

Land Day Keynote Speech
March 30, 2014
St. Mary's Basilica, Livonia.
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There are certain things I am *not* going to do tonight. I am not going to talk about history or the situation of the Palestinians. All of you know that better than I do. Nor am I going to discuss U. S. foreign policy. What I would like to discuss is how a political scientist sees this situation. I teach a course that spends about half of the semester looking at ethnic conflicts and how they work themselves out. It's not a pretty picture but I want to share with you the patterns we have discovered.

If you asked me to define the core issue in this conflict from a Palestinian perspective, I would say land. But two other issues are sometimes overlooked.

The first is the protection of Islam.

When the Al Aqsa Intifada began in 2000, there was a poll that asked Palestinians what they thought was the key issue in that uprising. Many mentioned the land, but an even greater number mentioned that Islam was under threat. I think we should not forget that. Many people not willing to die for a piece of land might be willing to die to preserve their religion.



The second issue is dignity. Once I went from Ramallah to Jerusalem and passed through one of those check points where people are treated like animals. Americans usually get a pass on those places but there I was with long lines of people, twisting through those wire cages. The woman in front of me was a travel agent. She said it should take 30 minutes to get from her house to her office but most of the time it took two hours. People were being bossed around by unsmiling soldiers who were often 19 years of age. Many people not willing to die for a piece of land might be willing to die for self-respect.

Given the situation, which all of your know well, what would it take to get to yes, to that point where some resolution is possible? I see five issues. Unless all five are met, this situation will escalate and deteriorate.



First, Israel must return to its 1967 boundary, with mutually agreed upon modifications. There can be no annexations or quasi-permanent "leases" of the Jordan Valley.

Second, the settlers must withdraw or be under Palestinian authority. I have stopped talking of a "peace process." It is a *withdrawal* process. If those settlers do not leave, there will be no peace, ever. And extra-territoriality is not acceptable, as if settlers were diplomats not subject to local law.

Third, there must be a Palestinian state. This does not mean an "entity" with self-government. It means a strong, secure state.

Fourth, refugees in camps in Lebanon and elsewhere must be allowed to return or be stabilized in some other way. At the present time, most are in legal and political and economic limbo. This is not acceptable and will produce instability.

[Aside]: You notice that I keep using words such as escalate, deteriorate, and instability. There are justice issues in this conflict but to a political scientist the issue is preventing disaster. The examples of similar conflicts from the modern age are not good.

When Algeria became independent, 80% plus of the one million French in that country left within a month. Some were from families who had been there for over a century. In Uganda, the whole Asian population was told to leave within 30 days. They were allowed to take \$1,000 each. Many left plantations, estates, and cars. The German minorities were expelled and ethnically cleansed from Eastern and Southern Europe after World War II ended. Perhaps two million died after the fighting stopped. And in 1965 there were mass killings of Chinese in Indonesia under the guise of fighting communism. These are alternatives we should avoid if we can.



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The fifth point is the hardest: The walled Holy City of Jerusalem must be shared in some way and the Palestinians must have their capital in East Jerusalem. Not Ramallah. Jerusalem. There is no alternative to this.

Back in 1995, I spoke at the Cranbrook Peace Foundation Annual Dinner. This is what I said:

Jerusalem is the key to peace. Perpetuating exclusive Jewish control over the Holy City and over Islamic holy sites, and maintaining Israeli control of the Palestinian populations of East Jerusalem will and is transforming a political dispute into a religious dispute. The result will be explosive and volatile and has the potential to spiral out of control with consequences that cannot be predicted and with a level of violence that is beyond anything we have seen so far.

Nineteen years later, nothing in that assessment has changed. And that talk was six years before September 11.

A colleague says there are only three outcomes to this conflict, and two involve genocide. There is logic in this but I think we need to become time travelers for a minute. If we could move fifty years into the future and look back, what would we see? Based on the structure of the conflict and how other religio-ethnic conflicts have ended, I see four possible outcomes. Sad to say, all are unlikely.

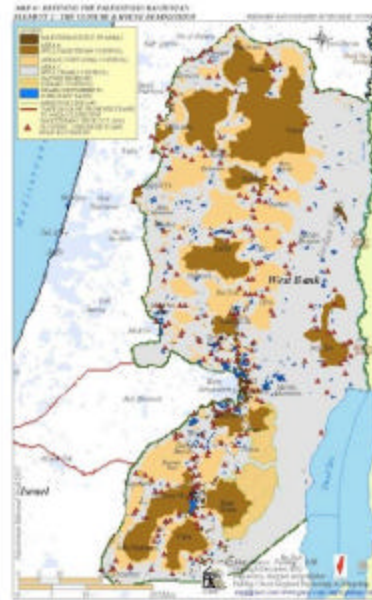
The first is the status quo. No one believes this situation can continue. It would require permanent warfare, permanent Israeli mobilization, permanent regional instability, and permanent U.S. support. Already U.S. strategic thinkers see this conflict

as an impediment to U.S. interests. Moreover, societies are not known for handling protracted stress gracefully, so we can anticipate some extremist action at some point to break the impasse. The status quo is extremely unstable, and very dangerous.

Option Two is the one-state solution, a unified state of Israel and Palestine. A single state would be bi-national. It would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state with a dominant Jewish population. It would also mean the negation of the Zionist dream of “a second segregation of the Jewish people upon a national basis.” Given the greater Palestinian birth rate, sooner or later there would be a Palestinian majority. When someone proposes a solution, we must always ask, “Who is the partner?” Most Jews would rather fight forever than accept this alternative.

The third option is the two-state solution. This would involve a restoration of the 1967 border with mutually agreed adjustments. This is commonly called “land for peace.” It was inherent in UN resolution 242 of 1967. The PLO adopted it in the Algiers Conference of 1988 and it is the basis of the Oslo Agreement of 1994.

The impediment is the settlement structure. Settlers will fight for their land, as we Americans know from our own difficult history. Think back to the number of times the U.S. government signed treaties with native peoples, recognizing their land rights, and the number of times those agreements were disrupted by settlers who intruded on native land and then insisted that the army defend them from attacks. Also consider what happened in Algeria, Zimbabwe, Angola and other places when the government agreed to political changes that would compromise settler rule. There were violent uprisings that killed myriads and left massive devastation.



Closing down settlements would also require that some Israeli prime minister give the order to use force against violent resisters. This is not realistic.

Finally, there is the terrifying option of expelling one population or the other. Israelis euphemistically call this “transfer” or “population exchange.” It would involve sending the West Bank Palestinians into Jordan. This would destabilize that country and the whole region. In 1995 when Israel signed a treaty recognizing Jordan’s border, it promised it would not expel Palestinians into Jordan. But how can one know the future? There are parties in the Knesset that openly advocate such things, sometimes couched as “voluntary” removal. In the past, this was inconceivable because Iraq would have mobilized to protect Jordan, its neighbor. Now that the Iraqi state no longer exists in any meaningful way, the situation is different. Iran has emerged as the strategic champion of the Palestinians, although it is not clear what they could do from such a distance.

Removing the Palestinians would also require the “ingathering” of Jews from overseas to replace them. Now that the Russian Jews have arrived (over a million in the 1990s, now perhaps 20% of all Israeli Jews), the remaining concentrations are in France and the US. Just before his stroke, Ariel Sharon met with American Jews and told them

that the French Jews (about 600,000) should escape while there was still time. There had been some physical attacks on individual Jews, none lethal but all traumatic. Sharon saw this as very significant, perhaps a precursor of a Holocaust. The French Jewish leaders were outraged, especially since they read this in the newspaper. Sharon also told American Jewish leaders that Israel needed a million Jews, fast! Since American Jews have never shown any inclination to leave, this would require a traumatic reversal of their American identity. It would also end the Jewish community in America in any meaningful sense. Since few people over 40 ever leave their country, evacuating a million Jews out of 5.5 million would decimate the fertile population and lead to a demographic collapse of the community. It would be the effective end of American Jewry. Such a mass population shift may not seem credible, but to those who think as Ariel Sharon did, History has its ways, and its inexorable march.

I have always supported two strong, secure states but I no longer believe this is possible. After studying the maps, reading the data on populations, seeing the burgeoning settler population in East Jerusalem, and the way the Israeli wall splits the Palestinians into small non-viable fragments, I think the settlement phalanx has compromised the viability of any potential Palestinian state. It is a formula for disaster.

If this pessimistic assessment is correct, it means Menachem Begin may be the most significant Israeli of all times. Begin believed that it was necessary to create Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank, not just in a security zone in the Jordan Valley or on the high points along the escarpment, as Labor did before 1977. He wanted to put Jewish settlements in the very center of Palestinian populations. He believed that once such settlements were in place, even if some future government decided to dismantle them, it would not be possible. At this point, Begin's vision looks irreversible.

When Israelis speak of a two-state solution, some may be thinking of a version of the Allon Plan of 1968, that Israel would annex Greater Jerusalem and areas on the border of the state and would keep control of the Jordan Valley. They would create a phony mini-state that would ultimately collapse and leave the highly populated zones of the central Palestinian highlands with Jordan. This would technically remove the Palestinian population. (It is often called "transfer in place."). Gaza could be administered by Egypt. Some Palestinian population centers now in Israel would be shifted to Palestine. Um Al Fahm, Tayibe, and the Arab "triangle" are frequently mentioned. All of this would happen on paper, nothing changing with the reality on the ground. There is reason to be skeptical about the current two-state "process."

But if a two-state solution is not viable, and a one-state solution is not viable, and the status quo is not viable, then which unlikely outcomes is the least unlikely?

On the face of it, Israel seems to have a real chance for a settlement. They often say with alarm that they are surrounded by a sea of hostile Arabs, but this is not true. Israel has treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and relations with Morocco and other states. Many governments have under-the-table relations with Israel, and even Saudi Arabia and the Arab League have promised to normalize relations as soon as the conflict ends.

But politically-speaking fear cannot be denied. A 2007 poll on the 60th anniversary of UN Resolution 181 (which led to the creation of Israel) asked Israelis if they thought the state would exist in 60 years. 47 percent had doubts.

How would this come about, the end of the Jewish state as we know it, and the departure of many Jews? Israelis fear a nuclear strike from Iran but this is unlikely because of the massive retaliation that would follow.

More likely is a dirty bomb detonated in the center of Tel Aviv. Professor H. V. Savitch says “a pea-sized morsel of cesium from a medical gauge could be encapsulated within ten pounds of TNT and its detonation would contaminate 300 city blocks” for weeks. The Israeli military consider this a serious scenario. In January, 2012 they conducted a simulation of such an attack in Haifa, trying to figure out how people would react and where they would go. More recently they have conducted “earthquake drills” in a place with no earthquakes.

A less discussed possibility is overrunning a West Bank settlement, or even some place within Israel itself. What if armed guerrillas had occupied Israeli border towns during the 2006 Lebanon War when hundreds of thousands of Israelis abandoned the Galilee? Israel is probably capable of preventing this, but what if it occurred in a few locations and took weeks of house-to-house fighting to regain control? Or what if guerrillas overran an outlying West Bank settlement? The question here is not military. We know the Israelis would “win” such a confrontation in a military sense. But would those people return to their homes when the fighting stopped or would they do what many Palestinians did in 1946 and 1947 and take their families to safer venues overseas? A recent Israeli security report estimated that 100,000 Israelis would leave if Tel Aviv were subjected to a serious attack. This sounds like a conscious under-estimate. Some observers believe a dramatic demographic hemorrhage is not necessary. A slow drain is already happening as Israelis move to the U.S. or elsewhere for education or jobs and never return. Many Israelis hold dual passports, an emergency insurance policy in the event of catastrophe.

Israel is now very strong, and its allies in the U.S. are very strong. It has a choice. It can negotiate itself out of the Palestinian lands or it can bleed itself out of the Palestinian lands. We Americans could never quite admit what had to be done in Vietnam so we bled ourselves out. Israel may well face a similar situation in the West Bank.

The occupation of those lands creates an unstable imbalance, but imbalance cannot persist forever. History has its ways. And it will not consult our logic. And it is full of surprises. And it will not be kind to those who do not listen to its warnings.