

# Rejectionism: The Barrier to Real Peace in the Mideast

by [Matthew M. Hausman](#) (November 2014)

*The following is the text of remarks delivered at a program in Fairfield, Connecticut on September 22, 2014. The program focused on the doctrinal, cultural and historical bases for anti-Israel rejectionism and the resulting impediment to lasting peace.*

Let's start off with two questions to establish some context.

How many Zionists does it take to screw in a light bulb? The answer is three: the first one to raise the funds and buy the bulb; the second to screw it in; and the third to proclaim that the entire Jewish People stands behind the actions of the first two.

Now, how many Jewish radicals does it take to screw in a light bulb? The answer is only two: one to screw it in and the other to denounce the burning out of the first bulb as a Zionist plot.

Tongue and cheek aside, self-rejection has been a persistent phenomenon throughout Jewish history, often manifesting as the repudiation of tradition, observance, Jewish national character and, perhaps most critically in our generation, the State of Israel.

There were Hellenizers during the Greek period, apostates who assisted the Dominicans in persecuting fellow Jews during the Middle Ages, Soviet collaborators who criminalized the practice of Judaism in the former Soviet Union, and kapos during the Second World War.

Today there are some, particularly on the political left, who express their hatred for Israel by advocating Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions ("BDS") activities, participating in Israel Apartheid Week, and supporting the anti-Israel lawfare movement. This phenomenon must be acknowledged preliminarily to show that rejectionist thinking exists within the wider Jewish community, where it is often tolerated by progressive establishment leaders as an alternative, yet authentic, point of view. This is nonsense, however; and rejectionism should be exposed for the self-loathing that it is.

Why is this important? Because if we don't recognize the self-contempt of some elements within our own community, we won't be able to deal effectively with the doctrinal, cultural, and

political rejectionism that comes from the outside and stands in the way of real peace and acceptance of Israel.

#### Arab-Israeli Conflict is not about Settlements

There are certain bromides regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict that are accepted as essential truths, but which actually have no basis in fact. Chief among these is that the conflict is about Palestinian land claims and supposedly illegal Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria.

However, the conflict is not really about settlements, which are perfectly legal under international law, or about the rights of a Palestinian people that is more a modern political creation than a historical reality. It's not about anything Israel says or does.

Rather, the conflict is about the rejection of Israel's very right to exist. The Arab-Muslim refusal to accept the existence of a Jewish State predates Israel's acquisition of Judea and Samaria in 1967. It also predates the first attempted war of extermination against Israel in 1948, as well as the unanimous Arab-Muslim rejection of partition in 1947.

The veracity of this thesis can be tested by asking one simple question. If the conflict were really about achieving Palestinian statehood in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, why was such a state never created when these lands were occupied (and illegally so) by Jordan and Egypt between 1948 and 1967? Where was the international outcry for an independent state of Palestine then?

The truth is that nobody clamored for the creation of such a state during that time – not the United Nations, not the Arab-Muslim world and not the Palestinians themselves – who would not be portrayed as an ancient, indigenous people with an independent identity until sometime after Israel liberated Judea and Samaria from illegal Jordanian and Egyptian control. The international community posits the need for such a state now only to delegitimize Jewish historical claims.

Over the last twenty-one years, the denigration of Israel's legal and historical foundation has been facilitated and reinforced by the Oslo Process, which early on became a vehicle for validating a competing national narrative that rejects Jewish history, asserts the Jews are foreign usurpers, and claims that Solomon's Temple never stood in Jerusalem.

#### Abbas has always Rejected the Concept of a Jewish State

When Mahmoud Abbas proclaimed that the Palestinians would never recognize a Jewish state or relinquish their unfounded "right of return," he effectively denied Israel's right to exist, called for her demographic destruction, and demonstrated the uselessness of negotiations. In

gauging the intent of such rejectionist statements, it's important to recognize that they haven't been said only once or twice to appease Arab audiences. Abbas has made such pronouncements numerous times, regardless of who was listening or the language in which his words were being reported.

Rather than chastise Abbas and the PA, the United States and the European Union admonished Israel for insisting on her recognition as a Jewish state in the first place. In castigating Israel for insisting on an acknowledgement of her legal and historical legitimacy, they belittled her existential concerns and lent credence to a revisionist historical narrative.

John Kerry Blamed Israel, but never Criticized Abbas for his Rejectionism

In effect, John Kerry scolded Israel for Abbas's provocations, and this is disturbing for two reasons. First, it demonstrated a dismissive contempt for the concerns of a long-standing ally of the United States. Second, it resembled a common strategy for dealing with political infighting in the Mideast, which is to deflect attention from political turmoil by inciting against the Jewish State.

Jewish proponents of the Oslo Process claim that words don't matter. They argue that only actions count, and that regardless of the vile anti-Semitism emanating from Palestinian schools, mosques, propaganda offices and media outlets, Israel and the Jews have a responsibility to agree to peace at any cost, and that the reality of peace will somehow change the malevolent ideology of Israel's enemies.

But this is either magical thinking or addled progressive fantasy. Peace is not possible when the goal of negotiations is to obtain territorial concessions from Israel as the first stage in her destruction as a Jewish State. Palestinian leadership has stated this goal repeatedly, and public opinion polls by Pew and other reputable organizations have consistently shown that the Palestinian majority rejects the concept of permanent peace with a Jewish nation.

The two-state solution is actually seen by those who would negotiate at all as a two-phased solution. The first phase would be the creation of a twenty-third Arab State (and the fifty-seventh Muslim State), while the second would be the demographic destruction of Israel through an influx of forced non-Jewish immigration. The only thing Israel would receive in return would be the empty promise of "normalization" to be conferred after her security and viability have been compromised. However, even if one believes the risk is worth taking, vague promises of normalization are worthless when coupled with a resolute refusal to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state. This is in practice something far less than real recognition.

Verbal promises of even limited recognition, moreover, have to be measured against the history of Arab-Muslim rejectionism. Because of the doctrinal concept of dissimulation that informs dialogue with “infidels,” such verbal promises are tantamount to no assurances at all.

It’s easy to see why Israel’s enemies want her to sacrifice her security and national integrity. But what drives the European Union and the United States to chide Israel for refusing to court her own destruction?

The answer is that they either do not understand Mideast history and politics or they have little regard for Israel’s safety and welfare. Regardless of the reason, any self-serving claims that they are motivated by genuine concern for Israel must be taken with a very large grain of salt. This is particularly so in light of the Obama administration’s suspension of the shipment of Hellfire Missiles to Israel in the middle of the Gaza war. This is not the way real allies are treated.

The only honest message to come out of last year’s failed negotiations was Abbas’s refusal to recognize a Jewish state under any circumstances – and by extension Israel’s right to exist.

#### Doctrinal Rejectionism

The lesson we can take from this rejectionism is that genuine peace will never be possible without a sea change in the way the Islamic world regards Jews.

An essential tenet in conflict resolution is that all sides must commit to the process and agree to concessions. It’s difficult to justify Israel’s participation in such a process, however, when Jews are not regarded as sovereign equals and the process sacrilizes a revisionist Palestinian narrative that repudiates Jewish history and promotes anti-Semitism.

Although it is often claimed that Islamic culture is not inherently anti-Semitic, Jews in Islamic society have traditionally been treated as a dispossessed minority with few substantive rights. It is this dynamic that drives the Arab-Israeli conflict, not concern for the fate of Palestinians in a land to which they were historical latecomers.

Despite modern Arab and Islamic claims to the Land of Israel (which are not supported by their own scripture), the most consistent cultural imprint on the land – the only one that dates back thousands of years and is confirmed by archeology, literature and the historical record – is Jewish. It’s not Arab, it’s not Islamic, and it’s certainly not “Canaanite” as some Palestinians like to assert in falsely claiming descent from indigenous pre-Israelite culture. This latter claim is pure invention.

The Jewish character of the land is reflected by the wealth of Jewish holy sites it contains, the remains of ancient synagogues, mikvas, shrines, dwelling places and artifacts found all over the country from north to south, and the Hebrew place names that have been in continuous use throughout the land since Biblical times – thousands of years before the Arab conquest.

But history means nothing to those who are vested only in denying the Jews' long connection to their homeland.

#### Treatment of the Jews under Islam

It's often claimed that anti-Jewish violence was rare in Islamic society, but it was actually quite common. Jews were slaughtered, segregated, and forcibly converted across the Mideast and North Africa starting in the eighth century – just as they were in Christian Europe. The following historical highlights, among many others, illustrate the perilousness of Jewish existence in the lands of Islam.

- In the late 700s, King Idris I massacred entire communities in Morocco after concluding sham treaties with them, setting a precedent for repeated pogroms and massacres over the succeeding centuries.
- In 1066, Muslim rioters destroyed the Jewish quarter of Granada, slaughtering its residents and crucifying its leader, Yosef Ha-Nagid, after Muslim clerics accused the Jews of usurping political power beyond their subjugated status.
- In 1465, Arab mobs killed thousands in Fez after Muslim preachers accused Jews of offending the honor of Muslim women.
- In 1785, Ali Burzi Pasha massacred Jews in Libya in 1785, and Jews were murdered indiscriminately in Algiers in a series of riots from 1805 to 1830.

Similar massacres occurred throughout the Islamic world with a barbarity rivaling that of the Crusaders. But it wasn't all murder and mayhem; there was institutional abuse and cultural repression as well.

In accordance with a series of edicts from Muslim religious authorities, for example, synagogues were destroyed in Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Iraq repeatedly between the years 854 and 1676. Although Islam supposedly prohibits forced conversions, they were actually quite common from its earliest days; and entire communities were converted under duress, for example in Yemen, Morocco, Baghdad, and Iran, from the twelfth through nineteenth centuries.

Jews were seen as subservient, and this dynamic was no less apparent in the Ottoman Empire, and in particular the region that would become the British Mandate.

### The Arab Population in Mandatory Palestine

Organized violence against Jews living under the British Mandate began in earnest in 1920 with attacks on Jewish towns in the north, and continued into 1921 with riots in Yafo, Petah Tikva and elsewhere. Spurred on by Haj Amin al-Husseini and facilitated by the British, Arab rioters in 1929 massacred many Jews in Tzfat and Hevron and expelled the survivors. Though these cities were historically Jewish, and in fact constituted two of the four “mystical cities” in Jewish tradition, they were disingenuously designated as Arab thereafter.

Attacks and riots continued throughout the 1930s, culminating in the issuance of the White Paper in 1939, which restricted Jewish immigration and thereby assured the deaths of millions during the Holocaust. No similar curbs were placed on Arab immigration.

Agitation against Jews throughout the Mandate wasn't caused by boundary disputes or arguments over territory per se. Rather, it was motivated by cultural chauvinism and the sectarian refusal to acknowledge the Jews' ancestral rights in their homeland.

This rejectionism dictated the treatment of Jews long before the rebirth of Israel and was unrelated to the purported rights of Palestinians, who had no political existence before the creation of a national identity years after Israeli independence. How do we know this?

For one thing, it was acknowledged by many Palestinian leaders and Arab intellectuals over the years, including the late Zahir Muhsein, who in a 1977 interview with the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* stated: “The ‘Palestinian People’ does not exist. The creation of a Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the State of Israel.”

Yasser Arafat voiced similar sentiments when he stated in his authorized biography that: “The Palestinian people have no national identity. I, Yasser Arafat, man of destiny, will give them that identity through conflict with Israel.” (Arafat was born in Egypt, by the way.)

It was also stated much earlier by Auni Bey Abdul-Hadi in 1937, when he testified before the Peel Commission that: “There is no such country [as Palestine]. ‘Palestine’ is a term the Zionists invented. There is no Palestine in the Bible. Our country was for centuries part of Syria.”

Interestingly, the only people who referred to themselves as “Palestinians” in those days were Jews who lived in the former Ottoman territories comprising the British Mandate.

The Arab population in Ottoman/Mandate lands grew largely through immigration during the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Although many Jews also immigrated during this time, there was a native Jewish population that had been extant since before the Dispersion. In addition to an ancient presence in Jerusalem, the mystical cities and elsewhere, the village of Peqi'in was continuously inhabited by Jews since before the Jewish-Roman War. The native population in the Jewish homeland may have fluctuated in size over the years, but it was never entirely uprooted.

In contrast, there was never a sovereign nation called Palestine; and the Palestinians were never seen as a distinct people until the formulation of a national identity much later in the twentieth century.

The Jewish homeland was no more Arab or Islamic in origin than was Spain, which was conquered through jihad, but which expelled the last of its Muslim invaders in 1492. Or continental Europe, which repelled the last significant jihadi incursion at the Battle of Vienna in 1683.

Unfortunately, objective history doesn't deter those who call for the liberation of these lands from the native peoples who succeeded in expelling their Muslim conquerors. ISIS in fact recently proclaimed the retaking of Spain as one of its goals.

It also means nothing to those who believe that lands conquered through jihad can never revert to their infidel natives. This is one reason why mosques are built over the ruins of indigenous holy places, including Hindu temples in India, Buddhist shrines in Afghanistan, Christian churches in Istanbul, Spain and the Balkans, and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

History is inconvenient for those who advocate the creation of a state on behalf of a people whose connection to the Land of Israel is neither as grounded nor documented as that of the Jews.

Now, can Israel negotiate with a people who constitute a political entity if not a historical reality? That decision is up to her and her alone. However, any resulting deal will be doomed to failure if it is to be predicated on the validation of a national narrative that repudiates Jewish history, claims the Jews don't constitute a national entity, and seeks to invalidate Jewish historical claims.

Historical revisionism should have no place in the process if it is to yield a just result, or even a workable one.

The Conceit of Oslo

The architects of Oslo, however, were guided by just such revisionist delusions when they demanded recognition of Palestinian identity even as they disparaged Jewish national claims. The conceit of Oslo is that it validated the political existence of a people with a sketchy historical past, but downplayed the legitimacy of the only people with documented ancestral roots going back millennia.

This is actually supported, albeit unintentionally, by the definition of “refugee” used by the United Nations Relief and Works Administration (“UNRWA”). According to UNRWA, Arab refugees from the former Mandate are defined as those who: (a) established residency [within Mandate] territory between June 1946 and May 1948; (b) lost their homes and livelihoods during the 1948 War; and (c) reside in areas where UNRWA services are available. Unlike any other refugee group in history, their status is passed on to their descendants.

No similar agency was created to serve the needs of the eight-hundred thousand or more Jews who were expelled from Arab-Muslim lands in 1948 and dispossessed of their assets without compensation. Most of those Jews were taken in by Israel with no assistance from the UN and they ceased to be refugees. That’s normally the way it works.

UNRWA’s novel definition prompts the question of why refugee status would be based on a minimum two-year residency requirement if the Palestinians are truly descended from a people who inhabited the land for hundreds of generations. Clearly, they weren’t required to be native born or even descended from indigenous forebears to be considered refugees; and in fact the majority were immigrants themselves or the progeny of immigrants.

Israel made many concessions throughout the Oslo Process, under George Bush’s roadmap, and during Bill Clinton’s bullish initiative to pressure a two-state deal at Camp David. Over the years, Jewish ancestral rights were sacrificed, as happened when Great Britain conveyed nearly eighty percent of their homeland to the Hashemites who were expelled from the Arabian Peninsula in 1922. Or their rights were compromised, as when the Jews themselves agreed to accept a partitioned state comprising only a fraction of their traditional homeland in 1947.

In contrast, the Arab-Muslim world has never compromised, because doing so would require it to acknowledge the validity of Jewish national claims and would necessarily conflict with the view of Jews as a subjugated people.

The Palestinians had limited obligations under any negotiating framework – and what obligations they did have were primarily verbal. That is, they had to recognize Israel and forswear incitement.



However, the PA never really amended its charter, recognized Israel's right to exist, or renounced incitement and terror.

There is no incentive for the Palestinians to act otherwise because their behavior is ignored, excused or enabled by Washington and the European Union, which continue to pour money into Palestinian coffers. During the recent war, for example, the US provided \$47 million dollars in "humanitarian aid" to Gaza with no real checks or balances to assure that these funds would not be used to finance further terrorism and continuing hostilities against Israel.

If the international community truly wanted to assist in resolving the conflict, it would acknowledge the Jews' historical connection to Israel instead of uncritically promoting the Palestinian narrative as an article of faith.

Unfortunately, the EU's treatment of Israel is colored by an anti-Semitism that's been part of European culture for a thousand years. It's also influenced by the deference of many Europeans to the growing immigrant communities within their midst and their frequent collusion with Islamists.

Just as unfortunately, the United States has lost its way as a credible broker, succumbing to an obsession with "evenhandedness," which really means favoring the Palestinians at Israel's expense.

Palestinian Self-Determination?

The problem with all iterations of the peace process since the 1990s is that they have presumed a sacrosanct Palestinian right of self-determination based on revisionist history and elevated it over authentic Jewish claims that are part of the historical record.

While Israel can certainly negotiate with the Palestinians as an existing political fact on the ground, Oslo went further by essentially demanding that Israel embrace their authenticity, regardless of their lack of chronicled presence in the land as measured by language, culture, societal institutions or ancestral indigeneity. Israel's acquiescence constituted the acceptance of a competing national narrative that repudiates Jewish history and ignores the abundant archeological, ethnographic and literary proof of the Jews' origination and presence in Israel since antiquity. The validation of a competing, exclusionary narrative – whether tacit or explicit – was an existential mistake.

The pressure on Israel to affirm Palestinian authenticity must be contrasted against the Palestinians' refusal – and that of the entire Arab-Muslim world – to recognize the Jews'

right to self-determination in their homeland. Again, this refusal was expressed long before Judea and Samaria were liberated from Jordan in 1967, before the existence of any so-called settlements, and before the invention of the Palestinian national myth.

The reality is that Arab-Jewish relations have always been dictated by the refusal to accept Jews as sovereign equals.

Abbas's Pledge of Non-Recognition and the PA's Unity Government with Hamas are Consistent with this Long Pattern of Rejection

John Kerry was wrong when he stated to Congress that last year's breakdown in negotiations was caused by Israel's plan to build seven-hundred new apartments in a Jewish section of Jerusalem. Israel's construction plans did not involve so-called settlements, but rather a Jewish neighborhood in Jewish Jerusalem.

The truth is that Palestinian leadership doesn't want Jews to build anywhere in Israel – not in Jerusalem and not in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Golan or the Negev. The term "occupation," which is thrown around so freely by the President and his Secretary of State, is not limited to settlements in Judea and Samaria (to which Israel actually has more valid claims than the Palestinians), but instead refers to the entire state of Israel.

The cold hard fact that Westerners don't want to admit – the great elephant in the room – is that the Arab-Israeli conflict has never been about Palestinian claims. Rather, it is about the refusal to accept the existence of a Jewish state, to treat Jews as sovereign equals and to acknowledge the Jewish character of lands that were neither Arab nor Muslim in origin.

It is also about the vilification of Israel by western progressives who enable rejectionism. They do this in part by condemning lawful Jewish construction, while at the same time ignoring illegal Arab construction, the destruction of Jewish artifacts in Jerusalem, and continuing incitement and terrorism against Israel, Diaspora Jews and the West.

Despite all these provocations, western governments continue to demand that Israel retreat to the 1949 armistice lines dubbed the "Auschwitz Borders" by Abba Evan, to relinquish sovereignty in Jerusalem, and to cede historically Jewish lands in Judea and Samaria. However, based on the historical belligerence of her Arab neighbors – and the duplicitous conduct of some of her allies – Israel has every reason to be skeptical of any negotiating framework going forward.

The breakdown of negotiations occurred because of Palestinian intractability, not Israeli

intransigence.

I would submit that Israel has no legal or moral obligation to continue participating in a sham process that disparages her national character and delegitimizes her historical underpinnings.

The Arab League in 1967 declared "The Three No's" at its summit in Khartoum; that is "no recognition, no negotiations and no peace" with a Jewish State. And this position has not really changed in the years since, except that "no negotiations" has been replaced by sham negotiations for the sake of propaganda.

The Arab nations have strained to justify this rejectionism with a persistent campaign of anti-Semitic slander. To this end they have disseminated false stories of Jewish conspiracies and Israeli atrocities, counterfeit claims to ancestral Jewish lands, and even classical blood libel tales. It should not be surprising that *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* have been consistent best sellers throughout the Arab world.

At the core of this rejectionism is a primal, deep-seated hatred of Jews. Unfortunately, Americans and Europeans often do not understand this, or simply don't want to. Worse, there is a tendency within the mainstream to minimize claims of Arab or Muslim anti-Semitism as alarmist.

But it's real, it's ingrained and it fuels the rejection of Israel.

Many in the West try to shoehorn the situation into a balanced equation. They say there are moderates, with whom Israel should negotiate, and extremists, with whom she should not. Balance in this equation is morally relative, however, as illustrated by those who pontificate that Israel should negotiate even with Hamas based on the trite maxim that: "You don't make peace with friends, you make peace with enemies."

This equation, though, is artificial and grounded in revisionist myth, cultural relativism and moral equivalency. It presumes there are moderates to balance out extremists, when in fact there really are no moderates. Those who believe otherwise should compare the charters of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

#### Hamas Charter

The Hamas Charter is committed to the destruction of Israel and her people, as clearly set forth in the following provisions:

*Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it. (The Martyr, Imam Hassan al-Banna, of blessed memory).*

( *Hamas Charter, Preamble.*)

*The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the wings of Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. Muslim Brotherhood Movement is a universal organization which constitutes the largest Islamic movement in modern times. It is characterised by its deep understanding, accurate comprehension and its complete embrace of all Islamic concepts of all aspects of life, culture, creed, politics, economics, education, society, justice and judgement, the spreading of Islam, education, art, information, science of the occult and conversion to Islam.*

( *Hamas Charter, Article Two.*)

*The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the links in the chain of the struggle against the Zionist invaders. It goes back to 1939, to the emergence of the martyr Izz al-Din al Kissam and his brethren the fighters, members of Muslim Brotherhood. It goes on to reach out and become one with another chain that includes the struggle of the Palestinians and Muslim Brotherhood in the 1948 war and the Jihad operations of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1968 and after.*

*Moreover, if the links have been distant from each other and if obstacles, placed by those who are the lackeys of Zionism in the way of the fighters obstructed the continuation of the struggle, the Islamic Resistance Movement aspires to the realisation of Allah's promise, no matter how long that should take. The Prophet, Allah bless him and grant him salvation, has said:*

*The Day of Judgement will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree, would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews. (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim).*

( *Hamas Charter, Article Seven.*)

Such his language is not only rejectionist – it's genocidal. But what about the supposedly moderate Palestinian Authority?

Palestinian National Covenant (PA Charter)

The Palestinian National Covenant (commonly referred to as the PA Charter) contains the

following articles, which clearly demonize and delegitimize Israel:

*Article 17: The partitioning of Palestine, which took place in 1947, and the establishment of Israel are illegal and null and void, regardless of the loss of time...*

*Article 18: The Balfour Declaration, the Palestine Mandate System, and all that has been based on them are considered null and void. The claims of historic and spiritualties between Jews and Palestine are not in agreement with the facts of history or with the true basis of sound statehood. Judaism... is not a nationality (and) the Jews are not one people with an independent personality...*

*Article 19: Zionism is a colonialist movement in its inception, aggressive and expansionist in its goal, racist in its configurations, and fascist in its means and aims...*

This charter is clearly no more moderate than that of Hamas, and it prompts the question of why it was never amended if the PA truly desires permanent peace with Israel. It also raises the question of why the US and EU persist in promoting the PA as moderate when it continues to teach racist anti-Semitism in its schools, incite violence from its mosques, support terrorism, and claim that Jews are strangers to the Land of Israel?

These observations are not Jewish paranoia. They're based on real facts that can be verified with a few minutes of internet research.

The truth of the matter is that genuine peace is not possible if Israel's putative negotiating partners refuse to concede her legal validity and the legitimacy of ancient and unbroken Jewish historical claims.

Jewish Tradition Teaches that Words are Important

For the most part, Jewish existence in exile has been precarious for generations. We Jews were viewed as strangers wherever we lived because of our refusal to assimilate, and our survival has always depended on the sufferance of host cultures that persecuted, confined, harassed and killed us with gusto. We lived everywhere but belonged nowhere until the reestablishment of a sovereign nation in the traditional Jewish homeland.

And that's why we can't afford to become blind to the hand in front of our face.

In determining whether peace is possible, we need to hear, listen and understand the words used by those who claim to want peace, but for whom "peace" really means the absence of a Jewish nation.

We also have to understand that peace at all costs is no peace at all. And those who think otherwise, or who mistakenly believe that such peace is consistent with a skewed vision of *tikkun olam* – a term that has been tortured beyond all recognition and meaning – are not thinking from the perspective of history or tradition.

In Jewish tradition, words have real meaning. The Hebrew word “*davar*” can mean “word” or “thing”; and in Torah it refers to ideas that are spoken and things that are done. Words and actions are inseparable.

The Rabbis taught that words are not simply the invisible expressions of abstract thoughts, but are real things that have real consequences. The power of words is articulated in the Torah itself, which relates how G-d created the world with ten utterances. Words spoken with sincerity and purity of heart can propel prayers to heaven, but when used to espouse senseless hatred they can also have a scorching impact here on the earth.

It’s no wonder that *halakha* (Jewish law) equates *lashon hara* – the evil tongue – with murder.

This is why the Chofetz Chaim (z”l) devoted himself to teaching the proper use of language to avoid *lashon harah*. It’s also why the Lubavitcher Rebbe (z”l) was scrupulous in his mode of speech to prevent the harms that could arise from even the unintentional misuse of language.

Applying this standard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, we have to ask whether the Palestinians are ready for real peace with a Jewish State. Is the wider Arab-Muslim world? Looking at the words contained in their charters and spoken by their leaders, the answer – sadly – would seem to be no.

Now this may seem a bleak view – but we Jews are supposed to be a people of history, of faith and of hope. As a people of history, we can’t forget where we came from or the basis for our national claims. As a people of faith, we have to remember what we’re supposed to believe in and conduct ourselves accordingly.

And as a people of hope, we have to focus that hope not on pipedreams of false peace molded by temporal and partisan sensibilities, but on the possibility that a change in the way Jews are regarded might someday facilitate the prospects for true conciliation. Although maintaining such hope may be considered noble, it does not require the abdication of reality, perspective or common sense. Naiveté is a luxury that neither Israel nor the Jewish People can afford.

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Matthew M. Hausman is a trial attorney and writer. As an attorney he represents the interests

of individuals, business entities and nonprofit organizations in state and federal courts. His work has appeared in numerous publications and venues, including *Israpundit*, *Israel National News/Arutz Sheva*, *The American Thinker*, *Canada Free Press*, *Hamodia*, *Connecticut Lawyer*, and *The New English Review*. He is active in Jewish communal affairs, and has served on the boards of several nonprofit organizations and committees.

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