



Israel Shuns Victory

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As Israelis go to the polls, not one of the leading parties offers the option of winning the war against the Palestinian Arabs. It's a striking and dangerous lacuna.

First, some background. Wars are won, the historical record shows, when one side feels compelled to give up on its goals. This is only logical, for so long as both sides hope to achieve their war ambitions, fighting either continues or potentially can resume. For example, although defeated in World War I, the Germans did not give up their goal of dominating Europe and soon again turned to Hitler to try again. The Korean War ended more than a half century ago, but neither North nor South having given up its aspirations means fighting could flare up at any time. Similarly, through the many rounds of the Arab-Israeli conflict (wars in 1948-49, 1956, 1967,

1973, and 1982) both sides retained their goals.

Those goals are simple, static, and binary. The Arabs fight to eliminate Israel; Israel fights to win the acceptance of its neighbors. The first is offensive in intent; the second is defensive. The former is barbaric, and the latter civilized. For nearly 60 years, Arab rejectionists have sought to eliminate Israel via a range of strategies: undermining its legitimacy through propaganda, harming its economy through a trade boycott, demoralizing it through terrorism, and threatening its population via WMD.

While the Arab effort has been patient, intense, and purposeful, it has also failed. Israelis have built a modern, affluent, and strong country, but one still largely rejected by Arabs. This mixed record has spawned

two political developments: a sense of confidence among politically moderate Israelis; and a sense of guilt and self-criticism among its leftists. Very few Israelis still worry about the unfinished business of getting the Arabs to accept the permanence of the Jewish state. Call it Israel's invisible war goal.

Rather than seek victory, Israelis have developed a lengthy menu of approaches to manage the conflict. These include:

- Unilateralism (building a wall, partial withdrawals): the current policy, as espoused by Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and the Kadima Party.
- Lease for 99 years the land under Israeli towns on the West Bank: the Labor Party of Amir Peretz
- Palestinian Arab economic development: [Shimon Peres](#).
- Territorial compromise: The premise of Oslo diplomacy, as initiated by Yitzhak Rabin.
- Outside funding for the Palestinian Arabs (on the Marshall Plan model): U.S. Representative [Henry Hyde](#).
- Retreat to the 1967 borders: Israel's far left.
- Push the Palestinian Arabs to develop good government: Natan Sharansky (and President Bush).

- Insist that Jordan is Palestine: Israel's right.
- Transfer the Palestinian Arabs out of the West Bank: Israel's far right.

These many approaches are very different in spirit and mutually exclusive. But they have a key element in common. All manage the conflict without resolving it. All ignore the need to defeat Palestinian rejectionism. All seek to finesse war rather than win it.

For an outside observer who hopes for Arab acceptance of Israel sooner rather than later, this avoidance of the one winning strategy prompts a certain frustration, one that's the more profound on recalling how brilliantly the Israelis early on understood their war goals.

Fortunately, at least one prominent Israeli politician advocates Israeli victory over the Palestinian Arabs. [Uzi Landau](#) notes simply that "[when you're in a war](#) you want to win the war." He had hoped to lead Likud in the current election but failed to win anything approaching a majority in his party and is [ranked 14th](#) on the election list this week, not even high enough to guarantee him a parliamentary seat. With Likud itself expected to get less than 15% of the popular vote, it is clear how deeply unpopular Israelis presently find the idea of winning their war.

And so, they experiment with compromise, unilateralism, enriching their enemies, and other schemes. But as [Douglas MacArthur](#) ob-

served, "In war, there is no substitute for victory." The Oslo diplomacy ended in dismal failure and so will all the other schemes that avoid the hard work of winning. Israelis eventually must gird themselves to resuming the difficult, bitter, long, and expensive effort needed to con-

vince the Palestinians and others that their dream of eliminating Israel is defunct.

Should Israelis fail to achieve this, then Israel itself will be defunct.