



## **The Missing Moderates. The real reason the Arab-Israeli conflict can't be settled**

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[Clifford D. May](#)

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To celebrate July 4th, Americans shoot off fireworks – a colorful reminder of the struggle for independence. This month, Israelis have been celebrating 60 years of independence and any store-bought pyrotechnics are superfluous: The rockets' red glare can be seen in Israel's skies night after night, courtesy of Hamas, the terrorist organization that rules Gaza and is openly dedicated to the annihilation of the Jewish state.

If we want peace between Israel and the Palestinians we need to marginalize the radicals and empower the moderates. That's the conventional wisdom. There's one problem with it: Moderates wield no power in Gaza.

Meanwhile, over in the West Bank there is Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, the head of Fatah, Hamas' rival. He is reportedly furious over President Bush's recent remarks to the Israeli parliament looking forward to the 120th anniversary of Israeli independence – a time, Bush predicted, when Israel will live in peace with an independent Palestinian neighbor.

Abbas told reporters: "The Bush speech at the Knesset angered us ... I frankly, clearly and transparently asked him that the American position should be balanced."

This, too, has become conventional wisdom. The problem with it: If my goal is to kill your two children and your goal is to keep them alive, a

balanced position – one midway between the two – would endorse the murder of one of your kids.

Such balance is relentlessly on view in the mainstream media. For example, to commemorate Israel's 60th year of independence, the Washington Post ran a front page feature on two men, one Israeli, one Palestinian, both born sixty years ago "into a land at war."

The story neglects to mention how that war began: The U.N. passed a resolution that established Israel and called for an Arab state as well. Jewish leaders agreed. Had Arab leaders done likewise, Palestinians also would be celebrating 60 years of statehood this month -- and there would have been no war and no refugees.

The Post reports that the family of Nabil Zaharan, the 60-year-old Palestinian, fled "their native Jaffa out of fear of advancing Israeli troops." This has become the conventional narrative -- Palestinians driven from their homes by Jews. But as Efraim Karsh, head of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Studies at King's College, University of London, writes: "The recent declassification of millions of documents from the period of the British Mandate (1920 - 1948) and Israel's early days... paint(s) a much more definitive picture of the historical record. ...By the time of Israel's declaration of independence... none of the 170,000 - 180,000 Arabs fleeing urban centers, and only a handful of the 130,000 - 160,000 villagers who left

their homes had been forced out by the Jews."

He quotes Ismail Safwat, the Iraqi general who served as commander-in-chief of the Arab Liberation Army that was attempting to "drive all Jews into the sea." Safwat noted "with some astonishment that the Jews 'have so far not attacked a single Arab village unless provoked by it.'"

The overwhelming majority of those who fled, Karsh explains, were instructed to do so "by their own leaders and/or by Arab military forces whether out of military considerations or in order to prevent them from becoming citizens of a prospective Jewish state."

One of those leaders was Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, who had spent World War II close to Hitler in Berlin. Scholar Barry Rubin writes that al-Husseini "hated Jews, wanted to destroy them and could not envision compromise."

"The key point," Rubin says, "is that in rejecting partition, in demanding everything and starting a war it could not win, the Arab side ensured endless conflict, the Palestinian refugee issue, and no Palestine. It wasn't murder - it was suicide."

Those Palestinians who did not flee are today Israeli citizens – more than 20 percent of the population. Despite the departure of families such as Zaharan's, Jaffa remains an Arab city with minarets and mosques framing its skyline.

Also unmentioned in the Post piece: Nearly a million Jews whose families had lived for centuries in such places as Egypt, Syria and Iraq were expelled. Today, half of all Israeli Jews trace their roots to Arab countries.

Israel's war of independence has never really ended. Thirty years ago, there seemed a chance: Egyptian President Anwar Sadat went to

Camp David and made peace with Israel. Not long after, he was gunned down by members of an Islamist group headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. Now Osama bin Laden's top deputy and presumed to be living in the tribal areas of Pakistan, al-Zawahiri is a living reminder of the consequences that await any moderate who would dare end this long and bloody conflict.

*[Clifford D. May](#), a former New York Times foreign correspondent, is the president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on terrorism.*

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