



THE MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM

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When I did my graduate studies at the Middle East Institute at Columbia University's School of International Affairs, I took many courses on the question of the Middle East conflict.

Semester after semester, we studied the Middle East conflict as if it was the most complex conflict in the world – when in fact, it is probably the easiest conflict in the world to explain. It may be the hardest to solve, but it is the easiest to explain.

In a nutshell, it's this: One side wants the other side dead.

Israel wants to exist as a Jewish state and to live in peace. Israel also recognizes the right of Palestinians to have their own state and to live in peace. The problem, however, is that most Palestinians and many other Muslims and Arabs, do not recognize the right of the Jewish state of Israel to exist.

This has been true since 1947, when the United Nations voted to divide the land called Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state.

The Jews accepted the United Nations partition but no Arab or any other Muslim country accepted it.

When British rule ended on May 15, 1948, the armies of all the neighboring Arab states – Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, and Egypt – attacked the one-day old state of Israel in order to destroy it.

But, to the world's surprise, the little Jewish state survived.

Then it happened again. In 1967, the dictator of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, announced his plan, in his words, “to destroy Israel.” He placed Egyptian troops on Israel's border, and armies of surrounding Arab countries were also mobilized to attack. However, Israel preemptively attacked Egypt and Syria. Israel did not attack Jordan, and begged Jordan's king not to join the war. But he did. And only because of that did Israel take control of Jordanian land, specifically the “West Bank” of the Jordan River.

Shortly after the war, the Arab states went to Khartoum, Sudan and announced their famous three “No's: “No recognition, no peace, and no negotiations,”

What was Israel supposed to do?

Well, one thing Israel did, a little more than a decade later, in 1978, was to give the entire Sinai Peninsula – an area of land bigger than Israel itself, and with oil – back to Egypt because Egypt, under new leadership, signed a peace agreement with Israel.

So, Israel gave land for the promise of peace with Egypt, and it has always been willing to do the same thing with the Palestinians. All the Palestinians have ever had to do is recognize Israel as a Jewish state and promise to live in peace with it.

But when Israel has proposed trading land for peace – as it did in 2000 when it agreed to give the Palestinians a sovereign state in more than 95% of the West Bank and all of Gaza – the Palestinian leadership rejected the offer, and instead responded by sending waves of suicide terrorists into Israel.

Meanwhile, Palestinian radio, television, and school curricula remain filled with glorification of terrorists, demonization of Jews, and the daily repeated message that Israel should cease to exist.

So it's not hard to explain the Middle-East dispute. One side wants the other dead. The motto of Hamas, the Palestinian rulers of Gaza, is: "We love death as much as the Jews love life."

There are 22 Arab states in the world – stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean. There is one "Jewish State" in the world. And it is about the size of New Jersey. In fact, tiny El Salvador is larger than Israel.

Finally, think about these two questions: If, tomorrow, Israel laid down its arms and announced, "We will fight no more," what would happen? And if the Arab countries around Israel laid down their arms and announced "We will fight no more," what would happen?

In the first case there would be an immediate destruction of the state of Israel and the mass murder of its Jewish population. In the second case, there would be peace the next day.

As I said at the outset, it is a simple problem to describe: one side wants the other dead – and if it didn't, there would be peace.

Please remember this: There has never been a state in the geographic area known as Palestine that was not Jewish. Israel is the third Jewish state to exist in that area. There was never an Arab state, never a Palestinian state, never a Muslim or any other state.

That's the issue: why can't the one Jewish state the size of El Salvador be allowed to exist?

That is the Middle-East problem.

I'm Dennis Prager.