



## The Arab Temptation

(Published in [\*American Enterprise Institute\*](#), October 2, 2006)

[Joshua Muravchik](#)

Colaboraciones n° 1254

October 5, 2006

The outcome of this summer's war between Israel and Hizballah was confused and confusing. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared a military success, and then appointed a commission to determine what had gone wrong. Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hizballah, proclaimed a glorious victory, and then explained that he would never have ordered the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers if he had thought there was "even a one-percent chance" it would lead to war. To Syrian President Bashar Assad, Hizballah's victory showed that Syria, too, should follow the path of war with Israel--or at least that is what he said before assuring Kofi Annan he would embargo any arms shipments to Hizballah. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the fire-breathing president of Iran, which had supplied the missiles Hizballah rained down upon Israel,

averred that his country was "not a threat to any state, not even the Zionist regime."

With such mixed messages emanating from the parties directly involved, it is still too early to "score" this war or foretell its consequences. Nonetheless, from watching the drama unfold one could draw certain inferences, the most important of which may help explain why the Arab-Israel conflict, despite all the pain it has caused, is still so difficult to resolve. In particular, this war brought into bold relief the political dynamics within the Arab world that militate against those who would like to have some form of peace with Israel and in favor of those who would block it.

Let me briefly review the essential history. In the late 1940's the Arabs, with a few notable exceptions, were

united in opposing the creation of the state of Israel on land they believed was rightly theirs to rule. In 1948, when the UN mandate expired and the Jews declared their sovereignty, the Arab League as a whole went to war, with the avowed aim of preventing Israel's birth. After the Jews gained the upper hand, an armistice was achieved, but not a single one of the Arab states would accept any commitment to peace with the Jewish state.

This first Arab defeat soon resulted in the fall of the Egyptian monarchy at the hands of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, pushing a creed of Arab nationalism that entailed the elimination of Israel, quickly became the most popular Arab leader of the 20th century. But Nasserism came a cropper in the Six-Day war of 1967, when the Arab belligerents suffered their most thorough and humiliating defeat yet. With Israel holding large swathes of captured territory on all fronts, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan famously said he was "waiting for a phone call" from Arab capitals in order to negotiate peace. Still, the Arab position did not change. Meeting in Khartoum in the war's immediate aftermath, the Arab League declared: "No peace with Israel. No recognition of Israel. No negotiations with Israel."

For more than a decade, no one deviated from this implacable stance--until President Anwar Sadat pulled Egypt out of the solid phalanx of Arab rejectionism by undertaking a journey of peace to Jerusalem and then signing a separate treaty establishing diplomatic relations. In so

doing, he brought down political and economic sanctions on his country and obloquy on himself, culminating in his assassination.

Not until the Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993 was there any further major erosion of the Khartoum position. Soon thereafter, Jordan signed its own peace treaty with Israel. Gradually, several North African states and smaller ones of the Persian Gulf, prodded by Washington, entered into varying degrees of relations with Israel as well.

There was also a change in rhetoric in those years, as Arab leaders came to speak less of an Israel-Arab conflict than, more narrowly, of an Israel-Palestinian one. At first this seemed merely a stratagem. After all, the Arabs in general had evinced little concern for their Palestinian brothers over the decades. In 1948, most of the lands that would have constituted Arab Palestine under the UN's partition plan were simply absorbed by Egypt (the Gaza Strip) and Jordan (the West Bank), while Syrian leaders declared that the territory called Palestine was "nothing but southern Syria." By choosing now to define the conflict as one between Israelis and Palestinians, the Arabs adroitly shifted the focus from their own longstanding eliminationist campaign against the Jewish state to the suffering that state, itself, had caused in its struggle to stay alive.

In time, however, behavior showed signs of catching up with rhetoric.

Certain Arab leaders, weary of obsession with a lost cause, let it be known that once a settlement could be reached between Israel and the Palestinians, they would be ready to enter peace agreements of their own.

But the Oslo process led to no such resolution. On the contrary, after seven very rocky years, it collapsed altogether at the 2000 Camp David summit--the culprit, according to Bill Clinton, who had played the part of mediator, was Yasir Arafat--and the so-called al-Aqsa *intifada* ensued almost immediately. Although the Palestinians denied having planned the violence, it was they who were on the offensive and they who dubbed it an *intifada*, which means uprising. Some reluctantly, some not, the larger Arab world closed ranks behind them, invariably invoking the Orwellian term "aggression" to refer to Israel's measures of self-defense against Palestinian terror (or, in another Orwellian inversion, "resistance"). Egypt and Jordan recalled their ambassadors from Tel Aviv; the Israeli trade office in Oman was closed; Morocco and Tunisia severed their diplomatic ties with Jerusalem. In short order, Palestinian radicals succeeded in undoing most of the steps that had been taken toward acceptance of the Jewish state.

Still, there was evidently no desire to march backward to all-out confrontation. In 2002, at the height of the *intifada*, a way out was proposed from an unexpected quarter: Saudi Arabia, a country whose leaders had once said they would be the last to

recognize Israel. Now Crown Prince Abdullah, in an interview with the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, sprang his own peace plan, which a few months later was adopted by the whole Arab League at a summit in Beirut. The Beirut Declaration pledged that the Arab states would "consider the Arab-Israel conflict over, sign a peace agreement with Israel," and "establish normal relations with Israel" in exchange for Israel's "complete withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 line"--that is, to the pre-Six-Day-war borders--and a "just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees...in accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 194."

Israel quickly dismissed this proposal. Resolution 194, adopted in 1949 in the aftermath of Israel's war of independence, has always been read by the Arabs as endorsing a "right of return" of Palestinians to Israel proper--that is, again, Israel within its pre-Six-Day-war borders--which would mean the demographic end of the Jewish state. Moreover, even Israelis ready to evacuate Jewish settlements in the territories occupied in 1967 would not countenance a full withdrawal to the 1967 lines, which would require among other things giving up the historic Jewish heart of Jerusalem. Finally, and fatally, the plan was offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, whereas Israel had always held, quite cogently, that peace talks would themselves constitute a form of acceptance and a necessary first step to peace itself.

That the Beirut Declaration went

nowhere was hardly an accident. Although the original Saudi initiative had been somewhat more forthcoming, Syria effectively sabotaged it by insisting that the terms be toughened. But even if couched in terms impossible for Israel to accept, the offer did signal a shift in the outward posture of the Arabs as a whole. No longer, it seemed, was the sticking point to be thought of as a wholesale Arab refusal to accept Israel's existence. In the new Arab narrative, what stood in the way of resolving the issues of borders, refugees, and the rest was rather the obduracy of Israel itself, the strongest of the disputants and the one that ought to be the most forthcoming in reaching a compromise.

Was this, too, a mere stratagem? Possibly; but the idea behind it nevertheless seemed to take hold in Arab consciousness and discourse. One began to hear reference to Nasser's boast that he would "throw the Jews into the sea" as evidence either of lamentable hubris or of outright delusion. Among more moderate Arabs, acceptance of Israel came to be spoken of as a given, with the burden on Israel to respond in kind lest more radical types come to power and incite the region into all-out war. As recently as a few months ago, Hamad bin Jasim al-Thani, the foreign minister of Qatar, put it this way in his role as the leader of the Arab League's delegation to the Security Council:

We should have a normal relationship with Israel--we should exchange ambassadors, and they should give the land back to the

Palestinians....Fifty years ago, the Arabs wanted to throw Israel into the sea. Now they have accepted to live with Israel. Otherwise, within 20 or 50 years, the Israelis might not have the same kind of people to reach peace with....Maybe the mood will change and there will be another war.

Is Israel letting slip a priceless opportunity? Has it nothing to fear but fear itself? Are the Arabs ready for peace? On this last question, the response within the Arab world to the recent war in Lebanon casts its own, rather equivocal light.

Initially, that response was notable more for its hearteningly sharp rebukes aimed at Hizballah than for any condemnations of Israel. The Saudi foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, denounced "irresponsible elements who do not recognize the supremacy of the [Lebanese] state [and who] make decisions on their own that...entangle th[eir] country." An unidentified "senior Saudi official" spoke of the need "to differentiate between legitimate resistance and the uncalculated adventures that some elements in [Lebanon] are carrying out." Jordan's King Abdullah derided "adventures that do not serve Arab interests." At a meeting of the Arab League, Saudi Arabia and Jordan were joined by Egypt and a few others in deprecating Hizballah's "unexpected, inappropriate, and irresponsible acts."

The criticisms of Hizballah came not only from officials but from other quarters as well. "It is inconceivable," wrote the editor-in-chief of

the influential pan-Arab newspaper *Asharq Alawsat*, "that our abilities and resources should be destroyed and eliminated [just] because [some] group has decided to set the region on fire in the service of foreign [i.e., Iranian] agendas." In the leading Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*, the columnist Abdallah Abdal Salam complained that Hizballah had "expropriated the decision to go to war from the [Lebanese] government," and in so doing had forfeited the right to call itself a "resistance" movement. Hanna Siniora, publisher of the *Jerusalem Times* and a member of the Palestinian National Council, noted approvingly the critical statements of "the most important Arab countries," which "did not allow their emotions to rule their judgment." More of the same could be found in the Egyptian, Lebanese, Iraqi, Gulf, and pan-Arab media. [1]

Those castigating Hizballah decried the destruction it had visited upon Lebanon and feared the turmoil it had unleashed in the region, with its potential to spill over borders and generate unforeseen international consequences. Above all, they condemned Iran for pulling Hizballah's strings. "Who's benefiting?" asked an unnamed senior official of an Arab country in the *New York Times*: "Definitely not the Arabs or the peace process. But definitely the Iranians are." Agreeing with this, the Egyptian journalist Abd al-Rahim Ali suggested that Iran had "decided to use Lebanon" as a means of deflecting the attention of the UN Security Council from its own campaign to acquire nuclear weapons, adding: "The question is

whether the Lebanese people must...be subjected to all this destruction for the sake of a campaign in which they have no part." Even more sweepingly, another *Al-Ahram* columnist, Hazem Abd Al-Rahman, declared that "all Iran wants is to extend its hegemony over the eastern Arab countries, and it is trying to use Hizballah as a Trojan horse to achieve this aim." [2]

But then something happened to cause the Arab media to change their tune.

As the long days of fighting followed one another, with Israel seemingly unable to deliver a crushing blow to the Hizballah forces in southern Lebanon, criticism of Hizballah was washed away, replaced by a mighty current of support for its "heroic resistance" to Israel's "aggression." Two weeks into the war, the *New York Times* reported from the region that "public opinion across the Arab world is surging behind the organization, transforming the Shiite group's leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah into a folk hero and forcing a change in official statements." According to the report, "Egypt's opposition press has had a field day comparing Sheik Nasrallah to Nasser, while demonstrators waved pictures of both."

A secular female Egyptian columnist gushed: "The last thing I expected is to fall in love with a turbaned cleric. I don't like them, and of course they will never like somebody like me. . . [but] I feel I've been searching for Nasrallah with my eyes, heart, and mind." In the *Wash-*

*ington Post*, a Syrian journalist interviewed a gaggle of Westernized twenty-somethings over Diet Pepsi and mentholated cigarettes in a Damascus coffee house. "Before what happened, I was against Hassan Nasrallah," said Amre whose views typified the group. "But in war, I was forced to choose. Now, I have to join Nasrallah's team."

Even prominent liberals joined the new chorus. "Thanks Be to God and to Hizballah" read a banner headline in *Al-Dustour*, an Egyptian weekly widely respected for its independence. The liberal Egyptian theologian Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who had been forced to flee to Europe after being ruled an apostate by a clerical court, forswore his previous associations:

Oh, rational liberals...it saddens me to announce that I am washing my hands of you and your positions. Resistance is not "adventure," but rather the only existing option at the moment for our peoples...Hizballah's discourse in the current war is not in essence sectarian or religious, but is rather a discourse of national liberation.

Prince Hassan of Jordan, veteran of a thousand peace meetings with Israelis, consciously evoked the British condemnation of the 1946 Zionist bombing of the King David Hotel in calling the Israeli attack on Lebanon "one of the most dastardly and cowardly crimes in recorded history."

Perhaps the most surprising, indeed shocking, reversal was that of Saad

Edin Ibrahim, the sociologist and prominent political gadfly who had been Egypt's most celebrated political prisoner. Adopting the standard Orwellian formulation to enthuse over "Hizballah's courageous resistance," Ibrahim lambasted the "ugly" and "stupid Israeli" who "provokes the entire world, and enjoys the killing and the destruction." Already on record as a liberal advocate of "dialogue" with the Muslim Brotherhood in its opposition to the Mubarak regime in Egypt, Ibrahim now apparently cast his lot both with the Muslim Brotherhood and with its counterparts elsewhere:

The Arab people do not respect the ruling regimes, perceiving them to be autocratic, corrupt, and inept....[M]ainstream Islamists with broad support, developed civic dispositions, and services to provide are the most likely actors in building a new Middle East. In fact, they are already doing so through the Justice and Development party in Turkey, the similarly named PJD in Morocco, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, and, yes, Hizballah in Lebanon. [3]

To be sure, not every Arab liberal was prepared to leap on Hizballah's bandwagon. In contrast to Ibrahim, Amr Hamzawy, a young Egyptian intellectual who has also advocated "dialogue" with Islamists, expressed his dismay at the totalitarian tendencies of "putatively democratic Arab opposition movements":

There is a great difference between adopting a rational discourse that rightly condemns the Israeli military

for its crimes against civilians and criticizes unconditional American acceptance of the war, and cheering the death of Israeli civilians as a step toward the destruction of the "Zionist entity." This goes beyond the tendency of Islamist and pan-Arab opposition movements to opportunistically capitalize on popular feelings to rally support. It shows that these movements lack a key characteristic of reformist political forces: a willingness to combat ideologies of hatred and extremism rather than using them for political advantage. For his part, a noted Egyptian blogger who goes by the moniker "Sandmonkey" penned an open letter to Nasrallah heaping sarcastic ridicule on the ruling spirit of the day:

A true leader shouldn't care about such trivial things like the welfare of his country or the safety of his people, as long as he engages in wars of dignity and inflicts some damages against the evil nazi zionists. That's what your glorious role model showed them, and the egyptian people have looked around, saw the peace and quiet we have been living in for the past 27 years, and screamed: I DON'T WANT THIS HONORLESS PEACE! GIVE ME WAR! GIVE ME DIGNITY.

These, however, were rare voices. In the face of prevailing sentiment, even the region's conservative governments began to amplify their criticism of Israel and to mute or eliminate any adverse comments about Hizballah. With numerous babies in the Arab world being named Nasrallah and Hizballah, one

unidentified deputy prime minister confided to the *New York Times* that Nasrallah's popularity had made him "the most powerful man in the Middle East." The Saudi royal court warned: "If the peace option is rejected due to the Israeli arrogance, then only the war option remains." Jordan's Abdullah, sounding a very different note from earlier, asserted that "the Arab people see Hizballah as a hero because it's fighting Israel's aggression. This is a fact that the U.S. and Israel must realize. As long as there is aggression there is resistance." By the war's end, Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak was calling Hizballah "part of the Lebanese national fabric."

What had occurred, in short, was a full-scale recrudescence of Arab rage, rejectionism, and anti-Israel solidarity.

Its elements were readily discernible, beginning with the renewed sense of Arab and--even more so--Muslim identity itself. Nasrallah had proclaimed Hizballah the "spearhead of the *umma*," the universal community of Muslim believers. Although not all Arabs would have chosen Hizballah for this role, the feeling of belonging to the *umma* remains both deep and wide. Indeed, identification with one's country, as opposed to the Muslim "nation" as a whole, is but a recent and incomplete development in the Middle East. "In my father's view," writes Galal Amin, a popular analyst of contemporary Egyptian society, "Turkey was part of the same 'nation' to which he belonged." Earlier this year, the Egyptian Muslim

Brotherhood's Mohammed Mahdi Akef suggested in an interview that he would sooner be ruled by a Malaysian Muslim than by an Egyptian Christian.

Of course, parts of the *umma* have frequently fought bloody wars with other parts, and still remain bitter rivals. But this does not dampen the instinctive impulse of believers to rally around whenever any part is engaged against non-believers. Questioned about the fact that Hizballah is Shiite while the Muslim Brotherhood is Sunni, Yusuf Qaradawi, sheikh of the latter movement, replied: "This is not the moment to examine such confessional differences....During war, one can find oneself closer to one apostate than to another."

In this connection, there were loud expressions of anguish and indignation over the suffering of the Lebanese. As the *Washington Post's* correspondent Faiza Saleh Ambah reported:

Photos of Lebanese toddlers killed by Israeli missile strikes and lying dead amid the rubble have been on the front pages of daily papers across the region, and activists have circulated dozens of e-mails with graphic photos of Lebanese civilians and children killed or wounded in the strikes. Satellite stations al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya have broadcast blanket coverage of the crisis.

Although there was no doubt much genuine empathy with fellow Arabs and Muslims, something more was at work here. For one thing, Hizbal-

lah and its sympathizers used deception and theatrics in order to stoke the outrage. In an incident publicized worldwide by leading news organizations, an Israeli shell reportedly destroyed a clearly marked Red Cross ambulance; this would be exposed beyond a trace of doubt as a complete hoax. Elsewhere, dolls and teddy bears were placed on top of the rubble of bombed-out buildings for the benefit of photographers, to suggest that children had perished; but the toys seemed always to have come through the bombing undamaged and clean, free of the dust that covered everything else in sight. The *New York Times* had to issue a correction on a photo series showing an injured man prone amid wreckage when readers pointed out that in several other frames the same individual appeared unscathed and indeed was directing rescue efforts. Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora wept publicly at an Arab League meeting as he announced that 40 civilians had been killed in a bombing that day, or so he had been told; later he admitted he had been misinformed and the actual death toll was one.

Then, too, Muslim empathy with the suffering of fellow Muslims is a sometime thing. Sudanese in Darfur, who although non-Arab are mostly members of the *umma*, have been dying by the tens of thousands, arousing scarcely a murmur on the part of their fellow Muslims. And what about the Iraqis, who are mostly Arab as well as Muslim? According to UN figures, more than 3,000 Iraqi civilians perished in terrorism

or inter-communal violence in the month of June, three times the number of Lebanese fatalities in the 34-day war. And, although this is assuredly too much to ask, what about the innocent Israelis, many of them Arabs themselves, who were dying at the hands of Hizballah?

But this leads to another and more central component of the newfound sense of Arab solidarity. As one Kuwaiti columnist put it, "The Lebanese people may have lost a lot of economic and human resources [but] Lebanon was victorious in the battle of dignity and honor." And the "dignity and honor" in play were not Lebanon's alone but the dignity and honor of all Arabs, and of the Muslim *umma*. The Egyptian poet Ahmed Fouad Negm told the *New York Times*: "People are praying for [Nasrallah] as they walk in the street, because we were made to feel oppressed, weak, and handicapped....I asked the man who sweeps the street under my building what he thought, and he said: 'Uncle Ahmed, he has awakened the dead man inside me! May God make him triumphant.'"

That the Arab world still nurses a deep sense of wounded pride--a wound stemming from colonial subjugation and no doubt too from an awareness of the paucity of Arab achievements in modern times--is well known, as is the fact that into this wound Israel's military victories and indeed Israel's mere existence have rubbed a great deal of salt. Of such feelings, Nasrallah has an astute grasp. "All his wartime speeches," the *Times* reported, "have

been laced with references to restoring lost Arab virility, a big sell in a region long suffering from a sense of impotence." The same point was well captured by a contributor to the pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Hayat*: "[W]hatever the political outcome...what will remain in the memory of many Arabs is the ability of a group to inflict losses on Israel."

Curiously, the one exception in the Arab world to this pattern of opinion and emotion was in Lebanon itself. There is no doubt that the Lebanese were deeply bitter toward Israel for what it was doing to their country. But this did not prevent many of them, often at considerable personal risk, from expressing their anger as well at Hizballah and its patrons.

Michael Young, the opinion editor of Lebanon's English-language *Daily Star*, wrote that Hizballah "has...managed to turn the Lebanese consensus squarely against" it. A *Boston Globe* correspondent touring Lebanon found many confirming voices, especially among non-Shiites: "Hizballah made this war and ruined the whole country," ran one typical statement by a Christian woman. The Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was especially outspoken. When Syria's foreign minister visited Lebanon and offered to enlist behind Nasrallah, Jumblatt shot back: "You who are a lion in Lebanon and a rabbit in the Golan, it is very easy [for you] to [sacrifice] the Lebanese people to their last drop of blood. If it were not for our polite and hospitable customs, we should have stoned you and thrown you

out of the country.”

More remarkable than any of this were the voices raised against Hizballah within the Shiite community itself. The sociologist Waddah Sharara told the *New York Times* during the fourth week of fighting that “Lebanese politics, especially since Nasrallah carved out his role, has become his very own circus. He built this circus on a foundation of pageantry, lies, fear, crazy hopes, and unreal dreams.” At the same time, Lebanon’s leading daily, *Al-Nahar*, published an essay by Mona Fayyad, a professor at the Lebanese university, asking “What Does it Mean to be a ‘Shiite?’” A Shiite herself, she addressed the question in a tone of acid sarcasm:

Does it mean that you have to resign yourself to the destruction of your country, to see it falling down on your head, to see its families becoming “refugees”...to accept “steadfastness” as long as there remains one fighter who can fire a missile against northern Israel...without even asking “why”?

Among those seconding Fayyad’s view was an intellectual who described himself as “a Shiite displaced in my country [because of] calculations and adventures forced on me” and who answered Fayyad’s rhetorical question by asserting that “to be a Shiite is to demand accountability from those who took this adventure.” On a website that posted Fayyad’s piece, a Shiite woman named Hala Awad decried the Arab “illusion of...‘dignity.’” True dignity, she wrote, “is not

measured by how much we hate and loathe an entity. It is not measured by our blind allegiance to a leader. It is not measured by our love of death.”

Once the fighting was over, the Shiite mufti of Tyre challenged Hizballah’s pretension to represent the Shiites:

I don’t think Hizballah asked the Shiite community about the war. Perhaps the great emigration from the south is the best proof that the people of the south were against the war. The Shiite community authorized no one to declare war in its name or to drag it into a war that was far from its wishes and from the wishes of other ethnic communities in Lebanon. What happened in the south does not represent the will of the Shiite community, and is not its responsibility, but was caused by the vacuum that the Lebanese state left for years in this region.

Outside of Lebanon itself, however, Hizballah’s popularity remained firm. And what drew “the admiring gaze of Arabs everywhere,” in the words of the scholar Vali Nasr, was assuredly not the sight of Lebanese blood but the sight of Israeli blood--the specter of Israeli vulnerability.

This helps explain why the Arab-Israel conflict has defied resolution. A leading Arab-American liberal said to me recently: “Of course the creation of Israel was an injustice, but I want to move on.” I believe him, and I believe there are many like him in the Arab world. But if it comes to seem possible that the “in-

justice" can once and for all be redressed, that the stain on Arab honor can at last be removed, how effectively will those in the region who think as he does oppose the call? In the exultant words of a columnist in a Hamas magazine, "The [Hizballah] victory in Lebanon will weaken those Palestinian voices that are heard from time to time, sometimes calling for making concessions, at other times calling for fortuitous ceasefires. Hamas will [now] be given a significant margin" to continue its "resistance."

Such radicals do not, at the moment, represent a majority in the Arab world. Nor, despite its recent travails, is the liberalizing and reformist spirit moribund. There are those who not only know in their hearts but are prepared to say publicly that the fight with Israel is, for the Arabs, worse than a dead end, and that their real enemy lies within. Remarkably, even the spokesman for the Hamas government of the Palestinian Authority shared such an epiphany this summer in an article calling on Palestinians to "cease blaming our mistakes on others." Then, addressing Gaza's fractious factions, he appealed: "Please have mercy...on us from your demagoguery, chaos, guns, thugs, [and] infighting."

But the radicals hold powerful cards. One of them is the rising regional influence of Iran, with its frank aim of returning to the stance of Khartoum and to Nasser's intention of throwing the Jews into the sea. The calls for Israel's destruction that issue regularly from the lips of

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are not the fulminations of a lone maniac. Even his "moderate" rival for the presidency, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, speculated aloud at a prayer service about the benefits of a nuclear weapon in the hands of a Muslim power: "Application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, while [an Israeli counterstrike] would just produce damage in the Muslim world."

The second card held by the radicals is that, whenever they choose, they can still pick a fight with Israel that will at once put immense pressure on all the other Arabs to back them. That is what Arafat did in 2000 when he spurred the al-Aqsa *intifada*, and what Nasrallah did this past summer. And if such an Arab attack shows the least sign of being successful, the temptation to join in can be irresistible. Thus, in 1967, was Jordan's King Hussein drawn belatedly and disastrously into the Six-Day war by Nasser's lying boast that the Arabs were winning.

When the fighting ended this summer, the Arab League announced another new initiative to end the Israel-Arab conflict. Since it consisted of nothing more than turning the whole problem over to the UN, the exercise seemed little more than an articulation of Arab helplessness, a step backward from the Beirut Declaration of 2002. That earlier declaration, for all its evident flaws, nonetheless had the virtue of putting the Arabs officially, if unenthusiastically, on record in favor of peace and "normal relations" with Israel.

But if this summer's display of the dynamics of Arab politics shows anything, it is that the spirit of Beirut is also not sufficient. Peace requires not one-sided declarations but sitting together and talking. It also requires, as in the example of Anwar Sadat's 1977 visit to Jerusalem, at least a measure of active reconciliation. Above all, it requires that a peace-seeking Arab majority be prepared to stand against the minority that does not want peace. This will mean breaking ranks within the Arab nation and the *umma*,

and exposure to the charge of being an apologist for injustice, a lackey of the Zionists and the imperialists. But there is no other way for the Arab world to take its future in its own hands, to cease looking in vain for rescue either to the UN or to a new Nasser, and to put an end at last to a conflict of its own making that, in addition to all the misery and death it has visited on Israel, continues to take an incomparably high human toll of the Arabs themselves.

*Joshua Muravchik is a resident scholar at AEI.*