



PERSPECTIVES

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An Israeli Victory Is Necessary if Peace Is to Be Achieved

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: It is usually wiser to work for a solution to a conflict than try to achieve victory. But in some conflicts, the objectives of the two parties are so mutually exclusive that the conflict can only end when one defeats the other. Israel's goal is survival; the Palestinian goal is the elimination of Israel. Peace requires that the Palestinians give up that goal, which they have had for nearly a century. They won't do so until they understand that they have no chance of succeeding.

Two opposing mistakes are often made about "victory". One is the idea that in war, victory is always the goal. The other is the idea that the goal in war must never be victory, but always compromise, because the pursuit of victory makes it harder to achieve peace.

In ordinary civil life – at work, at home, and in politics – we train ourselves to look for win-win ways of dealing with conflict. We teach ourselves to reject thinking in terms of "victory" and "defeat" because doing so gets in the way of finding the shared goals that permit practical solutions.

In war, neither general rule is correct. Some wars can end when one side or the other is victorious. Others can only end when both sides accept compromise. And sometimes the pursuit of victory is the most effective way to make a compromise possible. Whether or not it is necessary to pursue victory depends on the real goals of each side (recognizing that each side of a major conflict is rarely unified).

Middle East peace requires Israeli victory

The judgment that peace between Israel and the Palestinians requires Israeli

“victory” comes from a recognition of the nature of the conflict. It does not imply that the Palestinians’ rights, interests, and desires should be ignored, or that they must be humiliated. Nor does it imply that Israel does not have to make concessions to the Palestinians. Not all the right is on Israel’s side.

Israel’s essential goal is to continue to exist in its homeland, and the Palestinians’ essential goal is the elimination of Israel. Thus, if one side wins, the other side loses. There is no way Israel can continue in peace and at the same time be eliminated. The two essential goals clash, making compromise impossible.

“Victory” is not a matter of declarations and celebrations. It means achieving your essential goal. Nor is “defeat” groveling and humiliation: it is giving up your central goal because you realize it cannot be achieved.

The Palestinians will have been defeated when they become convinced that Israel cannot ever be destroyed. That defeat would be tantamount to an Israeli victory, and it is required for peace to be possible. And for the Palestinians, their “defeat” – that is, Israel’s victory – would lead to great improvements in their lives.

Peace requires that the Palestinians understand they are defeated

If the obstacle preventing peace is the Palestinian commitment to the goal of Israel’s destruction, what strategy can be used to remove that obstacle and advance towards peace? We need a strategy that can lead an effective majority of Palestinians to give up the goal of destroying Israel. The goal of removing Israel is so strongly supported by Palestinian history and basic Muslim doctrine that its desirability cannot be undermined without undermining its feasibility. Although it is possible to build up competing goals, such as freedom and wealth, the Palestinian community has shown little sign so far that it is growing ready to overturn its historic goal.

The only way the Palestinians might consider other goals is if they become convinced that removing Israel is impossible – that is, that they have been defeated.

A Palestinian who wants to argue for the advantages of peace can’t get anywhere so long as his audience believes that continued Palestinian resistance just might eventually defeat Israel. Anyone who wants to argue effectively for an alternative goal has to start with the credible assertion that there is no possibility of destroying Israel, now or in the future.

Today, therefore, the fundamental obstacle to peace is the persistent Palestinian hope or belief that, despite Israel’s military power, it can be defeated – by

Iranian and/or Hezbollah missiles, or by UN and European delegitimization, or by internal conflict and loss of morale in Israel.

The first requirement for the strategic pursuit of peace is thus the demonstration by Israel that it cannot be defeated. Israel must act in ways that convince its enemies that despite internal conflict, it will always be united in its determination to protect the country as a whole. The Iran/Hezbollah threat to Israel must be overcome. And leading foreign governments – especially the US – must demonstrate that they accept Israel and will not participate in attempts to render it illegitimate.

Israeli victory – the defeat of the Palestinian hope of victory – is the only path to peace. Without an Israeli victory, the 100-year-long Palestinian struggle to prevent or end the Jewish state will always make peace impossible.

The US can promote an Israeli victory through a campaign of truth-telling

A major component of US strategy to help Israel gain the victory necessary for peace should be a campaign of “assertive truth-telling.” Such truth-telling by Israel, the US, and eventually the European democracies can be the key to an ultimate Israeli victory because Palestinian policy is based, both internally and externally, on demonstrable falsehoods.

Usually, a country has to commit troops or get the support of other countries, or at least spend a large amount of money, if it is to achieve victory. But the US can help Israel achieve victory without any of these. A major part of Israel’s problem is that most of the diplomatic world accepts key falsehoods about Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab world. By simply and boldly stating the truth, the US can end the reign of the now-dominant falsehoods and advance an Israeli victory. And the US has a unique ability to bring diplomatic attention to the error of these falsehoods.

The US can sharply strengthen Israel’s position in the world by explaining three facts so insistently that their truth can no longer be ignored:

1. There has never been any “Palestinian territory” anywhere. That being the case, there cannot now be “occupied Palestinian territory.” Nor can Israel have stolen “Palestinian land.”
2. There were Jewish kingdoms in much of what is referred to as “Palestine” for hundreds of years before the birth of Islam. The Palestinian belief that the Jewish people are European colonialists invading the area with no historic claim or right is entirely false.
3. There are not millions of Palestinian “refugees.” A just peace in the area does not require that Israel take in so many Palestinians that it

cannot continue to exist as a democratic Jewish state.

Instead, peace requires that the Arab world let the descendants of refugees from the Israeli War of Independence be settled and live normal lives, rather than continue to treat them as stateless refugees in order to preserve their status as a threat to Israel.

While Israel has expressed these truths frequently, its diplomatic policy has been to put more emphasis on trying to appease the consensus by showing a willingness to negotiate, limiting settlement in the West Bank, and limiting criticism of the Palestinians and assertions of Israeli rights – as if those were useful ways to advance negotiations. It is time for Israel to challenge the international diplomatic assumptions more vigorously by assertive truth-telling.

The US can adopt a truth-telling policy in support of an Israeli victory without any change in law and without requiring the agreement of any other country or the commitment of major resources. All assertive truth-telling requires is giving up the diplomatic desire to avoid “unnecessary” arguments and eschewing the reluctance to challenge popular diplomatic opinion. It requires some imagination to recognize the opportunity that exists of using an unusual means of pursuing an international policy goal. The result will be a decisive move toward Israeli victory and resolution of the historic conflict.

Moving the US embassy to Jerusalem was one of the most successful and popular actions of the Trump administration (though it has its critics). The primary official justification for moving the embassy was truth-telling: Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, and the US embassy belongs in the capital. The broad appeal of this simple assertion of the truth demonstrates the potential power of a broader policy of assertive truth-telling about the Middle East. The popularity of former Ambassador Nikki Haley’s standing up for truth at the UN pointed in the same direction. Moving the embassy created a strong precedent for the next campaign of attacking traditional falsehoods with a policy of assertive truth-telling.

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