

Why I No Longer Stand with Israel, and Never Will Again. Scott Ritter

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Global Research, October 15, 2023

[Scott Ritter Extra](#) 14 October 2023

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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The Gates of Gaza

"The attackers came at dawn, quickly occupying the town. The men were separated from the women and shot. One of the attackers, opening the door of one of the homes, found an old man standing there. He shot him. 'He enjoyed shooting him,' an eyewitness to the attack said afterwards.

Soon the town was empty—the entire population of 5,000 had either been killed or expelled, those who survived put on trucks, and driven to Gaza. The empty homes were looted. 'We were very happy,' one of the participants said afterwards. 'If you don't take it, someone else will. You don't feel you have to give it back. They were not coming back.'"

It sounds like a narrative torn from the front pages of today's newspapers, one of many such stories—too many to count—describing the atrocities inflicted on the civilian populations of Israeli towns and Kibbutzes adjacent to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

But it is not. Instead, it is the recollections of Yaakov Sharett, the son of Moshe Sharett, one of the fathers of Israel, a signatory to Israel's Declaration of Independence, and Israel's first Foreign Minister, and second Prime Minister. Yaakov Sharett was recounting the seizure of the Arab town of Bersheeba, in 1948, by Israeli soldiers, during Israel's War of Independence.

As a young soldier serving in the Negev Desert in 1946, Sharett was appointed *mukhtar*—or chief—of one of eleven teams of soldiers—part of the secret "11-Points Plan" designed to establish Jewish outposts in the Negev Desert that would serve as a strategic foothold in the

region when the anticipated war between Israeli Zionists and Arabs broke out.

Zionism, as it existed before 1948, was a movement for the re-establishment of a Jewish nation on the territory of Biblical Israel. It was established as a political movement, Zionist Organization, in 1897 under the leadership of Theodor Herzl. Herzl died in 1904, and the Zionist Organization was later taken over by Chaim Weizmann as a reward for pushing for the adoption of the Balfour Declaration, which committed the British government to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Weitzman remained as the head of the Zionist Organization until the establishment of Israel in 1948, after which he was elected as Israel's first President.

In 1946, a United Nations partition plan dividing the British Palestinian mandate into Arab and Jewish sections had apportioned the Negev region to the Arabs. The Zionist leaders of the future state of Israel, led by David Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett, and others dedicated to the principles of Zionism, devised the "11-Points Plan" as a means to alter the status quo then in existence in the Negev, where 500 Jews in three outposts lived amongst 250,000 Arabs residing in 247 villages and towns. The 11 new outposts would boost the Israeli presence in the Negev, creating the condition where, as Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi noted, "an indigenous majority living on their ancestral soil" would be "converted overnight into a minority under alien rule."

On the night of October 5, 1946—just after Yom Kippur—Yaakov led his team into the Negev.

"I remember when we found our piece of land on the top of a barren hill," Yaakov recounted. "It was still dark, but we managed to bang in the posts and soon, we were inside our fence. At first light, trucks came with prefabricated barracks. It was quite a feat. We worked like devils."

When Yaakov was part of the Zionist Youth Movement, he would travel throughout the Negev on foot, familiarizing himself with the Arab villages, and learning their Hebrew names as they existed in the Bible. Next to Yaakov's hilltop settlement, which became the Hatzerim Kibbutz, was an Arab village named Abu Yahia. One of the missions given the Kibbutzniks of Hatzerim was to collect intelligence on the local Arabs that would be used by Israeli military planners who were at the time preparing for the large-scale expulsion of the Arabs from the Negev.

The Arabs of Abu Yahia provided Yaakov and his fellow Zionists with fresh water and would often guard the property of the Kibbutz while the men were away on work. There was an understanding between the leaders of Abu Yahia and the Hatzerim Kibbutz that they would be allowed to remain once Israel took control of the Negev. Instead, when war came, the Kibbutzniks from Hatzerim turned on their Arab neighbors, killing them and driving the survivors away from their homes forever.

Most of the survivors ended up living in Gaza.

The slaughter and physical eradication of the village of Abu Yahia, the town of Bersheeba, and the 245 other Arab towns and villages in the Negev by Israeli settlers and soldiers has gone down in history as the *Nakba*, or "Catastrophe." The Palestinians, when speaking of the *Nakba*, do not only address the events of 1948, but everything that has transpired since then in the name of the post-1948 sustainment, expansion, and defense of Zionism that

defines modern-day Israel. Israelis do not talk about the *Nakba*, instead referring to the events of 1948 as their “War of Independence.”

“Silence on the *Nakba*,” one contemporary scholar on the subject has observed, “is also part of everyday life in Israel.”



Palestinians fleeing for their lives from Israeli soldiers and settlers, 1948

After the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948, a group of Jewish settlers approached Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, requesting that the men from their settlements be allowed to serve in the military as a group. The result was the creation of the Nahal program, which combined military service with agricultural work. The Nahal forces would form a garrison, which would then be transformed into a Kibbutz, which would serve as the first line of defense against any future Arab attack on Israel. In 1951, the very first of these Nahal settlements, Nahlayim Mul Aza, was established on the border with the Gaza Strip. More followed, as the Nahal project sought to surround Gaza with these fortress-settlements. In 1953, Nahlayim Mul Aza made its transition from a military outpost to civilian Kibbutz and was renamed Nahal Oz.

One of the first settlers in Nahal Oz was a man named Roi Ruttenberg. At the age of 13, he served as a messenger boy during the 1948 War of Independence. When he turned 18, in 1953, he enlisted in the IDF, and then went on to get his commission. His first job as an officer was to serve as the security officer for Nahal Oz. He was married, and in 1956 was the proud father of an infant son. On April 18, 1956, Roi was ambushed by Arabs, who killed him and took his body into Gaza. His body was returned after the UN intervened, and he was buried the next day, on April 19. Roi’s death had enraged the Israeli nation, and thousands gathered for his funeral service.



Moshe Dyan, the Israeli Chief of Staff, reads the eulogy for Roi Ruttenberg, April 19, 1956

Moshe Dyan, the Israeli Chief of Staff, was in attendance, and delivered a eulogy which has gone down in Israeli history as one of the defining speeches of the nation. "Early yesterday morning," Dyan began, his voice carrying over the crowd of mourners, "Roi was murdered. The quiet of the spring morning dazzled him and he did not see those waiting in ambush for him, at the edge of the furrow."

Let us not cast the blame on the murderers today. Why should we declare their burning hatred for us? For eight years they have been sitting in the refugee camps in Gaza, and before their eyes we have been transforming the lands and the villages where they and their fathers dwelt, into our estate.

It is not among the Arabs in Gaza, but in our own midst that we must seek Roi's blood. How did we shut our eyes and refuse to look squarely at our fate, and see, in all its brutality, the destiny of our generation? Have we forgotten that this group of young people dwelling at Nahal Oz is bearing the heavy gates of Gaza on its shoulders?

Beyond the furrow of the border, a sea of hatred and desire for revenge is swelling, awaiting the day when serenity will dull our path, for the day when we will heed the ambassadors of malevolent hypocrisy who call upon us to lay down our arms.

Roi's blood is crying out to us and only to us from his torn body. Although we have sworn a thousandfold that our blood shall not flow in vain, yesterday again we were tempted, we listened, we believed.

We will make our reckoning with ourselves today; we are a generation that settles the land and without the steel helmet and the canon's maw, we will not be able to plant a tree and build a home. Let us not be deterred from seeing the loathing that is inflaming and filling the lives of the hundreds of thousands of Arabs who live around us. Let us not avert our eyes lest our arms weaken.

This is the fate of our generation. This is our life's choice—to be prepared and armed, strong, and determined, lest the sword be stricken from our fist and our lives cut down.

The young Roi who left Tel Aviv to build his home at the gates of Gaza to be a wall for us was blinded by the light in his heart and he did not see the flash of the sword. The yearning for peace deafened his ears and he did not hear the voice of murder waiting in ambush. The gates of Gaza weighed too heavily on his shoulders and overcame him.

The speech is notable for its open recognition of the hatred of Israel on the part of the Palestinians imprisoned in Gaza, as well as the source of their hatred, and understanding regarding the legitimacy of the Palestinian emotions.

But it is also unapologetic about the righteousness of the Israeli cause, regardless of the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause. Israel, Dyan said, cannot be settled without the “steel helmet and canon's maw.” War, he said, was Israel's “life choice,” and as such Israel was condemned to a life of militarized diligence, “lest the sword be stricken from our fist and our lives cut down.”

As people reflect on the violence which took place on October 7, when hundreds of heavily armed Hamas fighters surged out of Gaza and fell upon the military outposts and Kibbutzes that surrounded Gaza, they should never forget the origins and purpose of these installations—to literally pen the population of Gaza into what is in effect an open-air concentration camp, and the emotions produced amongst the Arab population imprisoned there. The Israelis who lived, worked and served in these encampments bore “the heavy gates of Gaza” on their shoulders, laboring under the “burning hatred” of a people forced to sit in refugee camps while, before their eyes, the settlers in the surrounding Kibbutzes transformed “the lands and the villages where they and their fathers dwelt” into the Israeli Jewish homeland.

These Israelis all grasped the sword of Zionism firmly in their hands. None among the adults who lived and worked in these encampments can be considered innocent—they were part of a system—Zionism—whose very existence and sustainment demand the brutal imprisonment and subjugation of millions of Palestinians who had their homes stolen from them 75 years ago. They lived out their “fate,” as Moshe Dyan called it, with all its inherent brutality. The “heavy gates of Gaza” was the destiny of their generation, until, like Roi Ruttenberg before them, the gates weighed too heavily of their shoulders and overcame them.

Never Quit

There was a time when I counted myself as a friend of Israel. I had campaigned during Operation Desert Storm to prevent Iraqi SCUD missiles from being launched against Israel, and, from 1994 until 1998, I travelled extensively to Israel, where I worked with the Israeli Defense Force's (IDF) intelligence organization, AMAN, to make sure Iraq would never again be able to threaten Israel with either SCUD missiles carrying conventional high explosive, chemical, biological, or nuclear warheads. I briefed Israeli generals, diplomats, and politicians.

I worked long hours side-by-side with Israeli photographic interpreters, signals intelligence collectors, technical intelligence analysts, and human intelligence case officers as we made sure no stone was left unturned when it came to making sure all of Iraq's weapons of mass

destruction capabilities were fully and verifiably accounted for. I was struck by the amazing work ethic and innate intelligence of my Israeli counterparts. I was also impressed by their integrity, as they more than lived up to their promise of adhering to the mandate set forth by the United Nations Security Council when it came to the work myself and my fellow inspectors from the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) were doing in Iraq.

By the time I left UNSCOM, in August 1998, I counted myself as a genuine friend of Israel (there was a downside to this relationship—the FBI was investigating me for alleged violations of the espionage act, an investigation that did not end until after September 11, 2001, when, after an interview between myself and three FBI agents, the investigation was closed.)

I must admit to more than a little ambivalence regarding Israel growing up—I was not a natural fan. My first recollection of Israel was the Yom Kippur War, in October 1973, and being mesmerized by the reports I saw on television. Later, in 1976, I was similarly captured by the audacity and heroism behind the Entebbe rescue. But this childhood infatuation faded when I attended college. Between an American-Israeli roommate who had just finished his service in the IDF (I had just finished my service in the US Army, and was enrolled in a Marine Corps commissioning program, and could not fathom why an American citizen would—or even could—serve in the armed forces of another nation), and a very active on-campus Hillel (Jewish student) organization, I became offended by the zero tolerance that existed amongst many American Jews toward Palestine and the Arab world in general.

I was deeply influenced by Professor John B. Joseph, an Assyrian-American historian of Middle Eastern studies. The son of refugees from the Assyrian genocide in pre-Iran Persia, Professor Joseph was born and raised in Baghdad. The open-mindedness with which he taught courses on Arab-Israeli relationships contrasted starkly with the my-way-or-the-highway approach taken by Hillel. On one occasion, in the Spring of 1983, Hillel sponsored a delegation of Israeli soldiers to visit the campus, where they gave talks on the Israeli invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. I was enrolled in the Marine Corps Platoon Leaders Course and was scheduled to be commissioned upon graduation in May 1984.

A confrontation between a US Marine and three IDF tanks in February 1983 had made headlines around the world. The tanks, commanded by an Israeli Lieutenant Colonel, had tried to drive through the Marine position. Captain Charles B. Johnson, the officer in charge of a Marine unit assigned to keep the Israelis from entering Beirut, had stood in front of the tanks, telling the IDF officer that they would not be allowed to pass. When the tanks threatened to run him over, Captain Johnson drew his pistol, jumped up onto the lead Israeli tank, and told the Lieutenant Colonel they would do so over his dead body. The Israelis backed down.

The standoff outside Beirut led to tensions between the US and Israel, with the State Department calling in the Israeli charge d'affaires, Benjamin Netanyahu, to protest Israeli provocation. Bad blood ensued, with the Israelis spreading rumors that Captain Johnson's breath smelled of alcohol.

This rumor was repeated by one of the IDF soldier-ambassadors at an on-campus talk I attended. I took umbrage and rose to my feet to challenge the speaker. In a not-so-diplomatic manner, I reminded the IDF soldier that he was on US soil, in the presence of a US Marine, and I would be damned if I were going to let him smear the reputation of a

Marine Corps officer in my presence. Sensing the violence inherent in my words (I already had a reputation on campus for roughing up a fellow student who had wished John Hinckley, the would-be assassin of President Ronald Reagan, had been a better shot), the Hillel organizers intervened, and ushered the IDF soldier off the stage, and off the campus.

My next interaction with Israel came, indirectly, during Operation Desert Storm. While the mission of US forces was to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi military, the firing of modified SCUD missiles into Israel by Iraq threatened to bring Israel into the conflict, an act that would have caused the coalition of nations, which consisted of numerous Arab nations who would refuse to fight on the same side as Israel, that had been so carefully cobbled together by President George H. W. Bush, to fall apart. Stopping the Iraqi SCUD launches became the top priority of the war and, as the resident SCUD expert on General Norman Schwarzkopf's staff, I became heavily involved in this effort. (As I reminded an openly hostile audience member during a 2007 presentation before a major American Jewish organization, I was putting my ass on the line for Israel when he and other American Jews were buying tickets to escape the Holy Land.)

After the war I was recruited by UNSCOM to help create an independent intelligence capability in support of the United Nations mission in Iraq. In 1994 I proposed that UNSCOM open a secret channel with Israel to closely coordinate on intelligence issues related to the disarmament of Iraq. My proposal was approved, and I helped lead the first UNSCOM delegation sent to Israel, where we met with the Director of AMAN and the Chief of the Research and Analysis Division (RAD) to discuss the scope and scale of UNSCOM-Israeli intelligence cooperation.

During my first visit to Israel, in October 1994, I was introduced to an Israeli Air Force intelligence officer who became my principal interlocutor for the next four years. Our professional relationship was exquisite—there is no doubt that without this officer, whose energy, intellect, and experience were second to none, made the UNSCOM-Israeli relationship the success it was. What struck me the most about this man, whom I came to view as a friend as well as colleague, was how much he wanted me to understand and appreciate Israel—the real Israel, not the made-for-TV propaganda show that Israel is known for when it comes to influencing foreigners like me.

Yes, I was given the helicopter tour of Israel so that I could see from a bird's eye view how small and vulnerable the nation of Israel was. Yes, the helicopter landed at Masada, where I was educated on the tragedy of that period in Israeli history. Yes, I was driven up to the Golan Heights, to a forward observation post, where I could view Syrian Army positions through a telescope—all of this is true. But my Israeli host noted sagely that what I was really interested in was the "SCUD museum," where Israel had assembled the debris from all the SCUD missiles that had fallen on its soil during Operation Desert Storm. This interested me because it was my mission.

Falling in love with Israel was not.

Gradually, my host loosened up the controls when it came to where I could go and what I could see during my time off from planning inspections. My wife visited me in Israel for a long weekend, and I took her to the Dead Sea, Jerusalem (where we walked the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, Jesus' processional route to his crucifixion on Mount Cavalry), Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River—all places taken straight from the pages of the New

Testament. My wife, a devout Georgian Orthodox, was ecstatic. I, a simple historian, was deeply impressed. “Every stone you overturn with your foot tells a story,” he told me. “This land is full of history.”



The Via Dolorosa, in Jerusalem

We soon took to discussing the history of Israel itself, starting with the neighborhood where the Israeli imagery exploitation unit I worked with was located—Sarona, also known as the German Colony. We discussed the British Mandate while visiting the King David Hotel, in Jerusalem, the site of an infamous terrorist attack carried out by Menachem Begin, the future Nobel Prize-winning Prime Minister of Israel, who at the time of the attack, in 1946, was part of the Irgun terrorist organization. Most Israelis would bristle at the notion of Begin and Irgun being labeled in such a manner. “Look,” my host said, “he was a terrorist. He had much in common with Yassar Arafat.” It was this kind of honesty that made me like my host even more.

We discussed the formation of Israel while visiting the *Ma’oz Mul ‘Aza* (The Stronghold of Gaza) museum, in the Kibbutz of Kfar Aza, and compared and contrasted the Israeli narrative regarding the birth of a nation under fire (the museum was built on the site of the Saad Kibbutz, which had been destroyed by the Egyptian Army in 1948), and the Palestinian *Nakba*, or catastrophe, regarding the forceful eviction of Palestinian families from their homes—including in the vicinity of the Kfar Aza Kibbutz (this Kibbutz was one of the one targeted by Hamas on October 8, 2023, and tragically lost scores of residents to the violence perpetrated by the Hamas fighters.)

We discussed the words of David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first President, who stated,

“If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal; we have taken their country. It is true God promised it to us, but how could that interest them? Our God is not theirs. There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They see but one thing: we have come, and we have stolen their country. Why would they accept that?”

Another quote by Ben Gurion drove this point home.

“Let us not ignore the truth among ourselves ... politically we are the aggressors, and they defend themselves,” he said. “The country is theirs, because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down, and in their view, we want to take away from them their country.”

“He was right,” my host said of Ben Gurion. “Israel has a very difficult history.”

The consequences of this difficult history were existential for my host, his family, and his fellow Israelis. I was often invited to his home, in a small neighborhood nestled into the hills that separate Tel Aviv from Jerusalem. There, I was treated to the kind of hospitality that one would expect from someone with whom you shared a special bond. While enjoying a barbeque and listening to the music his teenaged daughter had selected for our listening pleasure, my host pointed at the hills overlooking his neighborhood, where a village could be seen in the distance, the telltale minaret of a mosque revealing it as Arab.

“This is the “Green Line,” he said, pointing to the hill. The “Green Line” represented the original border of Israel, established at its creation in 1948. After the Six Day War, in 1967, Israel took control of the territory today known as the West Bank. The Palestinians were fighting to get their land back, to return the border between Israel and Palestine to the “Green Line.”

“You’re a military man,” he said. “That’s the high ground. You understand the risk to my family and my neighbors if an enemy were to occupy that terrain, to put a mortar or sniper up there. We would,” he said in a near whisper, as if hiding his words from his wife and kids, “all die.”

“We need peace,” my host concluded. “The kind of peace that gives the Palestinians their land back and allows my family to live without fear.”

Like most military officers, my host maintained an air of disinterest when it came to domestic politics. Once, while sitting down at a local eatery near the Sarona district, my host pointed out a short, stocky man seated a few tables down. “That’s Ehud Barack,” he said. Barack had retired from the IDF in early 1995, finishing his career as the Chief of the General Staff. “He’s now entering the world of politics,” my host noted. “He now must learn to lie.”

While my host did not inform me of his political affiliation (nor did I ask), two things became very apparent to me. First, he admired Yitzhak Rabin, a former soldier turned politician. “He lies, just like all the others,” he once observed. “But he lies in the cause of peace. I can accept that.”

And he absolutely despised Benjamin Netanyahu. “He will be the destruction of Israel,” my host warned. “He only knows hate.”

During my many visits to Israel, the threat of terrorism was an ever-present reality. On October 19, 1994—during my first visit to Israel—a Hamas suicide bomber blew himself up on a bus located on Dizengoff Street, a busy Tel Aviv thoroughway, killing 22 persons. The location of the attack was within a short walking distance of my hotel. On July 24, 1995, during my third visit to Israel, another Hamas terrorist blew himself up on a bus in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan, killing six. During my fourth visit, on August 21, 1995, another

Hamas suicide bomber attacked a bus in Ramat Eshkol, a suburb of Jerusalem, killing five.



The Dizengoff Bus bombing, October 19, 1994

The impact of these attacks on the Israeli people was palpable. Tears flowed freely as they mourned the dead. I recall after the July 1995 attack being picked up by the IDF driver who was to take me to my appointment inside the Kirya, the IDF's headquarters campus in downtown Tel Aviv. "Is our meeting cancelled?," I asked. "No," he replied grimly. "Life must go on."

We arrived at the building where my host maintained his office. There were several female IDF soldiers working for him. They ushered me into the waiting room and offered me tea. I noticed their eyes were red, and their faces streaked with tears. "Shall I come back later?," I asked my host when he entered the room. He called the girls back into the room. "Scott wants to know if he should come back later," he said. "What is your response?"

"If you quit, the terrorists win," one girl responded. "We won't quit, ever. We hope you won't as well."

On November 4, 1995, my host was driving me back from the Kirya to my hotel. We passed the Kings of Israel Square, a large public place where political rallies were often scheduled. There was one scheduled for that night—a pro-peace rally put on by supporters of Yitzhak Rabin in support of the Oslo peace process. Rabin had met with PLO Chairman Yassar Arafat in Washington, DC, on September 28, 1995, where the two men signed the Oslo II Accords.



Yitzhak Rabin (left) shakes hands with Yasser Arafat (right), while Bill Clinton (center) looks on

The Hamas terrorist attacks had been designed to disrupt the Oslo peace process; Yitzhak Rabin did not falter in his determination to see the process through to fruition, despite strong domestic political pushback from his chief rival, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu had mobilized radical right-wing Jewish religious extremists to his cause, accusing Rabin of being removed from Jewish tradition and Jewish values. But Netanyahu's posturing went beyond simple political rhetoric and veered into political violence. In March 1994, near the town of Ra'anana, north of Tel Aviv, a protest march was organized by the right-wing religious group, Kahane Chai. Netanyahu marched in front of the Kahane Chai protest; behind him, a coffin was carried inscribed with the words, "Rabin is causing the death of Zionism." On October 5, 1995—the day the Israeli Knesset voted to support Oslo II—Netanyahu organized a 100,000-strong rally in opposition. Netanyahu urged the crowd on as they shouted, "Death to Rabin."

"I hear you're going out tonight with some of the guys," my host said. I had dinner plans with two young Captains from RAD and their fiancés. "Don't come near this place," my host instructed, pointing at the Kings of Israel Square. "Rabin is speaking here tonight, and there is a strong likelihood of violence. He should cancel it," my host continued. "Too many people wish him harm, and there are too many opportunities here to do him harm."

That night, just after 9:30 PM, my two friends, their fiancés, and I had just been served our dinners, and we were getting ready to enjoy our meal, when the owner of the restaurant appeared before us. "Yitzhak Rabin has been shot," the owner said, tears falling down her face. "He has been taken to a hospital. He needs out prayers."

Without a word, everyone rose from their tables and left the restaurant. No bills were paid. I was dropped off at my hotel by my dinner companions, who listened to the radio and kept me informed of the breaking news.

The rally attracted 100,000 people, and Rabin gave a rousing speech.

"I always believed that most of the people want peace," he told the admiring crowd,

“and are ready to take a risk for it.”

A right-wing religious Jew, who believed he was acting on instructions from a Rabbi to kill Rabin for betraying Israel, had pulled the trigger of the pistol that took Rabin’s life.

At 11:15 PM, Yitzhak Rabin’s death was announced to the Israeli nation. From my hotel room where I watched the announcement on television, I could hear the wails of women crying from the hotel rooms next to me, and in the streets below.

November 5 was a national day of mourning. Israel buried their slain leader the next day, November 6.

On November 7, my driver was in the lobby, and took me to the Kirya. My host and his soldiers were back at work. Two days later, on November 9, armed with intelligence that the Israelis had collected about the shipment of missile guidance and control devices from Russia to Jordan, where they were scheduled to be moved into Iraq, I crossed the Allenby Bridge separating Israel from Jordan, where I was picked up by Jordanian security officers. That evening I met with Ali Shukri, the chief of the King of Jordan’s private office, and convinced him and the head of the Jordanian intelligence service to launch a raid of a warehouse the Israelis believed the missile components were being stored. The raid was executed, and several hundred guidance and control devices that were scheduled to be shipped to Iraq the next day were seized.

The next night, as I waited in the dark to cross back into Israel, I reflected on the tenacity of my Israeli hosts. They didn’t quit, I thought.

We didn’t quit.

To show the measure of the man that was my host, I recounted a story Ali Shukri told me while we were waiting for the results of the raid to come back, about his father, a wealthy Palestinian from the city of Jaffa, next to modern day Tel Aviv. A street had been named after his father, and he asked if I could go visit it on his behalf. I told my host about the request, and without hesitation we got into his car and explored old Jaffa. The streets had all been changed to Hebrew names, but my host approached several elderly people, and asked if anyone remembered the old street names. They did, and soon we found ourselves strolling down a well-lit boulevard.

“I’d like to believe Yitzhak Rabin would have wanted Ali Shukri to be able to walk down this street himself,” my host observed. “Maybe even live in his family home.”

We kept walking down the silent street, alone in our thoughts.

The Sins of the Father

On January 5, 1996, Israeli security forces assassinated Yahya Ayyash, a Hamas operative known as “The Engineer.” Ayyash was the chief bomb designer for Hamas, and his bombs were responsible for most of the terrorist actions carried out by Hamas against Israel. Israeli security was able to get a cellphone in which a minute amount of high explosive had been placed. Upon getting Ayyash to answer the phone, Israeli security set off the explosive, instantly killing the Hamas bombmaker.

While Israel is normally reticent about taking responsibility for targeted assassinations of

this nature, I was provided with an informal briefing by my hosts about how they came to kill Ayyash. I guess they figured I had a need to know, given the impact his bombings had on my work in Israel.

The killing of Ayyash triggered a violent response from Hamas, who in the weeks and months that followed unleashed a campaign of terror against the Israeli people. Three terrorist bombings, including two buses in Jerusalem and one outside the Dizengoff Center in Tel Aviv, which transpired between February 25 and March 4, killing 55 persons and wounding hundreds more, shook the nation, helping contribute to the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister in a general election held on May 29, 1996.

The period between Netanyahu's election and my resignation from UNSCOM, in August 1998, was one filled with turmoil and change. The success of the interception operation in Jordan paved the way for an even more in-depth relationship between UNSCOM and Israel, which was facilitated by my relationship with my Israeli host. We were able to create the equivalent of an intelligence fusion cell, blending imagery exploitation, SIGINT collection, and human intelligence to create an intelligence product that helped UNSCOM break open the issue of past Iraqi efforts to conceal the truth about their weapons of mass destruction programs, as well as uncover evidence of ongoing Iraqi activities, linked to the Office of the Presidency, which violated Security Council resolutions regarding sanctions.

My working relationship with Moshe Ya'alon, the new head of AMAN, was as strong as one could hope for, and Israel went out of its way to make sure every request for support I made was acted on. And the results were undeniable—when I started my relationship with Israeli intelligence, in 1994, Iraq topped AMAN's list of threats to Israel. By 1998, Iraq had dropped to fifth, behind far-right domestic extremism, Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. This transformation had come about because of the understanding that the UNSCOM-Israeli cooperation had been able to achieve about the true capabilities of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs.

In 1998, however, this relationship, so carefully nurtured by my host and I since our first meetings in October 1994, came to a sudden halt. Under pressure from the United States, Israel ended its intelligence relationship with UNSCOM. By 1998, the entire AMAN team that had made this relationship work, from Moshe Ya'alon, to Yaakov Amidror, to my host, had been replaced. The new team—Amos Malkin as the head of AMAN, Amos Gilad as the chief of RAD, and a new "host"—shut down the UNSCOM intelligence sharing operation immediately. I made one last visit to Israel, in early June 1998, where I was briefed by my counterparts on the new reality.

Two months later I resigned from UNSCOM, no longer able to carry out my mission of disarmament.

Despite the abrupt nature surrounding the termination of my professional relationship with the Israeli government, I always maintained a soft spot in my heart for the Israeli people and, by extension, the Israeli nation. Even as I watched Amos Gilad single-handedly dismantle the results of the hard work that my Israeli counterparts and I had worked so diligently undertaken, rejecting the fact-based findings that saw Iraq's threat profile diminish, and once again elevating Iraq to the status of a threat worthy of war, I didn't blame Israel as a whole, but rather the individual Israelis involved, first and foremost the man who had taken over from Yitzhak Rabin as the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's incompetence as a political leader had resulted in him being voted out of office in 1999, replaced by Ehud Barak (who had apparently learned to lie to a degree sufficient to the task of being an Israeli politician). In September 2002, Netanyahu testified before the US Congress about Iraq's nuclear weapons program. Even though he did so as a private citizen, his status as a former Prime Minister gave his words credibility they did not deserve.

"There is no question whatsoever that Saddam is seeking, is working, is advancing towards the development of nuclear weapons," Netanyahu said. "Once Saddam has nuclear weapons, the terror network will have nuclear weapons."

Netanyahu's statements directly contradicted the findings that my Israeli colleagues and I had reached—findings that were shared by the International Atomic Energy Agency, responsible for overseeing the dismantling of Iraq's nuclear program—that the Iraqi nuclear program had been eliminated, and that there was no evidence of its reconstitution.

But Netanyahu's job wasn't to tell the truth about Iraq's nuclear program, but rather use the fear generated by the specter of an Iraqi nuclear weapon to justify a war with Iraq that would remove Saddam Hussein from power. "If you take out Saddam, Saddam's regime, I guarantee you that it will have enormous positive reverberations on the region," Netanyahu told his receptive congressional audience. "And I think that people sitting right next door in Iran, young people, and many others, will say the time of such regimes, of such despots is gone."



Benjamin Netanyahu testifying before Congress, 2002

Looking back today, at the horrific consequences of America's illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, at an Iranian regime firmly entrenched behind a nuclear program that is not going away, one can clearly see that Benjamin Netanyahu was wrong about everything. But that has been his *modus operandi* from the start—to exaggerate and lie about threats faced by Israel to justify military action which invariably resulted in disaster.

In the years between my resignation from UNSCOM and the start of the US-led invasion of Iraq, I would often travel to Washington, DC, where I would seek out meetings with representatives and senators from both parties to educate them on the facts regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. At every step of the way, I was bird-dogged by teams of operative from the American Israeli Public Action Committee, or AIPAC. As soon as I would

leave one elected official's office, the AIPAC team would slide in behind me and remind the person in question about who wrote the checks that paid for their reelection.

Years later, I watched a video from 2001 where Netanyahu brags about how easily the US can be controlled, to the point where he knew he could get away with openly sabotaging Yitzhak Rabin's greatest legacy—the Oslo Accords—knowing full well the US would back down. "I was not afraid to clash with Clinton," Netanyahu bragged. "I know what America is. America is something that can easily be moved. Moved to the right direction."

America went to war with Iraq because of Israel—the lies told by Netanyahu, and the manipulation by Israel, through its American proxy, AIPAC, of the Congressional duty to the American people of responsible oversight.

Lest anyone think that AIPAC was acting on its own volition, the FBI uncovered evidence of collusion between AIPAC officials and an Israeli diplomat, Naor Gilon, regarding the transfer of classified information to Israel.

Naor Gilon was my point of contact at the Israeli Mission to the UN, in New York.

The difference between me and AIPAC, however, was that all my contacts were approved by the UN and the CIA.

AIPAC was simply freelancing as an Israeli asset.

To say I was furious at Israel for interfering with US foreign and national security policy is an understatement. Despite this, I continued to stand with Israel.

On November 13, 2006, I spoke at Columbia University's school of international affairs. The topic was Iran's nuclear program. I opened my remarks by addressing what I called "the elephant in the room: Israel." Israel, I said, was a close ally of the United States, and if push came to shove, and Israel and Iran came to blows, then Israel's "legitimate national security concerns" are ours and could even bring war.

But my support was not unconditional—unlike the Clinton administration, I could not be easily moved. "Israel," I said, "is drunk with hubris, arrogance, and power. I operate off the old saying, 'friends don't let friends drive drunk.' Therefore, as a friend of Israel, I believe we have a responsibility to take the keys out of the ignition and stop the bus they are driving, because otherwise it is heading straight for a cliff."

I was very concerned at the time that Israel was in the process of repeating its actions in the leadup to the Iraq War, fabricating intelligence (Amos Gild was, by this time, the Israeli "intelligence and security" czar, having been moved to the position of the head of the political and military affairs bureau) and spreading a false narrative among US lawmakers and international bodies, such as the IAEA.

But something else was gnawing at me as well.

In October 1997 I was working with the Israelis on a new operation in Romania, tracking an Iraqi delegation that was intending to purchase a controlling share in a Romanian aerospace company for the purpose of acquiring ballistic missile technology in a manner which violated sanctions. The month prior, an Israeli team botched an assassination of a senior Hamas official in Amman, Jordan. The would-be assassins had poisoned their target, Khaled Mashal,

but had been captured by Mashal's bodyguards before they could escape. An infuriated Jordanian King demanded that Israel provide the antidote for the poison used on Mashal in exchange for the captured Israeli agents. The matter was resolved, but at a huge embarrassment for Israel.

Benjamin Netanyahu had ordered the murder of Khaled Mashal, my host told me.

"That's to be expected," I replied.

"Is it?" my host asked. "Do you know that Hamas was created by Israel?"

This floored me. I had been taken to a museum inside the Kirya, where weapons, uniforms, and other pieces of equipment that had been captured from Hamas terrorist were put on display. Hamas had committed numerous atrocities against the Israeli people during my time in Israel. I saw them as the enemy of Israel,

And now I was being told that Israel had a hand in the creation of Hamas. The intent, my host told me, was to create a political divide within the Palestinian political leadership, and to dilute the power and influence of Yassar Arafat's Fatah organization. In this, they had apparently succeeded. But the violent response of Hamas to the Oslo Accords had caused Israel to rethink this relationship, and soon Israel was in open war with its creation.

I was prepared to write off the Israeli-Hamas nexus as a political experiment gone bad when, in 2006, it looked like Israel had forgiven Hamas its violent past, working to create the conditions that helped Hamas secure a majority of the seats in the Palestinian Parliament. By 2007, however, the poor relations between Hamas and Fatah had broken down further, leading to a civil war between the two factions that led to the split of the Palestinian entity into two halves—one, led by Fatah, was located on the West Bank, while the other, led by Hamas, operated in Gaza.

It later came out that this internecine conflict between Palestinians had been orchestrated by Israel to split the Palestinian political body, weakening it while providing Israel with the opportunity to improve relations with Fatah under the grounds that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Over the course of the next decade and a half, I watched as Israel leveraged its control over Fatah, and its animosity toward Hamas, into a cycle of never-ending violence which always ended up with the Palestinian cause making more compromises which resulted in more lost territory—and more lost lives. The Gaza conflicts of 2014 and 2021 were telling in their violence against the Palestinian civilians who lived there, violence which was largely ignored in the West as people grew immune to the sight of dead Palestinian children.

In the aftermath of the October 8, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, the muscle memory in my heart and brain told me that I must stand with Israel as it responded to this atrocity.

But then I watched as Israeli generals and politicians openly advocated for war crimes on national television, calling the Palestinians "animals" and openly advocating for their elimination.

I watched as the Israelis lied about the nature of the Hamas attacks, turning what had been a flawless assault against a series of militarized settlements and military strongpoints that encircled the open concentration camp that was Gaza, into a narrative of uncontrolled

bloodlust which was then fed to an unquestioning western audience by a compliant mass media.

I watched how the world rallied to the shock generated by the fiction of 40 beheaded Israeli babies, while remaining silent over the real deaths of nearly 400 Palestinian children killed—no, murdered—by Israeli air attacks.



Palestinian children killed by Israeli bombs, Gaza, October 2023

And I decided that I could no longer stand with Israel.

I arrived late to the Palestinian cause. I was too wrapped up in the Israeli saga, too invested in the Israeli fantasy, to see the forest for the trees. I was too busy hating Hamas to realize that I should instead be hating that which enabled Hamas to carry out the crimes it has committed for the past four decades.

Simply put, I was blind to the tragedy of the Palestinian people.

Today I know that the only true victims in the Israeli saga (outside the children from every walk of life who are caught up in the tragic events foisted upon them by adults who claim to be working for a bright and shiny tomorrow, but only deliver death and destruction) are the Palestinian people.

At least Israel's founding fathers were honest enough to acknowledge this.

The Zionists of today lack the moral character to admit that Israel can only be built and sustained at the cost of a viable, free, and independent Palestine, that Israel will never allow such a Palestine to exist, and that if there is a Zionist Israel, there will never be an independent Palestine.

The sins of the fathers are real, especially when it comes to Israel's founding fathers and the crimes they committed against the Palestinian people. Moshe Dyan admitted this much. So, too, did David Ben Gurion. These were men—fundamentally flawed in their ideologies and

motivations, but honestly so.

Benjamin Netanyahu and his fellow modern-day Israeli politicians, regardless of political affiliation, have no such integrity. They are inveterate liars, men and women who will promise one thing, then do another, when it comes to the future of Palestine, all the while leading Israel down the path of permanent war.

I arrived late to the Palestinian cause, but now that I am here, I can say this—the best way to defeat both Hamas and Zionist Israel is to support a free and independent Palestinian state.

I have never stood with Hamas, and I never will.

I once stood with Israel, but I will never do so again.

For four decades now, the Israeli-Hamas collusion has run its tragic course, each side proclaiming its desire to destroy the other, and yet each side knowing the awful truth—that one cannot exist without the other.

The Israeli-Palestine problem has become a never-ending cycle of violence which feeds off the pain and suffering of the Palestinian people. It is time to bring this cycle to an end.

From this moment forward, I will always stand with the people of Palestine, convinced that the only path for peace in the Middle East is one that leads through a viable Palestinian homeland, its capital firmly and forever ensconced in East Jerusalem.

In this way, Hamas will be disenfranchised as a terrorist organization—a legitimate Palestinian state takes away the perpetual state of conflict Hamas contributes to, a status which is justified by the pursuit of a legitimate Palestinian state. Zionist Israel will never allow to exist.

A legitimate Palestinian state delegitimizes the notion of a Zionist Israeli entity which, by definition, can only exist by the perpetual exploitation of the Palestinian people. Benjamin Netanyahu was able to sustain the modern-day version of the Zionist Israeli state by generating fear through the endless cycle of Hamas-driven violence.

Remove the threat posed by Hamas, and Zionist Israel no longer will be able to blind the citizens of Israel and the world to the apartheid-like reality of the present-day Israeli existence. Basic humanity will compel Zionist Israel to shed its Zionist ideology, just as apartheid South Africa shed its ugly legacy of White supremacy. Post-Zionist Israel will be compelled by necessity to learn to coexist with its non-Jewish neighbors peacefully and prosperously, not as a colonial apartheid state, but as equal partners in the experiment of life that will have collectively seized the people who call the Holy Land home.

The words of Roger Waters's great song, [*The Gunner's Dream*](#), come to mind when envisioning such a place:

You can relax

on both sides of the tracks

And maniacs

don't blow holes in bandsmen by remote control

And everyone has recourse to the law

And no one kills the children anymore

I stand with Palestine because I want to live in a world where children are no longer plucked from blood-stained furniture strewn about a Kibbutz ransacked by Hamas gunmen, or extracted, broken and blackened by soot, from the remains of a home pulverized by Israeli bombs.

No one kills the children anymore.

These lyrics may come from *The Gunner's Dream*, but they should be a permanent part of the dreams of every human being alive who claims to be holding on to a shred of humanity and compassion for their fellow human beings.

I stand with Palestine, because I stand for the children of Israel and Palestine, knowing full well that the only chance they have of a future where they can live together as neighbors united in peace, instead of enemies united in war, is for a free and independent Palestine to exist.

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