

Contested Territory or Contested Faith

*Is the honesty required to make
peace in historic Palestine
anything more than an impossible
dream?*

by [Robert Harris](#) (December 2023)



Curving Road– Ziva Jelin, 2010

In many ways the conflict in Israel is a question of framing. Is it simply a question of territory as some would have us believe or is it fundamentally a matter between Middle Eastern Muslim Arabs and the Jewish people that have the misfortune to find themselves within Dar al-Islam (the House of Islam)? This

question of how we frame an issue also involves the debate over the horrors of October 7th. Of course everything has a context but the question as to whether or not it took place within “a vacuum” is more appropriately addressed a matter of moral discernment, involving the question of whether or not there is any substantive or meaningful justification for debased violence against civilians—violence of the kind seen on that terrible day? If we were to speak more purely and impartially of a “context” in which events occur then in an overtly material sense we could more easily point to the regional pogromic violence of the past such as the 1929 Hebron Massacre which was driven by Islamist inspired anti-Semitism and was every bit as brutal where the figure that inspired that violence (Haj Amin al-Husseini) was similarly tied to the Muslim Brotherhood.



Thomas Fazi

When framing our understanding of the nature of a conflict with which many seem to unsuccessfully grapple, it is surely appropriate to ask questions of what pre-empted that conflict, what defines how it today by looking at what events lead to violence, and how it diverges from other regional conflicts. This article responds on a point by point basis to Thomas Fazi's *Unherd* [article](#), “Why peace in Israel failed” (October 24th, 2023). In an [interview](#) on UK Talk TV's ‘The Independent Republic of Mike Graham,’ Mr. Fazi presented his thesis that the Arab-Palestinian side is being unfairly being presented in the media as having rejected peace deals on various occasions. The interview displays a prejudiced reading of history and,

while it is perfectly legitimate to feature such voices on the media, Mr. Fazi's reading of history allowed him to put forth such a hypothesis through omission where, for example, he stated that Hamas is a practical organisation that has called for truces. In 2008 Hamas offered a 'hudna,' i.e. a temporary truce (typically ten years) if Israel withdrew to the 1949 lines. Similarly, in 2017, another offer was made to create an Arab-Palestinian state that did not recognise Israel's existence. These offers merely [seek to further](#) disadvantage an opponent whilst regrouping.

In "Why peace in Israel failed," Mr. Fazi pushes the propagandistic narrative that this conflict is essentially a matter of unwarranted territorial gains and expulsions, surely a particularly wearisome and reductive simplification in the aftermath of October 7th. He claims that "Israel captured the territories it had failed to occupy in 1948—the Jordanian-controlled West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip—putting all of historical Palestine under its control." This is untrue. The entirety of historic Palestine was originally designated for a Jewish homeland but, in 1921, 77% was ceded to TransJordan and the rest of the territory (Cis-Jordan—West of the River Jordan) would continue to be designated for a Jewish homeland. There was no legitimate occupier prior to that time as a succession of empires controlled the territory, last of all the Ottoman Empire. Mr. Fazi again misrepresents the historical circumstances by presenting Israel as the aggressor in 1948 when, in fact, five Arab nations declared war on the country, with Azzam Pasha, head of the Arab League, [declaring](#) the year before that a terrible and historic genocide would soon be visited upon the Jewish people.

Mr. Fazi wrote, with regard to the West Bank/Judea and Samaria: "even though Israel promised to normalise the lives of the Palestinians in these territories, its political goals could only translate into a system of control and domination.

The Israeli historian Ilan Pappé describes what emerged as “the largest mega-prison ever created.” It has been widely noted for some time that Pappé is [not a reliable source](#) and is famously biased against Israel in his reading of history. Israel greatly developed the regions under military control, the infrastructure and the welfare of the people whose population grew rapidly with life expectancy growing rapidly. There is of course nothing akin to the embargo upon the populace unlike that found in Hamas-run Gaza. Mr. Fazi is likely referring either to the oft-claimed encirclement of Bethlehem which is an overt [falsehood](#), or the security barrier (the famed ‘[Apartheid Wall](#)’ of which only circa 5% is wall rather than fencing) in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria which effectively brought the end to the Second Intifada as various terrorist sources subsequently admitted. The region is not closed to the external world since there is travel from Amman airport which some international figures prefer to take when choosing to snub Israel. Access to Israel is restricted during times of intensified violence but permits have always increased after lulls as with an easing of roadblocks. Whilst no doubt a disturbing hindrance in a civil environment, these encumbrances are a response to substantive episodic periods of violence rather than of punishment and, therefore, must be a legitimate addition to the landscape unless Jewish-Israeli lives are deemed to somehow be of less worth, as would surely be within the mindset of many anti-Israel activists that today are increasingly displaying a grotesque tolerance of the most debased genocidal violence, where, somehow, Hamas remains part of the “resistance” whilst the Jewish State is supposedly a “terrorist entity.”

It is quite extraordinary to read Mr. Fazi’s criticism of Israel for “crushing the PLO” –the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was a highly efficient and notably brutish terrorist organisation which was responsible for some of the most infamous international acts of terrorism during the 1970s and 80s. He says that the existence of Hamas “allowed Israel

to brand the Palestinian struggle as part of a global anti-Western Islamic jihad” –this is nonsense as the PLO were known as a particularly destructive terrorist organisation that possesses an Islamist orientation of its own even if it is less explicit. The genocide of the Lebanese Christian town of Damour is evidence of this fact as well as the brutal killings of Jewish civilians living in Europe. If there is any truth to the claim then, at worst, it would represent the strengthening of a competitor to take some power away from what was then the all-powerful PLO which aided other terrorist organisations across the world during the 70s and 80s. Israel did not create pro-Palestinian Islamism for how would Mr. Fazi explain the existence of Hizbullah—a Shia terror group which was the product of the theocracy of Iran?

Mr. Fazi describes the First Intifada as “anti-occupation riots” –to a significant extent it was in fact a [purge](#) of moderate Arab-Palestinian people. He then waxes lyrical on why Israeli PM Rabin was assassinated but he fails to note that Israel was suffering under an increasing rate of terrorism at the time, with only passing mention of Hamas’ attacks, and indeed this failure to appropriately address the consequences of terrorism, and broader radicalism is found throughout his apologia for Arab-Palestinian intransigence.

For a refutation that Arafat is largely to blame for the failure of the Camp David talks, Mr. Fazi relies on the claims of Robert Malley, whose opinions and actions have suggested that he is [far from an impartial](#) observer. He claims that an Arab-Palestinian State was to only take up 20% of the remaining 20% of the Palestinian land taken in 1967. This is abject nonsense. He also claims that a village near Jerusalem was to be the capital of the Arab-Palestinian State. However, it is well-known that there was to be [a partitioned sovereignty](#) over Jerusalem and he speaks of the Right of Return which breaches the *two states for two peoples* principle of the peace process. As Benny Morris [noted](#), some Arab-

Palestinians were expelled in 1948 but most fled under the instruction of Arab leaders, and there were similar expulsions of Jewish people from the territories the Arab armies occupied. Most of the long ignored Jewish refugees from the Arab world, the Mizrahi Jews, also fled to Israel after hellish persecution and acts of genocide that paralleled NAZI Germany.

Mr. Fazi also claimed in his interview with Mike Graham that the Camp David talks failed due to an offer of a non-contiguous State in which Israeli settlements were embedded into its fabric. This old untruth often used the term 'cantons' a la Apartheid South Africa but has been [robustly denied](#) and would in any case be quite impossible where Arafat was offered 90% of his territorial demands. Arafat is said to have walked away from Camp David in 2000 because he would not accept shared sovereignty over the Haram al Sharif (Temple Mount). Mr. Fazi conveniently ignores the subsequent talks as well—Arafat walked away from more generous concessions at Taba in 2001. Mahmoud Abbas walked away in 2007-08 despite later [acknowledging](#) he had received all territorial demands. Similarly in 2011-12, noted US peacemaker George Mitchell stated that the PA again [walked away](#) despite getting their initial terms met in order to enter into peace talks.

Mr. Fazi states that “growing anger and frustration of Palestinians eventually led to the outburst of the second Palestinian uprising, in the autumn of 2000,” and that “Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit to the Temple Mount, a Muslim holy site, is what likely triggered the Second Intifada.” Sorry, what was Mr. Fazi saying about Israel having encouraged an Islamist terror movement called Hamas to the detriment of the PLO? How could a Jew visiting the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif lead to the death of a thousand Israelis and the serious injury of thousands alone in Jerusalem?

We could in fact assert that the conflict started in the 1920s where genocidal anti-Semitism emerged as a cornerstone of this

conflict when the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al Husseini, incited massacres of the Jewish populace over libels concerning the supposed desire of Jewish people to take over the Temple Mount—a libel recounted today even by supposed moderates in the Palestinian Authority. This led to genocidal brutality, of particular note in Hebron, 1929 which was every bit as bad as the excesses of Hamas on October 7th. During this era, the rest of the Islamic Middle East intensified its persecution of the ancient Jewish demographic largely in parallel with NAZI Germany. Dreadfully sorry, Mr Fazi, but this comes across as a form of Islamist intolerance for which even the likes of supposed secular moderates like President Abbas use today, for example [stating back in 2015](#), that “the Al-Aqsa [Mosque] is ours ... and they [the Jews] have no right to defile it with their filthy feet. We will not allow them to, and we will do everything in our power to protect Jerusalem,” which unsurprisingly led to a dramatic upsurge in violence. The [Mitchell Report, 2001](#), notes that the Sharon visit did not cause the Second Intifada, and it has [become evident](#) that Sharon was scapegoated by the PLO.

Mr. Fazi ignores the pan-Arab rejectionism of any right of Jewish self-determination in the region on however small a plot land it might be—they famously rejected a tiny 17% Jewish State (5% of the original mandate) proposed by the Peel Commission which was [rejected in 1938](#) by Arab representatives, and a slightly more balanced division under the 1947 UN partition plan where there was effectively <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/map-of-the-u-n-partition-plan> a near-100% Arab State that was slightly smaller than a Jewish-majority State with a substantial Arab minority. Jerusalem would be under international control under both plans. It offered to give back most of the territory it seized in 1967 after launching a legitimate pre-emptive strike (with *casus belli*) against Egypt but was greeted with the Three No's of Khartoum (no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel) and continued aggression.

Most egregiously, Mr. Fazi said that Hamas are a practical organisation that has called for truces. In 2008 Hamas offered a 'hudna', i.e. a temporary truce (typically ten years) if Israel withdrew to the 1949 lines. Similarly, in 2017, another offer was made to create an Arab-Palestinian state that did not recognise Israel's existence. Why on earth would Israel make such an immense trade without any promise of a lasting peace and recognition of its right to exist?

Hamas has turned Gaza which was troubled by conflict under Israeli rule but economically quite successful and had the promise of substantial assistance to turn itself into a flourishing economy. Gazans chose to elect Hamas which had by then a very well-established identity as the most extreme terror organisation in the region which conducted the greatest number of terrorist atrocities (including suicide bombings) during the then very recently ended Second Intifada, and surveys have since shown that support for Hamas remains despite the harms they have put the populace through, whilst using the huge amounts of international aid that the region receives (note that the population has grown very substantially since Israel's withdrawal) to fuel conflict with Israel.

Mr. Fazi claims of Gaza that Israel's "besieging and blockading of the Strip, which led to violent retaliation by Palestinian armed groups" and conflates the death tolls of combatant terrorists and civilians, as per usual within the mainstream media and prejudiced NGOs, which rely on Hamas controlled organisations like Gaza's health ministry. Is it not time to say that we cannot rely on such tolls in the aftermath of the Al-Ahli hospital debacle, where a car park was hit by an Islamic Jihad missile, and a fraction of the initially claimed 500 have in fact died? The reality is to the back of Mr Fazi's front—namely that chaos ensued after Israel left Gaza in 2005 where the abandoned industry and Jewish settlements were needlessly destroyed. [Israel and the PA](#)

[signed](#) the 'Agreement on Movement & Access,' to give free access of people and goods into Israel but conditions continued to go downhill when Hamas was elected and effectively revolted in a war with the Palestinian Authority, where the EU and the Quartet suspended assistance to Gaza. In 2008, Hamas continued to attack on Israeli territory and an [embargo](#) was introduced.

The sad reality is that Israel was [softening its embargo](#) on Gaza when Hamas unleashed what can only be described as an act of genocide. If Mr. Fazi and his ilk are serious about question why peace remains so elusive, he must look squarely at the Islamist radicalism embedded within the populace whilst not reinforce Hamas' appalling propagandistic machinations (whether they do so intentionally or not)! People that avert their faces from this horror—a medievalist dehumanisation of the Ancient Jewish Nation and Hamas' cynical propaganda which uses the bodies of the people they supposedly represent as a bulwark—cannot be true supporters of the Arab-Palestinian people for how could any of their supporters wish a seemingly eternal bloody struggle upon them?

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