Erlanger then made his own comment, however, stating: “But he was speechifying.” Erlanger, “Into the West Bank Abyss; From Student to Suicide Bomber,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2006.

assassinations of their militants or other Israeli military strikes that killed Palestinian civilians, even though it is an observable fact—frequently mentioned by *Haaretz*⁶⁶—that Palestinian attacks indeed have often occurred within days of such Israeli actions. More generally, in dozens of columns over the years, Gideon Levy and Amira Hass have frequently made the connection between the repression of the Israeli occupation and the development of Palestinian terrorism, as when Levy wrote that “the main motivation for the war against us is the aspiration to shake off the cruel yoke of the occupation,” or that “Arafat chose the path of terror, when no other military option was open to him, and when the chances of reaching a just settlement with Israel, without bloodshed, were nil.”⁶⁷

As Levy and Hass are considered “leftists,” however, in this context it must be noted that such blunt criticisms are by no means limited to *Haaretz* writers. Similar arguments have repeatedly been made by other prominent Israeli writers, peace activists, politicians, and even retired Shin Bet officers. In November 2003, for example, Amram Mitzna, the Labor Party’s candidate for prime minister in the elections earlier that year, wrote: “Far from defeating terrorism, the prevailing policy—closures, checkpoints, liquidations—is creating terrorism.”⁶⁸ In September 2005 the chairman of the Israeli Committee against House Demolition explained Palestinian terrorism in this way: “The question is what alternatives do the Palestinians have at their disposal to struggle for their rights and against the ceaseless damage caused by the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and the settlers.”⁶⁹ Similarly, Michael Sfard, a prominent Israeli human rights lawyer, commented: “There is an occupation here, and everything starts from that and emanates from that,” including, “obviously,” Palestinian terrorism.⁷⁰

In a remarkable statement Avraham Burg, a former government leader and an Orthodox Jew who has served as chairman both of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, wrote in *Yediot Aharonot*: “The Israeli nation today rests . . . on foundations of oppression and injustice. . . . Israel, having ceased to care about the children of the Palestinians, should not be surprised

66. See, for example, Gideon Samet, “Sharon’s Foreplay of Winks,” *Haaretz*, July 13, 2005.

67. The first quote appears in Gideon Levy, “The Base of Terror Is Here,” *Haaretz*, September 5, 2004; and the second in Gideon Levy, “His Death Will Not Bequeath Life,” *Haaretz*, October 31, 2004. Similarly, Hass rebuts what she describes as the standard Israeli attitude: “They all act against us, not because we give them a reason, but because their murderous behavior is ingrained.” Hass, “What Does the Turk Have against Us?” *Haaretz*, September 29, 2004.

68. Amram Mitzna, “A Historic Act by the Chief of Staff,” *Haaretz*, November 2, 2003.

69. Amos Gvirtz, “Nonviolence Needs to Be Supported,” *Haaretz*, September 20, 2005.

70. Quoted in Vered Levy-Barzilai, “A Defender of the Faith,” *Haaretz*, November 3, 2005.

when they come washed in hatred and blow themselves up in the centers of Israeli escapism. They consign themselves to Allah in our places of recreation, because their own lives are torture."⁷¹

In a January 2007 interview, Nissim Levy, who served in the Shin Bet for twenty years, including in Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza, noted that "Ehud Barak once said that if he were a Palestinian he would join a terror organization"; Levy commented that while he would not personally attack civilians, he would certainly "fight against the foreign occupier. . . . When you take a person and put him up against the wall and don't leave him many options, then what do you want him to do? . . . Do you think that if we were in their situation we wouldn't have suicide bombers?"⁷²

In short, whatever position one might hold on the causes of Palestinian terrorism, the connection between the Israeli occupation and the development of Palestinian terrorism is openly discussed in Israel, even by Israeli establishment figures. In the United States, however, including in the *New York Times*, a general silence on these matters prevails.⁷³

ISRAELI TERRORISM?

In discussing the problem of Palestinian terrorism, one would think it would be hard to avoid considering Israel's own history. Yet unlike in Israel, the issue almost never is raised in the pages of the *New York Times*. Israeli commentators have often noted that in the Zionists' struggle for independence, they—or, at least, more extremist groups, such as the Irgun—attacked and killed hundreds of Arab civilians, mainly by planting bombs in buses, theaters, restaurants, and other public places.⁷⁴ Even after independence, the Israeli military continued to target Arab civilians, in an effort to "send a message" or create massive refugee evacuations. The most obvious examples, often cited in Israel, were

71. Avraham Burg, "A Failed Society Collapses While Its Leaders Remain Silent," *Yediot Aharonot*, August 29, 2003.

72. Levy was interviewed by Uri Blau in "If I Were a Palestinian," *Haaretz*, January 5, 2007.

73. To be sure, *Times* editorialists have occasionally made worried references to indiscriminate Israeli attacks—including the particularly extensive ones in Lebanon in July 2006—but then often qualify their concern. For example, in a July 13, 2006, editorial ("Israel's Two-Front Battle"), the *Times* recommended that Israel attack only "individuals [and] organizations" that were "directly complicit" in Hezbollah and Hamas terrorist attacks, not the civilian population—but then hastened to add: "That is, of course, far easier said than done. Military actions in inhabited areas cannot be finally tuned." To conclude in such a Pollyannaish manner, the editorialists had to ignore the overwhelming evidence that in Lebanon, Israel was deliberately following a strategy of making life miserable for the civilian population, so as to induce them to pressure their government to act against Hezbollah.

74. See Tom Segev, "The Tzipi Livni Test," *Haaretz*, April 23, 2006.

Ariel Sharon's attacks on Jordanian villages in the 1950s, the use of massive air power against Egyptian cities during the 1970–73 War of Attrition, and Israeli attacks against Lebanon in the 1970s and, especially, in 1982.⁷⁵

Although Israel no longer appears to target Palestinian civilians as a matter of policy, it has sought to destroy Palestinian civil government and other public institutions as well as engage in indiscriminate military attacks. *Haaretz* columnists have suggested that these actions may constitute Israeli state terrorism. For example, in March 2002 dozens of Palestinian civilians were killed when Israeli forces invaded the West Bank and Gaza, supposedly to root out "terrorists" in refugee camps but obviously having the much broader purpose of destroying the governing capacity of Arafat and the Palestinian Authority: Arafat's governing compound as well as Palestinian police forces and other security institutions were attacked, as were government ministries, municipal offices, schools, and even hospitals and ambulances.⁷⁶ Among a number of outraged commentators in *Haaretz*, Danny Rubinstein wrote, "The war now being waged by Israel in the Palestinian territories is no longer against bands of terrorists [but] has evolved into a war against the entire population."⁷⁷

Although the scope and ferocity of the 2002 attack has not been repeated, in its efforts to kill Palestinian militants Israel has often used massive firepower, including air-launched bombs and missiles, in the midst of crowded cities and refugee camps, inevitably killing and wounding hundreds of innocent civilians. On July 23, 2002, for example, an Israeli plane bombed a Palestinian apartment house in an effort to kill a Hamas leader who lived there; fifteen civilians, most of them children, were killed. Again, there were many furious

75. Astonishingly, in a 1978 response to Israeli criticism of recent attacks in Lebanon, Gen. Mordechai Gur, then chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces and later a leading Labor Party politician, openly acknowledged what can only be described as Israeli state terrorism: "I've been in the army thirty years. Do you think I don't know what we've been doing all those years? What did we do the entire length of the Suez Canal? A million and a half refugees. . . . Since when has the population of South Lebanon been so sacred? They know very well what the terrorists were doing. . . . I had four villages in South Lebanon bombed . . . [as, he says, was done in Jordan]." The Israeli interviewer then comments, "You maintain that the civilian population should be punished?" Gur responds, "And how . . . I have never doubted it. . . . For thirty years . . . we have been fighting against a population that lives in villages and towns." Interview with Gur in *Al Hamishar*, May 10, 1978. Several days after the Gur statements, Zeev Schiff, for many years the leading *Haaretz* military correspondent, commented, "In South Lebanon we struck the civilian population consciously, because they deserved it. . . . The importance of Gur's remarks is the admission that the Israeli Army has always struck civilian populations, purposely and consciously . . . even when Israeli settlements had not been struck." Schiff, *Haaretz*, May 15, 1978.

76. The Israeli Physicians for Human Rights organization charged that it had documented proof that the army had attacked at least 165 Palestinian ambulances and wounded at least 135 medical personnel. Amos Harel, "Human Rights Group Demands IDF Halt Attacks on Palestinian Ambulances," *Haaretz*, March 12, 2002.

77. Danny Rubinstein, "A War against an Entire Population," *Haaretz*, October 21, 2002.

Haaretz commentaries, including that of Ari Shavit, a centrist who has often defended harsh Israeli actions: the Israeli action was nothing less than “a terrorist attack,” he wrote, and “Sharon [has] plunged us deep down the slippery slope of bestiality. He sullied the justice of our war and blurred beyond recognition the moral image of the country.”⁷⁸

Such comments were by no means limited to *Haaretz* writers. In 2003, for example, hundreds of Israeli reservists, including air force pilots and members of elite army units, declared their refusal to participate in the “illegal and immoral attacks on civilian population centers.”⁷⁹ In the same year, David Forman, the head of Israel’s Rabbis for Human Rights, wrote that Sharon should be tried by Israel for war crimes: “Apparently, what guided Sharon during his military career and reached its shameful climax at Sabra and Chatilla [in 1982], now dictates the way the IDF conducts its war against terror. . . . We are every day [sic] witness to the indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians.”⁸⁰

During the 2006 Lebanon war, a number of prominent Israelis condemned the Israeli attacks on Lebanese civilians and their crucial infrastructures. For example, Galia Golan, a prominent Israeli political scientist and former head of Peace Now, wrote in *Yediot Aharonot* that in both Lebanon and the occupied territories, Israel was engaged in the “collective punishment against civilian populations. In both cases the purpose appears to be (and has been stated by many ex-military commentators) . . . to inflict sufficient punishment upon the local population to the point of bringing them to pressure their governments to do what we want them to do.”⁸¹ Similarly, another prominent Israeli political scientist, Zeev Maoz, wrote that in Lebanon, Israel was practicing “extortion,” because it “is using excessive force without distinguishing between the civilian population and the enemy.”⁸²

In the eighteen months after Hamas declared a moratorium on terrorism, Israeli civilian casualties dramatically dropped—but not Palestinian civilian casualties. In June 2006 two *Haaretz* military correspondents wrote that in the previous two months, indiscriminate Israeli artillery and other attacks had killed dozens of Gazan civilians “at a time when not a single Israeli has been killed as a result of terror coming from the Strip.”⁸³ In its 2006 annual

78. Ari Shavit, “A Black Flag,” *Haaretz*, July 25, 2002.

79. Lily Galili and Amos Harel, “Air Force to Oust Refusnik Pilots,” *Haaretz*, September 24, 2003.

80. David Forman, “Put Sharon on Trial Here,” *Haaretz*, February 13, 2003.

81. Galia Golan, “Israel Has the Right to Defend Itself against Foreign Attack. But Is Our Current Course the Wise One?” *Yediot Aharonot*, July 24, 2006.

82. Zeev Maoz, “Morality Is Not on Our Side,” *Haaretz*, July 25, 2006.

83. Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, “Choice between Terror Prevention and Civilian Deaths,” *Haaretz*, June 14, 2006.

report, covered fully in *Haaretz* (which printed the entire text), Amnesty International charged that many Palestinians civilians “were killed unlawfully, in deliberate and reckless shootings, shelling, and air strikes in densely populated residential areas, or as a result of excessive use of force.”⁸⁴ There was no news story or comment on the Amnesty report in the *New York Times*.

Ehud Olmert, Hamas, and the Prospects for Peace

In early 2006 Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections, and Ehud Olmert and his Kadima Party won the Israeli elections, defeating the more dovish Labor Party candidate. In June 2007 Hamas effectively conquered the Gaza Strip. These three events have made the prospect of a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian settlement even more remote.

From the time of his election campaign until the Lebanon war in the summer of 2006, Olmert had publicly stated that he would unilaterally withdraw the smaller Israeli settlements deep in the West Bank, but retain and expand both the populations and the land of the much larger settlements closer to the 1967 borders but still well inside Palestinian territory. The security of these “settlement blocs” would be provided for not only by walls and other barriers, but also by the retention of Israeli military forces in other parts of the West Bank, especially but not only in the Jordan River Valley. As was widely noted in *Haaretz* and other Israeli commentary, the effect of these measures would be to divide the West Bank into three enclaves, largely separated from each other: the northern West Bank, the southern region, and the Jordan Valley.⁸⁵ As for Jerusalem, Olmert bluntly stated: “I . . . will never, ever, ever agree to a compromise on the complete control over the Temple Mount, the Old City . . . and every place that is an inseparable part of Jewish history.”⁸⁶

After the Lebanon war, Israeli public and governmental attitudes hardened still further, and Olmert’s plans for even minor unilateral withdrawals from the West Bank were indefinitely shelved. As for a negotiated settlement,

84. *Haaretz* Service, “Amnesty: Mideast Violence Dropped in 2005, but 240 Killed,” *Haaretz*, May 23, 2006; and Amnesty International, “Israel and the Occupied Territories,” *Report 2006* (New York: Amnesty International, 2006), <http://www.amnesty.org/report2006/isr-summary-eng>.

85. For two interviews in which Olmert sets out his thinking, see Aluf Benn and Yossi Verter, “A Country That’s Fun to Live In,” *Haaretz*, March 10, 2006; and Aluf Benn, “Olmert Briefed U.S. on Plan for Future Withdrawal,” *Haaretz*, March 12, 2006. The division of the West Bank into three enclaves that would be the consequence of Olmert’s plans is analyzed by Akiva Eldar, “Olmert’s Shelter,” *Haaretz*, February 6, 2007; and by the political scientist Zeev Maoz, “Morality Is Not on Our Side.”

86. Quote from a June 14, 2006, press conference in France, quoted in Foundation for Middle East Peace, *Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories* (Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Middle East Peace, Summer 2006), p. 6.

Olmert told the Knesset that he would be willing to meet with Palestinian Authority President Abbas to discuss “a political horizon,” but that there would be “no deliberations” over Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees, or a withdrawal to the 1967 borders.⁸⁷

With all the major issues ruled to be nonnegotiable, there was no chance that even the most moderate Palestinian leaders would accept such an outcome of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, the Olmert government is continuing to expand the settlements and extend the separation barrier to include Palestinian territory and create isolated Palestinian enclaves.⁸⁸

There has been little serious analysis in the *New York Times* of how Olmert’s stated intentions and plans would affect the possibility of a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—even before the Hamas victory in Gaza. To be sure, *Times* editorials on several occasions stated a preference for a negotiated settlement rather than a unilateral Israeli fait accompli, but argued that such a settlement could not occur “until Hamas repudiates terrorism and recognizes Israel’s right to exist”⁸⁹; not mentioned was the obvious fact that Olmert’s policies had also undermined the chances for a negotiated settlement with President Abbas, the most moderate Palestinian leader ever to have emerged.

By contrast, Israeli analysts in *Haaretz*—and elsewhere in the Israeli media⁹⁰—have been forthright in their critique and analysis of Olmert’s plans. *Haaretz* editorial writers and regular correspondents Akiva Eldar, Uzi Benziman, Gideon Samet, and Amira Hass have composed biting commentaries arguing that Olmert’s plans would provide not for a genuine Palestinian state but simply for a series of enclaves that are not politically, economically, or psychologically viable, and would amount to a direct and indirect continuation of the Israeli occupation.⁹¹

The writers cited above are known to be strong critics of Israeli policy. Perhaps even more striking, then, was a piece published by the conservative *Haaretz* reporter and columnist Nehemia Shtrasler, in which he wrote:

87. “What Is a Political Horizon?” *Haaretz*, February 14, 2007.

88. Cf. Meron Rapoport, “PA: Decision to Move West Bank Fence Undermines Peace Efforts,” *Haaretz*, January 31, 2007.

89. See, for example, “West Bank Withdrawal,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2006.

90. See, for example, Menachem Klein, “Olmert Will Converge; The Occupation Will Continue,” *Yediot Ahronot*, March 26, 2006. Klein is a prominent Israeli political scientist and has been an adviser to Israeli delegations in various Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, including Camp David.

91. See, for example, Akiva Eldar, “We Are Fed Up,” *Haaretz*, March 21, 2006; Uzi Benziman, “What Olmert Is Not Saying,” *Haaretz*, April 12, 2006; Gideon Samet, “A Government on a Collision Course,” *Haaretz*, April 12, 2006; and Amira Hass, “Israeli Restrictions Create Isolated Enclaves in West Bank,” *Haaretz*, March 24, 2006.

Olmert proposes an impossible solution: three beefed up settlement blocs that carve up the West Bank and make the Palestinian entity non-viable. Does anyone really believe it is possible to find a single Palestinian who would agree to such a solution? Will there be a single country in the world that will agree to such annexations? The massive annexation will lead in only one clear direction: a continuation of war. But worst of all is the success at blinding the eyes of the public . . . to the fact that Israel has become a brutal occupier's state, which executes people without trial, steals land under cover of the courts, demolishes homes, harms the livelihood of innocent people, causes poverty, unemployment, and want in an entire population, making a mockery of all that the prophets of Israel taught.⁹²

As noted, the election of Hamas and its subsequent takeover of Gaza have further undermined the prospect for a two-state settlement. It is clear that major changes in Hamas's actions and stated goals are a necessary condition for a negotiated settlement; at the same time, however, they are just as clearly not a sufficient condition, in light of the Israeli government's own positions.

There is a case to be made, as some Israeli commentators have done, that Hamas, however ambiguously or inconsistently, is slowly moving away from its refusal to accept the existence of Israel—at least operationally, if not rhetorically. In the most optimistic interpretation (and not withstanding its June 2007 takeover of Gaza), Hamas appears to be slowly moving away from its intransigent ideology and toward acceptance of reality, similar to what Arafat and the PLO did during the 1970s.

Since 2005, a number of *Haaretz* news stories and commentaries have charted Hamas's evolution. In February of that year, Hamas announced that it would observe a unilateral cease-fire with Israel for an indefinite period; for the next two years or so, as many Israeli commentators noted, Hamas did generally end its terrorist attacks within Israel, with brief exceptions in the aftermath of several particularly destructive Israeli raids in Gaza.⁹³ The result was a dramatic decline in Israeli civilian deaths during this period.

In January 2006 the Gazan leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, became the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, following Hamas's victory in Gazan parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, Hamas decided to continue recognizing Mahmoud Abbas as president of the Palestinian Authority and

92. Nehemia Shtrasler, "The Ashes on the Prophet's Eyes," *Haaretz*, March 21, 2006.

93. It is true that Islamic Jihad continued its largely ineffective rocket attacks on the Israeli border town of Sderot during this period, attacks that Hamas said it deplored but was unable to prevent. It should be noted that even the government of Mahmoud Abbas, whose opposition to terrorism is undeniable, was also unable to prevent the attacks. In March 2007, however, Hamas announced that it would "offer a promise . . . of a total cease-fire with Israel, including a complete halt to Quassam [rocket] fire and suicide bombings," if Israel agreed to persuade the international community to end its boycott of the Palestinian government. Avi Issacharoff and Aluf Benn, "Hamas Vows Full Truce If Israel Helps End Boycott," *Haaretz*, March 7, 2007.

agreed to enter into a de facto coalition government with Fatah. In the next eighteen months, it allowed Abbas to negotiate with Israel (however unsuccessfully); it is unclear whether this will change following Hamas's June 2007 takeover of Gaza.

There have been other potentially interesting indications of Hamas's operational, if not rhetorical, moderation. For example, in July 2006 Haniyeh wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, stating that "Palestinian priorities" were "reclaiming all lands occupied in 1967 . . . [and] statehood for the West Bank and Gaza [with its] . . . capital in Arab East Jerusalem." In December 2006, he reiterated his call for a long-term truce with Israel and for the formation of a temporary Palestinian state along Israel's 1967 borders.⁹⁴

To be sure, there are ambiguities in Haniyeh's statements. Moreover, he is not Hamas's only leader; many observers consider Khaled Meshal, who is based in Syria, to be equally powerful and considerably more militant. Some evidence suggests, however, that even Meshal's position has been evolving toward a grudging acceptance of Israel within its pre-1967 borders. Since mid-2006, Hamas officials have told *Haaretz*, Meshal has supported an overall deal that would include a mutual exchange of prisoners and the continuation of a long-term cease-fire, including a halt to Islamic Jihad rocket attacks, provided Israel ends its policy of assassination in the occupied territories.⁹⁵ In January 2007 Meshal went even further, stating that Hamas would consider recognizing Israel as "a fact" (if not formally) once a Palestinian state was established in the occupied territories.⁹⁶

Although the Olmert government essentially dismissed the changes in the Hamas position as inconsequential, many Israeli commentators argued that they were highly significant. For example, Danny Rubinstein, the lead *Haaretz* specialist on Palestinian politics, wrote that there were no longer any great differences between Hamas and the Abbas-led PLO (meaning in their posture toward Israel, of course, not toward each other).⁹⁷ Of particular significance, one of Israel's most prominent centrist figures, Yossi Alpher, while noting that Hamas's charter still calls for the destruction of Israel, wrote that Hamas's apparent suggestions that "refugee right of return and Jerusalem can wait for some other process . . . [and that] Hamas will suffice with the 1967 borders, more or less, and in return will guarantee peace and quiet for ten, twenty-five,

94. Ismail Haniyeh, "Aggression under False Pretenses," *Washington Post*, July 11, 2006; and "Haniyeh Calls for Formation of Palestinian State on 1967 Lines," *Haaretz*, December 20, 2006.

95. Amos Harel, Avi Issacharoff, Gideon Alon, Aluf Benn, and Mijal Grinberg, "Meshal Insists on Prisoner Swap for Return of Abducted Soldier," *Haaretz*, July 10, 2006.

96. Zvi Barel, "Meshal Declaration a Basic Shift in Hamas Position," *Haaretz*, January 11, 2007.

97. Danny Rubinstein, "Recognize the PA Government," *Haaretz*, September 18, 2006; and Danny Rubinstein, "Unity as a Lifesaver," *Haaretz*, October 3, 2006.

or thirty years of good neighborly relations and confidence-building . . . [are] almost too good to be true."⁹⁸

In short, there has been widespread discussion in Israel of the possibility of meaningful changes in Hamas's position on Israel. In contrast, the *New York Times*, while publishing an occasional nonstaff op-ed column recognizing Hamas's changes, has nonetheless ignored these changes and in its editorials continues to insist that "Hamas refuses to take the most minimal steps . . . a clear rejection of terrorism, acceptance of prior agreements, and acknowledgment of Israel's legitimacy," and that the "Hamas-led Palestinian government . . . rejects the very notion of a negotiated peace."⁹⁹

The apparent changes in Hamas's position on a political settlement may well be ambiguous, and its seemingly conciliatory statements are often followed by hard-line ones. Moreover, it has made no move toward jettisoning its rejectionist and anti-Semitic charter. Thus, whether Hamas is moving (however inconsistently and reluctantly) toward an acceptance of the reality of Israel and a compromise on a two-state solution can be determined only through direct negotiations with it (so far dismissed out of hand by both Israel and the United States)—and, more important, by Hamas's behavior after such negotiations.

Conclusion

The range of discourse in Israel over Israeli policies toward the Palestinians is far greater than it is in the United States concerning all the most crucial issues: the extent of Israeli responsibility for the failure of the Camp David negotiations in 2000 and the general breakdown of the peace process since then; the nature of the Palestinian intifada and the Israeli response to it; the justifiability of the continuing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the repression that has accompanied it; the consequences of the Israeli separation barrier and other measures designed to ensure de facto or de jure Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank and effective control over most of the rest of it; the significance and purpose behind the 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza; the extent and justification for the violence and terrorism employed by both Palestinians and Israelis in the ongoing conflict; the significance of the policies of the Olmert government; and whether the rise of Hamas in Gaza has ended all prospects for compromise.

98. Yossi Alpher, "Hudna: Problematic Option," *bitterlemons.org*, November 20, 2006.

99. The first quote appears in "The Wrong Partner in Israel," *New York Times*, October 25, 2006; and the second in "Israel's Mixed Messages," *New York Times*, December 27, 2006. The same conclusion is reached in "The Hamas Conundrum," *New York Times*, March 26, 2007.

On all of these issues the U.S. media in general, including United States' most prestigious and influential newspaper, the *New York Times*, rarely are as critical of Israeli policies as are the Israeli media, in particular but hardly exclusively Israel's most prestigious and influential newspaper, *Haaretz*. The significance of this difference cannot be exaggerated: without full and critical debate, the prospects for changes in U.S. government policies are next to nil, and this has dire consequences not only for U.S. national interests but also for the best interests of Israel itself.

The nearly unconditional support the United States gives to Israel has alienated the Muslim and Arab world; has contributed to the rise of the Islamic fanaticism that threatens Middle East stability, in general, and, in particular, the regimes of some of the closest U.S. allies in the region; has the potential to endanger U.S. access to oil in the future; and—perhaps above all—is increasing the dangers to the American homeland of Islamic terrorist attacks, particularly with weapons of mass destruction.

Nor are U.S. policies good for Israel. Despite the serious Israeli self-criticism examined in this article, the events since the failure of the Camp David negotiations in 2002 have significantly hardened Israeli attitudes toward the Palestinians and locked the Israelis into policies that preclude a negotiated political settlement—even with Palestinian moderates such as Mahmoud Abbas, let alone with Hamas. As many Israeli critics have pointed out, the Israeli occupation and repression of the Palestinians has had devastating effects on Israeli society, democracy, civic culture, and values. Above all, they pose a grave danger to Israeli security and even survival: in the absence of a genuine compromise settlement, it is hard to see how even more devastating terrorism against Israel, which sooner or later is likely to include nuclear or biological terrorism, can be indefinitely avoided. Among Israeli critics, there is a widespread, publicly expressed belief that only a dramatic change in the U.S. position—accompanied by serious and sustained pressure to induce Israel to do what it should but seemingly cannot do on its own—can rescue the situation.

In his memoirs, Max Frankel, the head of the *New York Times* editorial page in the 1970s and 1980s, admits that his editorials on the Middle East were written “from a pro-Israel perspective.”¹⁰⁰ The *Times* has continued to cover Israel from this same perspective, not only in its editorials but even in its news coverage.

The problem of the *Times*'s coverage and discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is sometimes a subtle one. The news coverage and editorial policies of

100. Max Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times* (New York: Dell, 1999), p. 403. Actually, Frankel was highly critical of the Israeli occupation, which is not at all inconsistent with being genuinely “pro-Israel.”

the *Times* usually appear to be moderate and balanced. Typically, they suggest that both the Israelis and the Palestinians have been more or less equally responsible for the ongoing conflict: the Palestinians because of Yasir Arafat's poor leadership and his alleged decision to refuse reasonable compromises and instead turn to violence and terrorism, the Israelis because of their settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and their own excessive reliance on the violent repression of the Palestinian intifada.¹⁰¹

Since 2005, the *Times's* coverage of the impact of the occupation on the Palestinian population has improved somewhat. Nonetheless, in a variety of ways the *Times* continues to distort the conflict; for example, even when critical of Israel, *Times* editorials and op-eds generally undercut the force of the criticisms by making even stronger criticisms of the Palestinians, in particular by laying most of the responsibility for the past and present failure of the peace process on them. In so doing, the *Times*, in contrast to the far more critical commentary in Israel, both obscures the historical record and ignores or downplays the distinctions between the occupier and the occupied, the repressor and the repressed, the strong and the weak.

It seems probable that because of its prestige and its seemingly evenhanded approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the *Times* has attained considerable credibility and influence over public discourse in the United States on this issue. Yet it has failed in its responsibility to properly inform and educate the American public, as well as members of the U.S. government.

There are few indications that the leaders of either the Republican or Democratic Parties understand the necessity for policy changes. The combination of U.S. public and governmental ignorance, domestic politics, fundamentalist Christian ideology, right-wing Jewish influence, and a commendable but simplistic overall U.S. moral commitment to Israel has produced an astonishing immobilism in U.S. policy, in reckless disregard for the easily observable and plainly disastrous consequences for the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as for critical U.S. national interests. Yet, without a reeducation of U.S. officials and the public at large, it is unlikely that there will be serious changes in U.S. policies—at least not before a catastrophe occurs, and maybe not even then. A crucial place to begin this process of reeducation would be in the pages of the *New York Times*.

101. The foreign policy columns of Thomas Friedman also typically fall into this pattern. While Friedman has always been highly critical of the settlements, he tends to minimize the severely repressive nature of the Israeli occupation in other respects, typically seeing this repression as a response to Palestinian terrorism and holding the Palestinian leadership—particularly, until his death, Yasir Arafat—responsible for that terrorism.