

Israel's Neighborhood Has Gotten Rougher

In January the veteran Arab journalist Rami Khouri made this assessment of the Middle East as a region: "Never before has the Arab region been so fractured, violent, volatile and vulnerable to the whims of desperate citizens, powerful autocrats, renegade militants, durable terrorists and predatory foreign militaries."

By comparison, when Israel came into being 70 years ago, its neighborhood was hostile but relatively tranquil. Middle Eastern states were young, having just emerged from the post-World War II period. Not today.

Middle Eastern countries have vast unemployment and massive numbers of people displaced. Many are ripped by sectarian and ethnic rivalries, tribal contests, and religious intolerance.

Arab national fabrics are imploding. And there is no apparent commitment of regional leaders to stem the bloodletting or restore a semblance of order between states.

Sitting on a sliver of land on the eastern Mediterranean as a non-Muslim, non-Arab state gives Israel almost no influence in shaping the region's structural realignments, save for protecting its borders, citizens and

sovereignty.

In terms of strategic vulnerabilities, Israel is more troubled by myriad uncertainties of Arab state survival than by resolution of the Palestinian issue. In unsettling times, by way of guidance about the retention of territories — the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Golan Heights — remarks made



Guest Column

By Ken Stein

by two former Israeli generals, Moshe Dayan in 1977 and Rafel Eitan in 1996, have contemporary relevance. (See their comments below.)

On balance, with context as a teacher, Israel by the numbers is better off strategically in 2018 than it was in 1948. Its \$315 billion annual GDP and its potent and highly sophisticated military provide it levels of deterrence that founding Zionist generations could not have dreamed of in the late 1940s.

It has a population of 8.4 million, not 650,000. About 20 percent of Israel's population is below the poverty line. The country is producing vast

amounts of exportable hydrocarbons that are cementing trade alliances with Mediterranean and southern European states.

With the exception of the Carter and Obama presidencies, 11 of 13 U.S. administrations have treated Israel reasonably well the past 70 years, though each had at least one major bone to pick with Israeli foreign policy.

Many of those issues were not resolved, including acquiring a nuclear weapon, using force to pre-empt an enemy's attack and managing the territories taken in the June 1967 war. Still, Israel has a deep and mutually beneficial strategic relationship with the United States that is enshrined in law and custom.

Less promising for a small country like Israel is the steady reduction of America's footprint in the region in the aftermath of the Cold War and of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Soviet Union was a distinct and feared Israeli Cold War enemy from the 1950s to the 1980s, but so far its successor state, Russia, has sought to avoid a confrontation with Israel over who might control the lands north of Israel. Russia apparently recognizes that Israel has a red line that cannot be penetrated to the point where Israel's northern populations will be held hostage by Iranian or

other proxy groups.

Where Egypt and Jordan have peace treaties with Israel, Turkey, the first Muslim country to recognize Israel, is jousting for control of lands that sit close to Israel's northern reaches.

Iran, once a key strategic ally and source of oil for Israel, has replaced Egypt of 50 years ago as Israel's most potentially troublesome enemy. Iran and her proxies are diabolical opponents of Israel's very existence. Insurgencies and their offshoots, as well as terrorist organizations not present on Israel's border areas seven decades ago, are embedded in territories on all sides of the Jewish state.

Oil revenues, not a lubricant for cultivating intolerance seven decades ago, continue to bankroll autocrats, religious extremists and radical groups.

Israel's map of unfriendly folks in its near and distant neighborhood is more cluttered now. To fend off its foes, Israel requires cutting-edge intelligence gathering and the same sort of innovation and inventiveness that it needed to smuggle people and materials into the state-in-the-making.

Vexing for some in Israel and some of her supporters as she turns 70 is striving to find a path toward an accommodation with the Palestinians.

Israelis have not been able to move forward because of enormous



Photo by Fritz Cohen, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **David Ben-Gurion** and Ambassador **Abba Eban** present a menorah to President **Harry Truman** in 1951.



Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **David Ben-Gurion** talks with President **Dwight Eisenhower** in the White House in 1960.



Photo by David Eldan, Israeli Government Press Office
President **Lyndon Johnson** and Prime Minister **Levi Eshkol** meet in Texas in January 1968.



Photo by Moshe Milner, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Golda Meir** visits President **Richard Nixon** at the White House in March 1973, about seven months before the Yom Kippur War would test the U.S.-Israel friendship.



Photo by Ya'acov Sa'ar, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Yitzhak Rabin** and President **Gerald Ford**, both of whom left office in 1977, meet at the White House in January 1976.



Photo by Ya'acov Sa'ar, Israeli Government Press Office
Egyptian President **Anwar Sadat** and Prime Minister **Menachem Begin** share a joke during Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977.



Photo by Ya'acov Sa'ar, Israeli Government Press Office
It wasn't all tough talk and frayed relations between President **Jimmy Carter** and Prime Minister **Menachem Begin**, as seen in this photo from the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem in March 1979.



Photo by Ya'acov Sa'ar, Israeli Government Press Office
President **Ronald Reagan** and Prime Minister **Shimon Peres** talk in the White House in September 1986.

ideological division within the Palestinian community itself and because of the flat-out unwillingness of a significant segment of Palestinians to accept Israel or its Jewish majority as a reality.

In addition, Palestinians themselves have a disdain for their own leadership; a recent poll shows that only 33 percent of the Palestinians are satisfied with their president's performance, and 68 percent demand his resignation.

History as Context

On Oct. 4, 1977, at the beginning of a four-hour meeting at the United Nations Plaza Hotel, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, the celebrated general, outlined in excruciating and unacceptable detail for President Jimmy Carter and members of his administration Israeli government policies about the content of any negotiations between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Dayan told Carter that Israel would not exchange land for peace as quickly as Carter anticipated.

Menachem Begin's Likud party

had just replaced the Rabin-Peres Labor coalition governments that had ruled Israel for her first 29 years.

Carter was the first U.S. president to call for a "Palestinian homeland." He had blindly hoped that the Labor Party would win the May 1977 elections — in fact, no one in the Carter

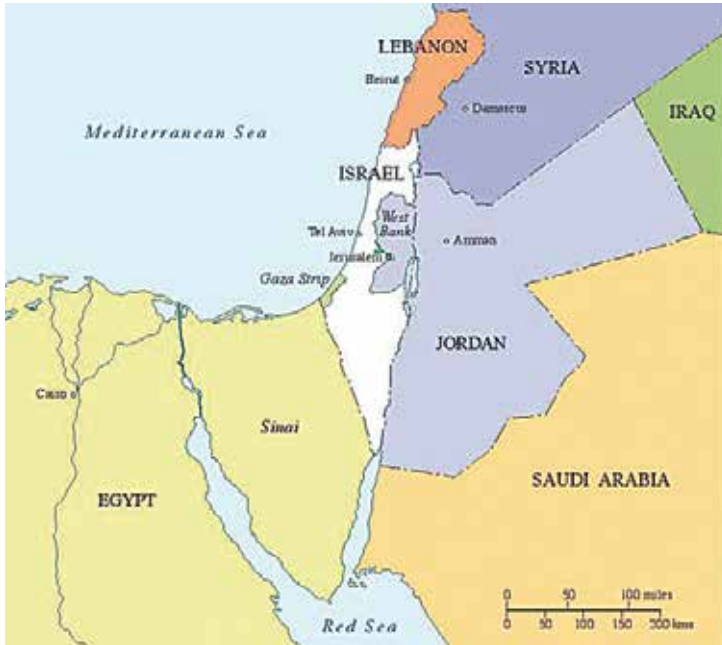
Dayan told Carter, "No independent Palestinian state in the territories and no PLO involvement in the coming negotiations."

Israel was not going to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization as long as it did not recognize Israel's right to exist.

Dayan had participated in secret talks with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's emissary. Both Begin and Sadat were gearing up to test each other's intentions for an agreement, and not necessarily with American involvement.

Dayan's soliloquy continued: "My attitude is that for the first time Egypt is ready and the others may not be. If you take one wheel off a car, it won't drive. If Egypt is out of the conflict, there will be no war. We can't make peace on all fronts now. Israel won't pull back from all of the territories. Nowhere will Israel go all the way. ... We can get a West

Bank agreement, and there will not be annexation, and there will be no sovereign rule of others there, and we will keep our military installations and settlements."



Israel's biggest threat today, unlike 70 years ago, is off the map to the east: Iran. But it is asserting itself in unstable nations much closer to Israel's borders.

administration predicted a Begin victory — and would thereby guarantee speedy negotiations for a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Wrong.



Photo by Tsvika Israeli, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Yitzhak Shamir** and President **George H.W. Bush** meet at the White House in December 1990.



Photo by Ya'acov Sa'ar, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Yitzhak Rabin** calls on Jordan's King **Hussein** at the Royal Palace in Amman in 1995.



Photo by Avi Ohayon, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Ehud Barak** (left) and Syrian Foreign Minister **Farouq al-Sharaa** flank President **Bill Clinton** in January 2000 during peace talks in Shepherdstown, W.Va.



Photo by Moshe Milner, Israeli Government Press Office
Peace talks in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, bring together (from left) Palestinian Authority President **Mahmoud Abbas**, Prime Minister **Ariel Sharon**, Egyptian President **Hosni Mubarak** and Jordanian **King Abdullah** in 2005.



Photo by Amos Ben-Gershon, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert** gets a warm welcome to the White House from President **George W. Bush** in June 2008.



Photo by Amos Ben-Gershon, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** and President **Barack Obama** share a light moment at the White House in March 2012.

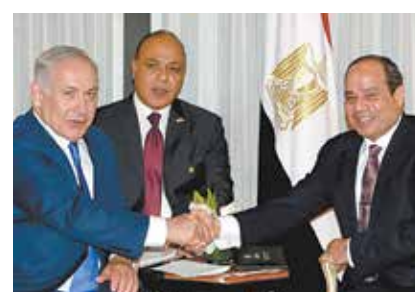


Photo by Avi Ohayon, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** and Egyptian President **Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** meet in New York in September 2017.



Photo by Amos Ben-Gershon, Israeli Government Press Office
Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** and President **Donald Trump** spend time together at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Jan. 25, 2018.