



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Concessions to Hamas Lead to Violence. Holding Firm Leads to Calm

By Prof. Hillel Frisch

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 2,075, June 18, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israeli concessions in Jerusalem led to the recent outbreak of serious fighting, but insisting on the flag parade led to relative calm. Will the new leadership of Bennet and Lapid take this to heart, or will Israelis pay the costs of a misguided belief in concessions?

After a deluge of dire warnings from Hamas, its mouthpiece, Qatar's AlJazeera (especially in Arabic), most of the Israeli media, and an array of politicians on the Israeli left, the violent eruption expected to be produced by the festive parading by Israelis of flags near the Damascus Gate turned out to be a non-event. The announcement by Hamas's Yahya Sinwar and Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas of yet another "day of rage" failed to ignite either Jerusalem's Arab residents or Israel's Arab citizens elsewhere in the country.

The day after stands in sharp contrast to what happened when Israel made two major concessions one month ago—postponing both a civil court matter over ownership and usage of property in Sheikh Jarrakh and the march of the flags on Jerusalem Day, which honors the unification of Jerusalem under the sovereignty of the State of Israel. To these concessions, Hamas responded by firing rockets toward Jerusalem, and some of Israel's Arab citizens unleashed vicious attacks on their fellow Israeli Jewish citizens over a period of several days (compared to a much smaller number of equally barbaric attacks on Arabs in response). The violence escalated to 11 days of serious fighting in which over 4,000 missiles were launched at Israeli civilian targets.

Israel's relatively short history is full of evidence that concessions to implacable enemies lead to violence and increased costs in terms of human life and property, while holding firm leads to calm.

One often and regrettably overlooked example is Jordan's bombardment of west Jerusalem and air bombardment of Netanya in the first two days of the Six Day War. Jordan's belligerent stand was well-known. A week before the outbreak of war, King Hussein decided to join forces with Egyptian President Nasser, who had by then violated the 1957 armistice agreement by amassing tens of thousands of Egyptian troops on Israel's southern border and closing the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships.

Yet when Israel struck preemptively, it did so only against Egypt, conceding to King Hussein the benefit of the doubt. Hussein responded by attacking Israeli military airports and indiscriminately bombarding Israel's civilian population. Israeli passivity, a form of concession, cost Israeli lives.

The same mistake was made in the first year of the first intifada, when PM Yitzhak Rabin applied his broken bone policy—ordering Israeli troops to injure violent Palestinian rioters if need be to quell the violence and restore Israeli deterrence. The policy was remarkably successful at reducing casualties among both Israelis and Palestinians. But under pressure from Labor Party liberals, the policy was abandoned. Violence erupted anew at an increased cost to both sides.

Costlier by far was the pattern that characterized the Oslo process in the 1990s. Over a seven-year period, whenever Israel made a concession to the Palestinians, terrorism spiked. Whenever Israel held firm, relative calm prevailed.

Thus, the greatest concessions Israel made in 1994-95—the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and its enlargement to include major towns, such as Nablus and Ramallah—brought vast increases in Palestinian violence, either by spoilers like Hamas and Islamic Jihad or abetted by the PA's militia, the Fatah Tanzim, with the firm assent of Yasser Arafat (who headed both the PLO and the PA).

So undeniable was this pattern even to the champions of the Oslo process that they coined a phrase to describe the victims of the policy of concessions: "korbanot Hashalom", or "victims of peace". This striking phrase has at its root the Biblical term "sacrifice". The way to peace, these advocates decided, was the shedding of Jewish blood rather than the breaking of Palestinian bones.

Perhaps the most striking example, and certainly the costliest, was the series of concessions PM Ehud Barak made to Arafat at Camp David in the summer of 2000, which, according to then-President Bill Clinton, included custodianship over the Temple Mount. Soon afterward, Arafat launched a

terror war against Israel that resulted in over 1,000 Israeli deaths (mostly civilians) over the next four years.

In the past decade and a half, concessions sharply abated relative to the Oslo period, and terrorism fell sharply as well. But the pattern still prevails.

An almost daily reminder of the costs of making concessions stems from a major concession made after the quelling of Arafat's war against Israel in 2004-5—Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in September 2005, in which Israel itself dismantled all Israeli settlements and forcibly removed their inhabitants. For that concession, Israel has paid dearly in four major rounds of conflagration, interspersed with numerous smaller ones, during which Israelis scurry for shelter from the 15,000 missiles launched against its citizenry by Palestinian terrorists in Gaza.

A sizeable percentage of Israel's Jewish citizens, and an even greater proportion of Israel's business, media, high-tech, and academic elites, nevertheless deny the reality of this pattern and insist on making concessions.

They are continuously cajoled into thinking that way by liberal elites from continents molded in the religious and cultural belief of turning the other cheek. Those elites overlook the fact that their own willingness to make concessions—to, for example, the murderous Iranian regime—belies their long history of war-making and particularly WWII, the destructiveness of which can be attributed to the concessions European powers made to Nazi Germany's military build-up and territorial annexations.

Israel is now governed by representatives of this elite. The question is whether new PM Naftali Bennet and PM designate Yair Lapid will be guided by the veracity of the costs of making concessions and the benefits of holding firm, or will impose the inevitable costs of believing that concessions are the answer in a violence-prone Middle East.

Prof. Hillel Frisch is a professor of political studies and Middle East studies at Bar-Ilan University and a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.