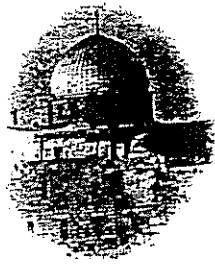


A City That Echoes Eternity

For billions, Jerusalem is not just sand and stone but sacred—a place of the world, and beyond it. BY KENNETH L. WOODWARD



ONE MAN, JESUS WARNED, CANNOT SERVE two masters. Yet Jerusalem is sacred stone and soil to Jew and Christian and Muslim alike. A place on the map like any other city, Jerusalem exists more vividly, more powerfully, more *dangerously* within the longitude and latitude of the religious imagination. In that fertile region of the mind, what has already occurred in time past—the building of Solomon's temple, the crucifixion of Christ, the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad—is also promise of

what is to come, "when time shall be no more." Among all the cities of the earth, only Jerusalem is seen as the locus of redemption and final judgment. For that reason alone, it inspires the fanatic. It is a burden no merely civil administration should ever have to bear. But short of that eschatological moment, Jerusalem seems to be always searching for respite from political tension, that it might live up to the meaning of its name: City of Peace.

To know what Jerusalem means to the three great monotheisms is to realize that politics alone can bring only a provisional kind of peace. Jews have the oldest identification with the city—and the Bible, which mentions Jerusalem 667 times, for their witness. In the background is God's promise of land and progeny to Abraham, His obedient servant. In the Book of Exodus, that promise takes the specific form of Canaan—the Holy Land—for the wandering tribes of Israel. King David made Jerusalem his capital and there, some 30 centuries ago, Solomon built the first temple. The exile of the Jews to Babylon only made the yearning for Jerusalem more intense. "If I forget you, O Jerusalem," wrote the Psalmist, "let my right hand wither." A second temple was built by King Herod, only to be destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans. What remains of the Western wall is now Judaism's holiest shrine.

Jerusalem, wrote Abraham Joshua Heschel right after the Israeli occupation of the city in 1967, is "a city of witness, an echo of eternity." It is also a city of waiting, the place where the messiah, when he comes, will rebuild the temple. To die in Jerusalem, pious Jews believe, is to be assured of atonement.

For Christians, the messiah has already come and atonement has been accomplished in the person of Jesus. Jerusalem is where he suffered, died and rose again in glory—and where he will return to judge the living and the dead. It is also the city where the Last

Supper was celebrated and where, at Pentecost, the church itself was born. As a place of Christian pilgrimage, Jerusalem has no equal. Medieval maps place it at the center of the universe (as did Dante), and paintings show medieval Jerusalem descending as the heavenly city to come. Today pilgrims can touch the rock where Jesus was crucified and, under the same church roof, the tomb where he was buried. The cross is gone, but in the Christian iconography, it continues to be the *axis mundi* connecting earth with heaven in the sacred drama of redemption.

For Muslims, Jerusalem is the third holiest place, after Mecca and Medina. To Muhammad, it was the city of the holy prophets who had preceded him. And so, before Mecca became the center of the Islamic universe, Muhammad directed all Muslims to bow for prayer toward Jerusalem. According to later interpretations of a passage in the Qur'an, Muhammad himself made a mystical "night flight" to Jerusalem aided by the angel Gabriel. From there, on the very rock where Abraham had offered his son as a sacrifice (now the shrine of the Dome of the Rock, atop the Temple Mount), Muhammad ascended a ladder to the throne of Allah. This ascension confirmed the continuity between Muhammad and all previous prophets and messengers of God, including Jesus, in a lineage going back to Adam. It also established a divine connection between Mecca and Jerusalem.

Thus, for billions of believers who may never see it, Jerusalem remains a city central to their sacred geography. This is why the future of the city is not just another Middle Eastern conflict between Arabs and Jews. From a purely secular perspective, of course, the shrines dear to Jews, Christians and Muslims are precious tourist attractions, and as such important sources of revenue. But Jerusalem is not some kind of Disneyland of the spirit. Both Israel and the Palestinians have real roots in the Holy Land, and both want to claim Jerusalem as their capital. The United Nations, supported by the Vatican, would have the city internationalized and under its jurisdiction. The issue, however, is not merely one of geopolitics. There will be no enduring solution to the question of Jerusalem that does not respect the attachments to the city formed by each faith. Whoever controls Jerusalem will always be constrained by the meaning the city has acquired over three millenniums of wars, conquest and prophetic utterance. Blessed or cursed, Jerusalem is built with the bricks of the religious imagination. Were this not so, Jerusalem would be what it has never been: just another city on a hill.



A HOLY PLACE: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem," wrote the Psalmist, "let my right hand wither"

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Almost 6 decades after
the Arab-Israeli war, any chance
for reconciliation or peace depends
on Israelis and Palestinians
understanding each other's history,
wounds, fears—and dreams.

Refusing to see other side of story

By Sandy Tolan

ONCE UPON A TIME, before the first Arab-Israeli war, there was a chance for coexistence based on long-cherished dreams. So the warring parties will tell you. There the agreement ends.

In its place are battles about what those dreams represented, what led to their collapse, and even what to call the war that followed, beginning 58 years ago this month: the War of Independence, or the Catastrophe?

Like two bittersweet seas of memory separated by a narrow isthmus, the narratives of Israelis and Palestinians lie side by side—isolated, but nearly close enough to touch. Any chance for lasting peace would require mixing these waters, and the memories and stories of the other. Genuine reconciliation, and thus the future of the region, depends on mutual witness. Yet these fundamental truths appear increasingly quaint in the deteriorating atmosphere between the two Semitic peoples.

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ONE PERSON'S
POINT OF
VIEW ON
'CONVERGENCE,'
PAGE 4

As Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert prepares to meet with President Bush on Tuesday, the prospects for lasting peace based on a mutually agreeable settlement appear as bleak as ever.

Not only does an Islamic Hamas government hold power in Gaza, but Olmert's unilateral plan to end the conflict seems likely only to deepen it. The new Israeli plan has a nearly 400-mile-long "security barrier" at its center, and in its efforts to separate Israel from the Palestinians, it is a symbol for the seemingly irreconcilable narratives at the heart of the conflict.

PLEASE SEE WITNESS, PAGE 4

WITNESS:

The fog of

the 1948 war

remains

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

stand each other's wounds. But essentially, the fog of the 1948 war remains, six decades on. Each side still essentially identifies its own forces as freedom fighters and the forces of the other as terrorists. Consider, for example, the roadside slaughter by Arab forces of more than 70 Jews in a caravan of doctors and nurses in April 1948. For the Zionist side, this was proof of the enemy's barbarous nature; for many Arabs, it was justified revenge for equally horrific killings, four days earlier, of more than 100 Arab villagers. This massacre at Deir Yassin, carried out by Jewish paramilitary forces known as the Irgun, helped provoke a spontaneous exodus of thousands of Arab villagers fearful of repeat atrocities.

If the central Arab failure in the decades since 1948 has been to misunderstand the depths of Israeli trauma, this is matched by an equal failure on the Israeli side to understand how the Palestinian experience of 1948 has shaped, and continues to shape, Middle Eastern history. Until each side begins to witness to the essential truth of the other, there will be no reconciliation. And without reconciliation, hopes for long-term peace are illusory—no matter how well-protected each sea of memory becomes, no matter how many barriers are erected.

It may seem absurd to promote the centrality of mutual witness, given the harsh reality on the ground. The "peace process" is in shreds, Hamas has approved of attacks on Israeli civilians, and this week Olmert will try to get U.S. approval for a unilateral solution with no negotiations, while his government completes a wall and fence separating the two peoples. What good is it under these circumstances, one might ask, to suggest that what is needed now is a mutual witness to history?

But for two peoples living in one land, long-term coexistence is not likely to emerge from a fortified barrier running through the heart of the land. Eventually, months or years from now, the two sides will again find themselves across a negotiating table. And they will have to start somewhere.

They could begin by carving into the isthmus that separates the seas of bitter-sweet memory.

These divided narratives are rooted in perceptions about the origins of Israel. Jews, and many others worldwide, have understood it as the heroic birth of a sovereign state from the ashes of the Holocaust. Many Palestinians failed to grasp the depths of fear and trauma that gripped the bed-ragged Jewish refugees searching for haven in Palestine. Neither have Palestinians fully understood how this trauma helped shape the wars that followed, nor how the Holocaust itself helped create the mythical supermasculine "New Israeli Man" (known in Hebrew as Sabra) who emerged after the atrocities to recast Jewish history.

Many Israelis do not understand how the Palestinian trauma of dispossession has defined Palestinian memory and identity over the years. Gripped by a post-Holocaust fear of annihilation, Israelis, for generations, have explained the Palestinian perspective as simply an Arab wish to annihilate the fragile Jewish state.

Yet the Palestinian sea of memory contains other depths. On the eve of Israel's birth, Palestinians asked why they should be required to compensate the Jews for the terrible crimes committed by Europe—ans thousands of miles away. The Arabs refused to accept Israel, and in the war that followed, 700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes. Most thought they would return in a few days or weeks, when the fighting died down. Fifty-eight years later, many of them, scattered around the world from the gulf states to Europe to America, or in squalid refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, are still waiting.

Sometimes in the wake of war, understanding begins to emerge, however haltingly, in the years that follow, and in some cases Palestinians and Israelis have struggled to under-

The Israeli/Palestinian Conflict: The Palestinian Perspective

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is one of massive importance to the world. It has at times undoubtedly brought out the worst in its conflicting adversaries, the primarily Jewish state of Israel and the as yet unborn state of "Palestine," with its Muslim Arab majority. The frustration and hardship produced by this conflict have led world leaders to seek a peaceful solution that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians. This has proven extremely difficult. Palestinians, angry with the Israeli government, have not always sought a peaceful reconciliation with Israel. Because they feel they have been denied a viable, autonomous Palestinian state, Palestinian Arabs have resisted compromise with the state of Israel. This resistance, due to a feeling of "second-class citizenship," originated in the 1948 creation of Israel itself, continued as Israel's territory increased, and is today embodied in several "sticking points" that threaten the Middle East peace process. Historical and current Israeli actions are interpreted by Palestinians as heavy-handed and unfair.

The very creation of the nation of Israel was and remains controversial in the minds of Palestinian Arabs. In 1948, the weakened British Empire turned over control of the geographic region historically known as "Palestine" to the United Nations. The UN "partitioned," or divided, Palestine into two separate regions that were to organize themselves into "states" (nations). One of the new "states" contained a population dominated by a specific cultural group of Muslim Arabs who called themselves "Palestinians." Palestinians had lived in the area for centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (which was eliminated by the 1920s) and the British Empire (from 1919 to 1948). They refused to accept the terms of the partition, which they viewed as unfair. The other new "state" contained a majority Jewish population, consisting largely of 20th century settlers from Europe hoping to establish a Jewish homeland that had not existed since biblical times (a belief known as *Zionism*). This ancient history of Jews (ancient Hebrews) in the region, coupled with the world's legacy of anti-Semitism, led to a desire on the part of Jews in the region to create a permanent Jewish homeland called Israel. Clearly, however, the "giving

away" of Arab land in 1948 was deemed unacceptable by most Arabs, even those who peacefully coexisted with Jewish residents prior to the partition. Thus, when Israel was created as an independent nation in 1948, its Arab neighbors—Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, furious at the perceived intrusion of a large Jewish population, immediately declared war on the infant nation. Israel defeated the invading nations, and for security purposes, annexed significant parts of the area that was to have become the Arab Palestinian state. The remaining areas wound up "in limbo," and no Arab state was ever created. Jordan occupied an area that has come to be known as the "West Bank." Egypt occupied an area that came to be known as the "Gaza Strip." No state called "Palestine" was thus created. Therefore, it is safe to say that initially, the very creation of Israel itself was the root of Palestinian hostility.

From the Arab perspective, Israel's later actions further exacerbated the situation, threatening the future of Palestine. In 1967, fearing an impending attack by its Arab neighbors, Israel launched a "preemptive" attack against Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The attack was a massive Israeli success. This short conflict, known as the Six-Day War, resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights (a hilly region on the Syrian border). Defying a UN Resolution (Number 242) calling for Israel's withdrawal from these areas, the Israeli government insists that it must maintain control over significant portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinians refer to these as the "occupied territories," and see Israel's actions as a direct attack on the autonomy of Palestinian Arabs. Partially due to Israel's success, the major point of contention between Israel and the Arab world was no longer whether or not Israel should exist, but what the future "Palestine" would look like. Thus, Israel's military victory and subsequent occupation of what was to become the state of Palestine perpetuated the Palestinian belief that peace with the Israeli government could result in great loss of land and power.

Already feeling like prisoners in their own homeland, Palestinians grew angrier still in the years following the Six Day War. In the late 1970s, the Israeli government began to establish "settlements," or colonies, of Jewish residents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. To protect the settlers, Israel has also deployed troops to the sites. Palestinians view Israel's settlement-building as an intentional choice meant

to prevent a realistic, viable Palestinian state. To support this, they point to the locations of these settlements. Often placed between key Arab cities, the settlements prevent convenient travel and communication, frequently forcing innocent Palestinians to pass through Israeli military checkpoints to attend work or school. World opinion, as displayed in the Fourth Geneva Convention, forbids building on occupied land. Despite this, the Israeli government continued to build new settlements, as well as additions to existing settlements, bringing the current number of Israeli settlers to over 300,000. As long as the settlements remain in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians are likely to feel that their sovereignty is threatened, and are quite unlikely to seek compromise with the Israeli government.

Yet another issue fundamental to the problem is the issue of Palestinian refugees and prisoners. As a result of the 1948 war, millions of Palestinian Arabs were displaced from their homes. Palestinian leaders stress the "right of return" when negotiating the refugee issue. They feel that since Israel unfairly expelled Arabs from Israel, as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the return of those refugees and their families is the only fair response. Clearly, the Israeli government wishes to prevent their return, but Palestinians appeal to fairness when pursuing this issue. The second issue is that of prisoners. Thousands of Palestinian "militants" are currently incarcerated by Israeli authorities as a result of Israeli crackdowns on terrorism and protest. From the Palestinian perspective, the Israeli justice system unfairly punishes thousands of Palestinians for the violent actions of a few. Despite the recent release of 334 prisoners, Palestinians believe that Israeli officials are not doing enough. Besides, they claim, Palestinians would not have to commit militant acts were it not for the oppression of the Israeli government. In the minds of many Palestinians, these assumptions add up to the conclusion that Israel will never allow them to be more than second-class citizens. This mindset leads many Palestinians to forsake any hope or desire for compromise.

Perhaps the most ideologically contentious issue of all is that of Jerusalem, the capital of Israel as well as Palestine. The city of Jerusalem is holy to both Jews and Muslims. Palestinians believe that Jerusalem will be the capital of a future Palestinian state. Currently, the western portion of the city is

completely under the control of Israel, while East Jerusalem (which holds many holy sites, including the site where Muslims believe the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven) is traditionally the Arab area. Few Israelis venture into the eastern half of the city, which is poorly maintained by the Israeli government. After the Six Day War of 1967, Israel seized East Jerusalem from Jordan, and despite UN resolutions instructing Israel to withdraw, Israel insists that Jerusalem is its "eternal, undivided capital." It has encouraged settlements that surround the city and it has annexed lands around the city, causing confusion regarding the real boundaries of Jerusalem. These settlements and annexations make it nearly impossible for Jerusalem to ever become the capital of a Palestinian state. Nonetheless, frustrated Palestinians continually bring up the issue during peace talks. A successful compromise on Jerusalem remains elusive.

The final, and in many ways the most frustrating issue that complicates the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is the problem of extremism. While there are many Palestinians who strive for peace and desire an end to the conflict with Israel, there are others who consistently oppose peace efforts. In the modern world, images of terrorists perpetuate stereotypes regarding Arabs and the religion of Islam. This is primarily a result of the actions of a relatively small number of radicals who threaten the peace process. Some of these radicals are Palestinian attackers and suicide bombers. When the second *intifada* (uprising) against the Israeli government began in September 2000 (the first occurred in 1987), attacks on Israeli targets in Israel itself as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip became frequent and intense. Because unemployment and poverty rates are huge in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, many Palestinians feel an increasing sense of desperation, and have consequently supported a more radical stance. Sadly, many Palestinians have turned to Hamas, a terrorist group based in the Gaza Strip, to lead the way to Palestinian autonomy. As long as extremist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad have the ability to recruit members and terrorize, the peace process will never move substantially forward.

Recent events suggest that the Palestinian reliance on extremism could continue. Recently, Israel decided to withdraw completely from the Gaza Strip, removing its settlements and its military presence.

Despite the fact that some believe this choice could lead to peace, Palestinian extremists, including Hamas, have boldly claimed that it was terror itself that drove the Israelis to exit the Gaza Strip. This unsettling conclusion may embolden Palestinian extremists to take their doctrine of brutality to new heights within Israel and the West Bank. At the very least, it has given Hamas something that it views as a precedent for future actions.

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is clearly one of great complexity and frustration. While numerous peace efforts have been made, the conflict drags on and on. What makes this conflict so frustrating is that compromise has become quite difficult. As long as Palestinians feel that Israel is preventing them from possessing a realistic, sovereign Palestine, difficulties will remain. From the first armed conflict in 1948, to the Six Day War of 1967, to the modern settlements, refugees and Jerusalem problem, Palestinians and the Arab world has constantly faced what it perceives as a noble uphill struggle. While it seems as though the entire world yearns for Middle East peace, it has remained an elusive goal.

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The Israeli/Palestinian Conflict: The Israeli Perspective

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is one of massive importance to the world. It has at times undoubtedly brought out the worst in its conflicting adversaries, the primarily Jewish state of Israel and the as yet unborn state of "Palestine," with its Muslim Arab majority. The frustration and hardship produced by this conflict have led world leaders to seek a peaceful solution that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians. This has proven extremely difficult. Historically, anti-Semitism (the common term for anti-Jewish sentiment) has frequently resulted in the persecution of Jews in many world areas, with the German Holocaust serving as the pinnacle of hatred. In the minds of many Israeli leaders, therefore, a peaceful solution must serve the goals and needs of the Israeli population. The state of Israel has had and will likely continue to have difficulty in compromising with the Arab world to end the Middle East conflict because of a constant fear for its survival and security. This fear stems directly from the aftermath of the original creation of the modern state of Israel, and has only intensified as the conflict has spread outside of Israel's borders and involved neighboring countries as well. Currently, there are several "sticking points" that prevent peace. The historical legacy has drastically impacted the current mindset of the Israeli government.

From its inception, the nation of Israel has feared for its very survival. In 1948, the weakened British Empire turned over control of the geographic region historically known as "Palestine" to the United Nations. The UN "partitioned," or divided, Palestine into two separate regions that were to organize themselves into "states" (nations). One of the new "states" contained a population dominated by a specific cultural group of Muslim Arabs who called themselves "Palestinians." Palestinians had lived in the area for centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (which was eliminated by the 1920s) and the British Empire (from 1919 to 1948). The other new "state" contained a majority Jewish population, consisting largely of 20th century settlers from Europe hoping to establish a Jewish

homeland that had not existed since biblical times (a belief known as *Zionism*). This ancient history of Jews (ancient Hebrews) in the region, coupled with the world's legacy of anti-Semitism, led to a desire on the part of Jews in the region to create a permanent Jewish homeland called Israel. When Israel was created as an independent nation in 1948, its Arab neighbors—Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, furious at the perceived intrusion of a large Jewish population, immediately declared war on the infant nation. Israel defeated the invading nations, and for security purposes, annexed significant parts of the area that was to have become the Arab Palestinian state. The remaining areas wound up "in limbo," and no Arab state was ever created. Jordan occupied an area that has come to be known as the "West Bank." Egypt occupied an area that came to be known as the "Gaza Strip." The 1948 partition and the resulting military conflict played a major role in creating Israel's perceived need for security. Its policies have thus been driven by a desire to protect itself, both from internal and external threats.

A second historical example of Israel's security goals in action is an event known as the "Six Day War." In 1967, fearing an impending attack by its Arab neighbors, Israel launched a "preemptive" attack against Egypt, Jordan and Syria. This short but very successful conflict resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights (a hilly region on the Syrian border). Israel currently refers to the areas as the "administered territories." Defying a UN Resolution (Number 242) calling for Israel's withdrawal from these areas, the Israeli government insists that it must maintain control over significant portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Without control over these areas, Israel claims it will be unable to adequately defend itself, both from its potentially hostile neighbors and Palestinian militants who coordinate violent attacks from towns and camps in the regions. Once again, from its perspective, the Israeli government was forced to take drastic action, even defying world opinion, to ensure its survival and provide its citizenry with security. However, far from ensuring a peaceful existence, Israel's actions have contributed to problems that have lingered until the present day.

Israel's desire for security has led to one of today's most contentious issues. In the late 1970s, the Israeli government began to establish "settlements," or colonies, of Jewish residents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. World opinion, as displayed in the Fourth Geneva Convention, forbids building on occupied land. The Israeli government has taken the stance that since there was no permanent sovereign Palestinian state at the time, there is no reason why these should not be built. Additionally, Israelis on the "right," who wish to take a hard line with the Palestinians, have claimed that the land rightfully belongs to Israel anyway, thus nullifying any Palestinian claims of "illegal occupation." Since the earliest settlements began, over 300,000 Israelis have moved into the West Bank and Gaza. They are strategically placed to provide security to Israel as well as to prevent a contiguous Palestinian state. Critics of current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon accuse him of intentionally placing Israelis in key areas, including rural lands which cut Palestinian territory in two, and suburban areas which surround and isolate key Palestinian cities. Defying the criticism, Sharon and other Israeli leaders insist that their only motive is the safety and security of the Israeli population. This massive stumbling block to peace has arisen, from the Israeli perspective, only because of a demonstrated need for self-preservation.

Yet another issue fundamental to the problem is the issue of Palestinian refugees and prisoners. As a result of the 1948 war, millions of Palestinian Arabs were displaced from their homes. Additionally, thousands of Palestinian "militants" are currently incarcerated by Israeli authorities as a result of Israeli crackdowns on terrorism and protest. Israel's stance on these issues is clear. If it were to allow all Palestinian refugees (as well as their extended families) to return to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and even modern Israel, a Jewish Israel may no longer exist. Such a large population shift would, from Israel's perspective, threaten the security and very survival of Israel. If prisoners (some of whom are indeed terrorists) were released in large numbers, there is a very realistic fear that terror attacks would not merely continue, but intensify. While Israel recently freed 334 prisoners, it is assumed that few, if any, of the several thousand remaining will be released. For security purposes, Israel feels that

its stance must follow a hard line. Granting Palestinian refugees the "right of return," as it is called, threatens the Jewish identity of Israel; freeing prisoners threatens the safety of the populace. Once again, Israel's policy decisions are based on its desire to ensure the security of its people.

Perhaps the most ideologically contentious issue of all is that of Jerusalem, the capital of Israel as well as Palestine. The city of Jerusalem is holy to both Jews and Muslims. Israel believes that the survival of its identity as a Jewish homeland is threatened unless it can fully possess and control the holy city. Currently, the western portion of the city is completely under the control of Israel, while East Jerusalem (which holds many holy sites) is traditionally the Arab area. Few Israelis venture into the eastern half of the city, which is poorly maintained by the Israeli government. After the Six Day War of 1967, Israel seized East Jerusalem from Jordan, and despite UN resolutions instructing Israel to withdraw, Israel insists that Jerusalem is its "eternal, undivided capital." Driven by a need for survival and security, Israel has cut East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank. It has encouraged settlements that surround the city and it has annexed lands around the city, causing confusion regarding the real boundaries of Jerusalem, making it nearly impossible for Jerusalem to ever become the capital of a Palestinian state. Rather than compromising on this issue, the Israeli government has made self-preservation its primary goal.

The final, and in many ways the most frustrating issue that complicates the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is the problem of extremism. While there are many Israelis who strive for peace and desire an end to the conflict with the Arab world, there are others who consistently oppose peace efforts. In the modern world, images of terrorists perpetuate stereotypes regarding Arabs and the religion of Islam. Seldom, however, are the victors of conflict portrayed as extremists. In Israel, there are many who oppose compromise with Palestinians, as well as the rest of the Arab world, on the grounds that any compromise threatens the existence and security of Israel. Whether the issue is settlements, refugees, Jerusalem or a controversial 310-mile "separation wall" currently being built along the West Bank, Israeli extremists threaten the peace process due to their beliefs and fears. One strikingly tragic

example is the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Itzak Rabin in 1995. Rabin was the architect of peace agreements with Palestinian leaders. Conservative Israelis, fearing changes and compromise with those they viewed as terrorists, opposed Rabin's policies. Finally, an Israeli radical (not a Palestinian terrorist) murdered the Israeli Prime Minister. Events such as these demonstrate the profound difficulty in achieving peace in Israel/Palestine. Acting on what they believe is best for Israel's future, extremists have done their best to derail the peace process. Recently, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon led a removal of the entire Israeli presence from the Gaza Strip, while permanently solidifying its position in West Bank settlements. Despite the fact that this move may have protected Israeli civilians and soldiers alike, extremists, including those from Sharon's own party, have opposed this action, feeling that Israel must not give in to Palestinians at all.

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is clearly one of great complexity and frustration. While numerous peace efforts have been made, the conflict drags on and on. What makes this conflict so frustrating is that compromise has become quite difficult. As long as the state of Israel feels that its security and even survival are threatened, it will continue to act in ways that anger Palestinians. From its first armed conflict in 1948, to the Six Day War of 1967, to the modern settlements, refugees and Jerusalem problem, Israel has constantly faced what it perceives as a noble uphill struggle. While it seems as though the entire world yearns for Middle East peace, it has remained an elusive goal.

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