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Dennis Hale
& Marc Landy:
Deneen vs. the Founders

Allen C. Guelzo:
Slavery and Oligarchy

Mark Bauerlein:
David Horowitz

William Voegeli:
*Thomas Sowell's
Discrimination and Disparities*

Edward Feser:
Steven Pinker's Enlightenment

Christopher DeMuth:
The Difference Congress Makes

Glenn Ellmers:
*The Jordan Peterson
Phenomenon*

Benjamin Balint
Jonathan Bronitsky
Michael S. Kochin
Michael Rosen:
Israel, Then & Now

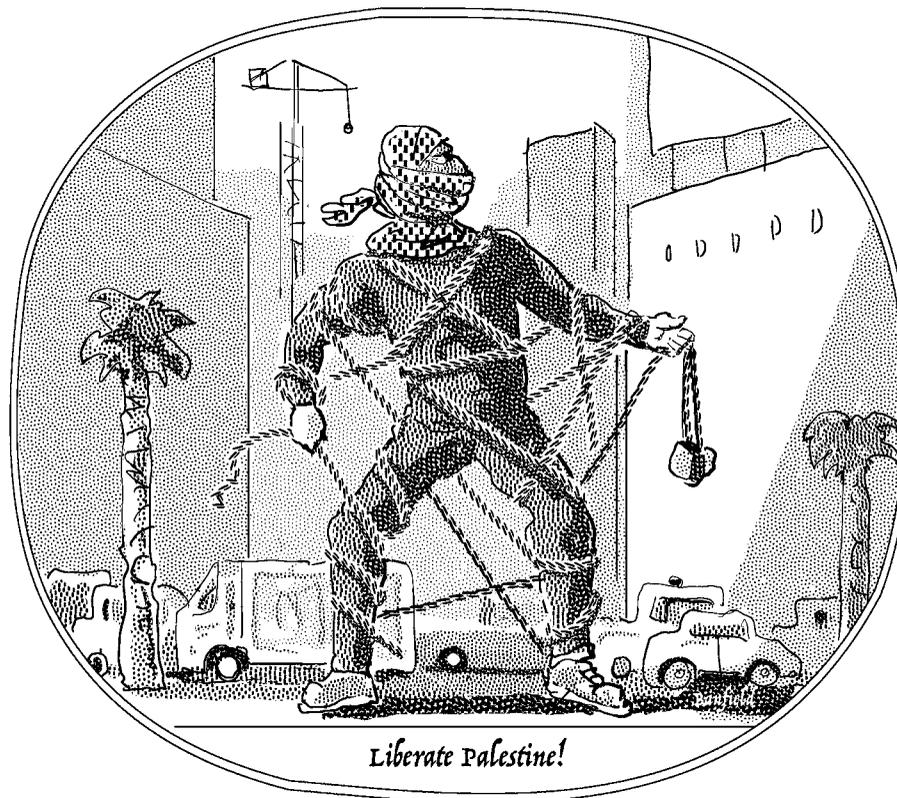
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WHY NOT A PALESTINIAN SINGAPORE?

Enemies and Neighbors: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917–2017, by Ian Black.
Atlantic Monthly Press, 640 pages, \$30



NEAR THE MIDDLE OF IAN BLACK'S narrative of 100 years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a revealing moment: when in July 1993 Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat agreed to a deal with Israel (in the so-called Oslo Accords), PLO executive committee member Shafiq al-Hout resigned in indignation. "I left [Arafat]," Black quotes al-Hout, "in the company of the group of hypocrites who were going to build him Hong Kong and Singapore on the sands of the Gaza strip and the Hills of the West Bank." Why *not* a Palestinian Singapore? Why not a free, prosperous, commercial republic alongside Israel on the Mediterranean's Eastern shore?

Black's *Enemies and Neighbors: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917–2017* aims to give both the Palestinian and the Israeli narratives, the stories that Israeli Jews and their Palestinian neighbors tell themselves and others about the conflict. But the book is not really about their accounts. International observers and intervenors like Black have their own conventional narrative, one constructed in the United Nations and European foreign ministry reports and the pages of newspapers

like the *Guardian*—where Black was Middle East editor.

ACCORDING TO THIS NARRATIVE, THERE has been, at least since the 19th century, a Palestinian people with a national identity distinct from their Arab neighbors, which unites all non-Jewish Palestinians. This people has been deprived by Western imperialism—and its Jewish beneficiaries—of their national homeland, which before Western incursion was a unified political and geographic entity. Jews are not a nation but a faith community, and had no aspiration for national redemption or a national homeland in Palestine before the late 19th-century Zionist movement. What Jews claim as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is Sunni Islam's third-holiest site; the Mount's Western Wall has long been revered by Muslims as the spot where Muhammed tied his winged horse al-Buraq before ascending into heaven on the site of the Dome of the Rock at the Mount's top. Peace between Israel and Palestine requires the erection of a Palestinian state, and at least the partial return of those Palestinians expelled in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and their descendants. The Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jeru-

salem, are illegal under international law, and their existence and growth are major—perhaps decisive—obstacles to a workable two-state settlement. The West Bank barrier fence is illegal under international law and is also a major obstacle to a workable settlement. Although Israeli forces left the Gaza Strip in 2005, Israel remains an occupying power under international law. The international community has a constructive role to play in making peace possible between Israel and Palestine, primarily by pressuring Israel to make concessions that her governments, held captive by nationalists, are unable to make themselves.

Black clearly and ably retells *this* narrative. He relies extensively on Jewish Israeli supporters of Palestinian national aspirations, though he admits that these advocates are prone to wishful thinking in describing Palestinian aspirations. Like other phenomena of modern cultural nationalism—the cult of Goethe, Arabic music, or the Egyptian film industry (before the Jews were expelled from Egypt by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, that film industry was, Black tells us, "the finest in the Arab world")—Palestinian national memory is, judging by the book's footnotes, mostly a Jewish invention.

BECAUSE ENEMIES AND NEIGHBORS rarely moves beyond the conventional narrative, it is useful primarily for those who need a handbook of that narrative—helpful to neophytes looking to absorb enough of the official line to make themselves acceptable in a foreign correspondent's office in Jerusalem, or an international aid agency in Gaza.

Of course, substantial elements of this story are false or misleading. Israel has *not* occupied Gaza since 2005. The Jews have longed for national redemption since the Babylonian subjugation in 586 B.C. Outside of Jerusalem's Jewish quarter and the Western Wall, there is not a spot in Judea and Samaria which most Jewish Israelis, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, would refuse to renounce if they thought it would purchase lasting peace. Moreover, if Palestinians can live in peace with Jewish neighbors in Tel Aviv or West Jerusalem, they should be able to live in peace with Jewish neighbors in Karnei Shomron or East Jerusalem. The barrier fence is no more permanent than the Berlin Wall, and will come down when those on both sides of it agree to take it down. The Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have gotten as far as they have toward self-government because they have had the Jews to grow with, rival, emulate, and fight against. Not just materially but culturally and politically the Arab population west of the Jordan has benefited from the investment and development brought and built by successive waves of Jewish immigration, even if their leaders would have preferred "none of your honey and none of your sting," as Black quotes the saying that the founder of modern Israel, David Ben-Gurion, attributed to them.

It is unfortunate that Black, who has a Ph.D. in political science from the London School of Economics, does not explore systematically why the Jews have built a state in the parts of Palestine they hold, while the Palestinians have not. To tell that story would require a book at least as big as Black's 600-plus pages.

Yet there is one part of that success and failure that has been neglected, and seems to me a sufficient explanation. Black has a lot to say about death—terror, counterterror, war, and massacre—but very little about taxes. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians are large per capita recipients of foreign aid. Israel receives about \$3 billion a year in military aid from the United States (74% is spent on American products), while the Palestinian Authority receives about \$1 billion a year in assistance from all sources, in addition to independently managed projects. 75% of what the U.N. calls "self-generated" Palestinian revenue (\$2 billion in 2014), is from import taxes collected by Israel on goods (such as fuel) shipped to the Palestinian territories. There are also transfers from

the Palestinian National Fund, which does not report its assets but has spent something like \$30 billion since its inception in 1964 as a holding agency for aid to the PLO from Arab states. Today that fund transfers to the Palestinian Authority approximately \$130 million a year to pay stipends to Palestinian prisoners, their families, and the families of terrorist "martyrs."

ALL THESE RESOURCES, WHICH FUND what passes for a Palestinian government in the West Bank, flow to that government without its having to build a revenue-generating capacity of its own—notwithstanding the U.N.'s Orwellian use of the term "self-generated revenue" to describe the import taxes collected by Israel and transferred to the Palestinian Authority. "Will developing countries learn to tax?" economist Nicholas Kaldor asked in 1965. In the West Bank, the Palestinians have not. Since government is mostly protecting people while extracting revenue to finance that protection, the Palestinians on the West Bank seem to show no interest in learning to govern themselves. The situation in Gaza is surprisingly better. Gaza is ruled by Hamas, the Palestinian affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike Fatah, the party that controls the Palestinian Authority, Hamas is dedicated by its charter to the genocidal eradication of Israel's Jews and, as Black admits, continues to reject the notion of a permanent peace with Israel regardless of Israeli concessions. From time to time Hamas acts on its program by trying to kill as many Jewish men, women, and children as it can.

Yet Hamas also controls the affairs of Gazans, to manage or mismanage as it sees fit. It continues to attack Israelis, and so the Israelis have blockaded Gaza's coast, closed its airspace, and closely regulated the flow of goods to and from Gaza through Israel. But notwithstanding Black's repetition of the conventional lie, this does not amount to an occupation. Gaza shares a border with Egypt, through which trade flows openly when the Egyptians choose to permit it (as under Mohamed Morsi's government) and clandestinely when the Egyptians do not. That trade, whether open or clandestine, is effectively controlled and taxed on the Gazan side by the Hamas government, and those taxes are its primary revenue source (apart from aid from friendly regimes like Qatar and Iran).

Why is there no state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, except in the imagination of Palestine's advocates? Of course the Palestinians want national freedom and self-government. Black gives us George Bernard Shaw's quotation about Ireland, put up at the 1975 founding of Birzeit, the first Palestinian university under the Israeli occupation:

If you break a nation's nationality it will think of nothing else but getting it back again. It will listen to no reformer, to no philosopher, to no preacher, until the demand of the nationalist is granted. It will attend to no business, however vital, except the business of unification and liberation.

BUT THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THINGS the Palestinians wanted more than they wanted a State of Palestine: to return to the homes from which the Jews drove them in 1948; to destroy what the Jews have built, in part on the wreckage of Arab Palestinian towns, neighborhoods, and villages; to do their part for the world, the Arab, or the Islamic revolution. "The mind of the revolution is very different from the mind of the state," said current Palestinian Authority President and Fatah leader Muhammed Abbas in 1993. What has determined the course of a century of conflict since the Balfour Declaration is, mostly, the choices Palestine Arabs have made.

Sufficient international pressure or even Palestinian violence could drive the Jews and their army out of Judea and Samaria, as violence drove them out of Gaza and southern Lebanon. But until the Palestinians want a State of Palestine alongside Israel, Israeli retreat to the other side of the 1949 armistice lines would merely transform civil war into interstate war, in which Israeli violence would no longer be constrained by the need to preserve Israeli rule in the West Bank.

Israeli Jewish sympathizers with Palestinian nationalism have no difficulty explaining to the Palestinians how they can "liberate" the "Occupied Territories": confining violence to soldiers and settlers, while relying primarily on nonviolent methods such as propaganda, boycotts, strikes, and lobbying for international sanctions. But to liberate those territories without a return to the homeland conquered from the Arabs by the Jews in 1948 would be to make in Palestine another Israel or another Singapore, another city-state with an open economy and a government that has to live largely on what it can tax.

Despite the settlements and the seemingly endless cycle of violence, the Palestinians could have that state basically for the asking. To understand the conflict beyond the conventional narrative that Black retells, and why it has escalated despite efforts to resolve it, one needs to understand why Palestinians refuse to ask for Singapore.

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