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Coffee with the Cantor Jewish Influence on Secular Society

Hazzan Menes

Israel and World Politics

How has the presence of modern day Israel changed world politics and why?

[From Mideast Web, Ami Isseroff](#)

Which Conflict ???

Arab-Israel, Palestinian - Israeli or Muslim versus the West?

The evolution of the Palestine Issue in Arab and Western politics and policy

The conflict between the Arabs and Jews of Palestine has always been expressed in several different dimensions, each of which assumes greater or lesser importance at different times in history and in different perspectives. Some of the major dimensions are:

- Arab people versus the Jews of Palestine or Israel
- Palestinians versus the Jews of Palestine or Israel
- Muslims versus Jews of Israel
- Muslims and Arabs versus the West

It is not always easy to untangle these different motifs either in popular thinking about the conflict or in policy decisions of governments. It is fair to say that over the years the conflict over Palestine-Israel has evolved from an Arab-Jewish conflict into a Palestinian - Israeli or Palestinian-Jewish conflict and a Muslim-Jewish conflict. It would be foolhardy, however, to ignore the existence of a genuine conflict between the Arab countries and the West that has only a peripheral relation to the Palestinian issue, or to dismiss aspects of the Arab-Zionist and Muslim-Jewish conflict that always existed, were never fully resolved, and may very likely return to the fore after the basic needs and aspirations of the Palestinians are met. We can distinguish several phases:

Ottoman: When the first Zionist settlers arrived in Palestine toward the end of the 19th century, there was no particularist nationalism in the Ottoman Turkish Empire, beyond a broad movement for Arab liberation and perhaps the Armenian and Greek communities, which were not related to the Palestinian issue. The Zionist settlement program was viewed with alarm both by Arab nationalists inside and outside Palestine, because it might threaten Arab national claims, and by Arabs living in Palestine who felt threatened by the Jews or who were directly affected by Zionist settlement. Thus, the conflict was both a local issue and an Arab/Muslim issue.

Mandatory Palestine: The coming of the British and the Balfour declaration intensified the conflict. The end of World War I, breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the peace treaties changed the Middle East and created a new reality and a new set of conflicts. The war created a number of semi-independent Arab states



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that the British had hoped would be beholden to them, but which in fact, became increasingly independent and jealous of outside interference. The British and French, and later the Americans, wanted to maximize their influence in the region and retain control over strategic and natural resources: namely, the Suez Canal and the oil resources of the Gulf countries, which became increasingly important. The Arab countries believed they had been deceived by the British, because they thought they would be setting up an independent country or countries throughout the Middle East, whereas in fact Syria and Lebanon were given to France as mandate countries based on the secret [Sykes-Picot](#) agreement and Palestine was given to Britain, based on the [Balfour](#) declaration. The Arabs considered that this arrangement betrayed British promises to them. The Hashemite family of Feisal, which had aided Lawrence of Arabia in overthrowing Turkish rule, was ousted from Saudi Arabia by Ibn Saud. Instead of a united Hashemite Arabia, the Hashemites were forced to content themselves with kingdoms in Iraq and Jordan. In Syria, the French, with the consent of the British, put down a revolt in favor of Feisal. Ibn Saud was quick to align himself with the British, but the politics and aspirations of the Saud dynasty were different from those of Feisal and the Hashemites, and having seen how the British had dealt with Feisal, Saud was not likely to fall into the same traps. Saud also had the advantage that increasingly, the great powers recognized the strategic importance of the vast oil wealth of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region.

The Arab Revolt - Beginning in 1936, the Arabs of Palestine revolted against British rule and in particular, against the Jewish national home promise of the [League of Nations Mandate for Palestine](#), and the immigration of Jews to Palestine. Ibn Saud [intervened](#), and was allowed to intervene by the British on behalf of the Palestinians, thereby gaining prestige in the Arab world as protector of Arab interests. The Arabs rejected the [Peel Report](#), which would have partitioned Palestine into a tiny Jewish state and a much larger Arab area, and ensured that the British would accede to Palestinian demands and close the gates of Palestine to Jewish immigration. According to historian Elie Kedourie [1], this intervention in the revolt in Palestine marked the beginning of the primacy of the Palestine conflict as an issue in Arab relations with the West, and the beginning of Arab intervention in that conflict. The role of Palestine as an Arab-Western issue and as an issue in Arab national politics was extended in the 1940s, when [President Roosevelt](#) felt compelled to reassure King Saud that the United States would not back an independent Jewish state in Palestine, and with the formation of the [Arab League](#). One of the express purposes of the Arab League was to prevent the formation of a Jewish state.

Partition and the first Arab-Israeli War - The nature of the Arab League, founded to oppose the creation of a Jewish state, as well as the agitation of the Grand Mufti, Haj Amin El Hussein, and the prestige value of Palestine as an issue in Arab politics, made it almost inevitable that the Arab countries would attack the new state of Israel. What is less widely understood, is that the several Arab countries had a deep aversion to Haj Amin El Hussein, and had no intention of allowing him to set up an independent Palestinian state. Transjordan, Syria and Egypt intended to carve up Palestine between them, or parts of it, and to prevent each other from having too large a slice of Palestine [2,3,4]. King Abdullah of Transjordan had already made a tacit agreement with the Zionist leadership to confine Jordanian territorial aspirations to the West Bank, and encouraged the Israelis to minimize Egyptian gains in Gaza. Abdulla el Tall told Elias Sasson "Strike the Egyptians as much as you can, our attitude will be neutral [2,4]. The Israelis were so successful at this that they eventually incurred the wrath of the RAF and the British government, which forced them to withdraw from forward positions in El Arish. The Syrians, for their part, feared that if Transjordan was too successful in Palestine, they would attempt to overthrow the Syrian government and replace it with a Hashemite monarchy.[3] None of the Arab states was enthusiastic about setting up a Palestinian state, though abortive rival Jordanian and Egyptian versions of the "Palestinian State" were announced in Gaza and the West Bank at the end of the war for propaganda purposes. In the context of inter-Arab politics, the Palestinian refugees created as a result of the 1948 war (the Israeli War of Independence) were a troublesome or useful byproduct of the conflict, and Palestinian national rights were a hot issue to be deflected and suppressed, because they



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represented the possibility of radicalization in the Arab world. Palestinian rights. Sympathy for the Palestinians was expressed in the desire to liberate Palestine as an Arab national cause. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were not allowed autonomous self-government. Palestinian aspirations were carefully channeled away from the direction of national self-determination.

Decolonialization - In the period after World War II, the role of France and Britain in the Middle East and North Africa, and their colonial empires, collapsed very rapidly. In addition to formal withdrawal from Egypt, Algeria and Syria, client regimes collapsed in Iran, Iraq and Libya. The USSR helped to accelerate this process, and both the USSR and more clumsily the US, intervened in several cases. The US worked against the British in Egypt, but worked with the British in Iran, to remove the nationalist Mossadeqh and reinstate the more amenable Shah Reza Pahlevi. With the exception of the Iranian counter-coup, all the regimes that came to power were anti-Western, with the Palestine issue being only a minor part of their agenda initially. The subsequent development of the Arab-Israeli or Muslim-Israeli conflict must be viewed in this context.

Nasser and the Rise of Arab Nationalism - Gamal Nasser was the most important of the new leaders who rose with the wave of decolonialization. He replaced Farouk, a British client, and then proceeded to remove the last vestiges of Western influence from Egypt. At the same time, he molded the Baathist Pan-Arab cause and recast it in his image, in a bid to make himself and Egypt leaders of the Arab world. The Palestinian issue was useful to Nasser. First, failure of the old regimes to liberate Palestine in 1948 was the issue that legitimized the revolution of 1953. Liberation of Palestine would now ultimately be used as an issue that would establish Nasser's credentials as the central leader of the Arab world. The Palestinian issue became subordinate to a larger anti-colonialist issue, or perhaps it is more correct to say that the Palestinian issue for the Arabs was always representative of the larger colonialist issue and inseparable from it. Arab nationalists resented Western influence and control, and Israel represented a "foreign western implant" on Arab soil. For Nasser however, the presence of the British in Egypt was a more pressing issue, and one that seemed easier to resolve. He nationalized the Suez Canal and provoked a conflict with Britain and France as well as with Israel. Israel, France and Britain attacked Egypt in October 1956. Israel quickly reached the Suez Canal and French and British troops moved to take over the canal area. But Nasser correctly assessed and capitalized on US-European rivalries to transform the humiliating military defeat of the Sinai campaign into a great moral and political victory.

Soon after the Suez campaign, Egyptian agents contacted [Yasser Arafat](#) and tried to set him up as a student leader who would channel Palestinian aspirations in the pan-Arabist, pro-Egypt direction desired by Nasser. The eventual result was the creation of the Fatah and the PLO as "liberation movements" and their adoption at the [second Arab summit conference of 1964](#), in the context of achieving Arab aspirations in Palestine, rather than Palestinian national aspirations. The Palestinians themselves were not too happy with this arrangement or with the tutelage and interference of Egypt and Syria, but they had little choice, especially as the Syrians provided the organization and military know-how to set up the first Fatah cells in the 1960s. Whatever genuine Palestinian national sentiment existed was kept carefully and control and channeled into the pan-Arab issue. Palestinians were not allowed real political freedom either in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, though in theory they could have formed a state there at any time, free of Israeli influence, and free to oppose Israel in the international arena.

Arafat and the birth of Palestinian Nationalism - Arab nationalism began to vanish from the Middle East political scene after the debacle of the 1967 6-day war. Instead of destroying Israel and liberating Palestine, the Arab countries suffered a humiliating defeat and what had been left of Palestine before 1967 was now in Israeli hands. Yasser Arafat, the PLO and the Fatah were now freed from the shackles of Egyptian and Syrian control, and developed the line of independent Palestinian nationalism, which had been more or less implicit in the Fatah program and in Arafat's writings in his newspaper, *Falestinunah*.



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The PLO at the UN - Since the late 1930s, US and British foreign policy had placed great weight on the Arab-Jewish (later, Arab-Israeli) conflict as the major fly in the ointment of Arab/Muslim-Western relations. This view was reinforced by the successive wars with Israel, culminating in the defeat of the Arabs in 1967. The defeat catalyzed the rise of Palestinian nationalism. The Palestinian plight, hitherto a more-or-less neglected byproduct of the Arab-Israeli conflict, was brought to the fore. Yasser Arafat [addressed the UN](#), and the PLO was given recognition. [UN General Assembly Resolution 3236](#) recognized the PLO as representatives of the Palestinian people, and stated the support of the General Assembly for Palestinian self determination. It also put the stamp of approval on Palestinian "resistance." It stated that the UN:

1. Reaffirms the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including:

(a) The right to self-determination without external interference;

(b) The right to national independence and sovereignty;

2. Reaffirms also the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and calls for their return;

3. Emphasizes that full respect for and the realization of these inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are indispensable for the solution of the question of Palestine;

4. Recognizes that the Palestinian people is a principal party in the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East;

5. Further recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to regain its rights by all means in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations;

6. Appeals to all States and international organizations to extend their support to the Palestinian people in its struggle to restore its rights, in accordance with the Charter;

7. Requests the Secretary-General to establish contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization on all matters concerning the question of Palestine;

[General Assembly Resolution 3237](#), passed on the same day, granted observer status to the PLO. Under Soviet tutelage, the PLO and the Palestinians had achieved international recognition, and the cause of Palestinian self-determination was put on the international agenda.

Harold Saunders and the American Recognition of Palestinian Nationalism - In 1975, the new situation was acknowledged by [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Harold H. Saunders, who told a US House of Representatives subcommittee:](#)

We have also repeatedly stated that the legitimate interests of the Palestinian Arabs must be taken into account in the negotiation of an Arab-Israeli peace. In many ways, the Palestinian dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the heart of that conflict. Final resolution of the problems arising from the partition of Palestine, the establishment of the State of Israel, and Arab opposition to those events will not be possible until agreement is reached defining a just and permanent status for the Arab peoples who consider themselves Palestinians."



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This document was rightly considered revolutionary because it proposed to recognize the national rights of the Palestinians and offered more than a broad hint that if the PLO adopted a compromise position and recognized the right of Israel to exist, the US would work to ensure dialogue between the parties. Saunders acknowledged what was evident: there would be no solution without the Palestinians, the PLO was now the recognized representative of the Palestinians, and the US should be ready to do business with the PLO provided the PLO was amenable to a reasonable solution. This change of policy was extremely important, and is discussed in more detail [elsewhere](#). However, Saunders did not seek to redefine the conflict, and did not do so.

The first sentence makes it clear that the Palestinian problem is not the only issue, and this is amplified by "In many ways" in the next sentence. However, the cautionary preamble "in many ways" was dropped in most reports. Somehow, "that conflict" was transmuted to "the conflict," and Saunders soon came to be credited (or blamed) for the thesis that *"The Palestinian dimension ... is the heart of the conflict."*

In his Congressional testimony, Saunders also said: *"It is a fact that many of the three million or so people who call themselves Palestinians today **increasingly** regard themselves as having their own identity as a people and desire a voice in determining their political status."*

Saunders was merely over-stating in words what had become obvious, that the Palestinians had come of age, and that their conflict with Israel would henceforth dominate the Middle-Eastern political scene. It had in fact been dominating the Middle Eastern political scene for several years, since the PLO had threatened the regime of Hussein of Jordan, and had been expelled from Jordan to Syria and Lebanon. Saunders went on to state,

The statement is often made in the Arab world that there will not be peace until the 'rights of the Palestinians' are fulfilled, but there is no agreed definition of what is meant and a variety of viewpoints have been expressed on what the legitimate objectives of the Palestinians are...."

"No one, therefore, seems in a position today to say exactly what Palestinian objectives are.... The issue is not whether Palestinian interests should be expressed in a final settlement, but how. There will be no peace unless an answer is found.

Again, Saunders was stating the obvious: a solution to the Palestinian problem is a necessary condition for a settlement, and without such a solution there can be no peace. Saunders did not say it was a sufficient condition however. He certainly did not state that a solution to the Palestinian problem would necessarily guarantee peace between Israel and the Arabs, or put an end to friction between the West and the Arabs. However, the Saunders thesis was quickly misinterpreted to imply that if only the Palestinian problem were solved, the entire Arab-Israeli conflict would vanish. Likewise, various "solutions" such as Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, and/or return of the refugees, attached themselves to the Saunders thesis as if they were necessary and sufficient to meet Palestinian demands, and as if it was a certainty that they would bring about a solution to the conflict. Middle East history was now reinterpreted by many as if the Arab-Israeli conflict had begun in 1949, with the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, or perhaps even in 1967, with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip.



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In December of 1975, Saunders co-authored a Brookings Institution report that reflected these ideas as well as others. The Brookings Report of December, 1975[5], called for a settlement among all parties, including all the Arab states. Among its summary points we find :

Point 1 states that the United States "is concerned for the security, independence, and well-being of Israel and the Arab states of the area."

Point 3 states, "We believe the time has come to begin the process of negotiating such a settlement among the parties, either at a general conference or at more informal multilateral meetings..."

Point 3 (e) is the reference in these summary points to "Palestine" or "Palestinian." It says, "Palestine. There should be provision for Palestinian self-determination....This might take the form of an independent Palestinian state ... or of a Palestinian entity voluntarily federated with Jordan but exercising extensive political autonomy."

The "Palestine first" approach was sidelined for a while by events, but we can recognize in it the beginnings of the Madrid conference as well as the Oslo Accord. In Israel, Menachem Begin was elected on a platform that stated, *"Judea and Samaria will not be given over to any foreign government; between the sea and Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty."* Egypt made a separate peace with Israel. If the Americans believed the Palestinian issue was crucial for peace, they did not make this particularly evident in their approach to Egyptian-Israeli peace. The PLO missed that opportunity when they refused the Egyptian invitation to participate in talks, and refused to recognize [UN Security Council Resolution 242](#). However the "Palestine first" approach became more popular in the 80s. The first attempt was to provide a solution through a federation with Jordan. King Hussein brought this offer to the Israelis, but it was turned down by the Shamir government. This left only the Palestinians themselves, and the Palestinians were ready to deal only through the PLO. The PLO on the other hand, was unwilling to recognize Israel or Resolution 242, and the Israelis and US refused to deal officially with the PLO in consequence. In the US, the problem was perceived as one of getting the PLO to become a part of the peace process. This was thought to be achieved in 1988, with the [announcement by Chairman Yasser Arafat](#) of PLO acceptance of resolution 242. Now the problem was to get the Israelis on board as well. This did not occur until the right-wing Shamir government was replaced by the Labor government of Yitzhak Rabin in 1992. The Rabin government in fact leapt past the US, negotiating directly with the PLO, resulting in the [Oslo Accords](#).

The Muslim Dimension - The Muslim dimension of the Palestine conflict was always implicit. Rather than being antithetical to Arab nationalism, Islamist and Muslim themes were always to some extent an integral part of the Arab nationalist doctrine. Islamic lands were divided into those that were already lost to the West, chiefly *Al-Andalus*, or Spain, and those that were properly part of Dar al-Islam, the home of Islam. Palestine was supposed to be in the latter category. The Israeli capture of Jerusalem greatly enhanced and underlined the Muslim religious dimension. Beginning with the Iranian revolution of Khomeini, Islamism became an increasingly potent political force in the Middle East, and therefore the Islamic dimension of the Palestine conflict assumed increasing importance as it was taken up by Iranians, by Salafi radicals in the *madrassas* (Islamic schools) being built with Gulf oil money throughout the Muslim world, and by [Osama bin Laden](#) and al-Qaeda. Bin Laden does mention Palestine in his rhetoric, subordinate to railing against the US for occupation of the holy places of Saudi Arabia. This caused some to further misinterpret the so-called Saunders doctrine to mean that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and US support of Israel, were at the heart of the Islamist struggle against the United States. However, the chief concern of Islamism, whether it is represented by the Shi'a Iranian branch or al-Qaeda, is the negation of Western influence, liberal democracy and the emancipation of women. The United States, and not Israel, is the Great Satan. The Palestinian issue,



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as well as anti-Semitism, are only convenient and popular issues. Islamist politicians leverage on these issues to advance their program.

The nature of the Israel-Arab conflict has certainly changed over time, and perceptions have changed. The distorted idea, convenient to Israel, and to a certain extent to Arab states, that the Palestinian issue was of little or no importance in solving the conflict has been discarded. No Israeli leader can say any more, as Golda Meir said, "There are no Palestinians." However, this distortion has been replaced by a different set of questionable perceptions. It is not clear by any means what the real importance of the Palestinian issue is to Muslim or Arab politics or in the every day lives of Arab people. It is uncertain whether they care about the Palestinian people, or about Arab (as opposed to Palestinian) control of Jerusalem and Palestine. The Lebanese, for example, show no great love for the Palestinian refugees living in their midst, but manifest a great aversion to Israel and sympathy for the Palestinian cause, so long as the Lebanese themselves are not called upon to do anything for the Palestinians. The Syrian government apparently still considers Palestine part of "Southern Syria" and therefore within their rightful sphere of influence.

Arab animosity to Jews and the idea of a Jewish state did not arise with the Zionist state or the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. All the evidence indicates that it predates the state of Israel.

Mousa Khazem El-Houseini, Mayor of Jerusalem, told Winston Churchill just after WW I:

The Jews have been amongst the most active advocates of destruction in many lands... It is well known that the disintegration of Russia was wholly or in great part brought about by the Jews, and a large proportion of the defeat of Germany and Austria must also be put at their door.

(Benny Morris, Righteous Victims, Knopf 1999 Page 99)

In 1937, [King Saud told Colonel H.R.P. Dickson](#):

Today we and our subjects are deeply troubled over this Palestine question, and the cause of our disquiet and anxiety is the strange attitude of your British Government, and the still more strange hypnotic influence which the Jews, a race accursed by God according to His Holy Book, and destined to final destruction and eternal damnation hereafter, appear to wield over them and the English people generally.

'God's Holy Book (the Qur'an) contains God's own word and divine ordinance, and we commend to His Majesty's government to read and carefully peruse that portion which deals with the Jews and especially what is to be their fate in the end. For God's words are unalterable and must be.

...

"We Arabs have been the traditional friends of Great Britain for many years, and I, Bin Sa'ud, in particular have been your Government's firm friend all my life, what madness then is this which is leading on our Government to destroy this friendship of centuries, all for the sake of an accursed and stiffnecked race which has always bitten the hand of everyone who has helped it since the world began.



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Nor can we say this was an isolated opinion, or that this view changed materially after World War II or after two Arab countries signed peace treaties with Israel. In 1961, Moustapha Tlass, Defense Minister of Syria, wrote a book perpetuating the blood libel, the accusation that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood for baking Matzoth. The book has since been reprinted many times, and the blood-libel accusation has appeared in Saudi newspapers as well. In 2002, Egyptian television aired a series which asserted the reality of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In Turkey, Mein Kampf is a best seller.

While some Arab hostility to the United States and the West is due to American support for Israel, the reverse is also certainly true. Arabs and non-Arab Muslims are hostile to Israel because Israel is viewed as an outpost of Western civilization, and the "last outpost of Western Colonialism." There are numerous expressions of this attitude, which arises both from religious extremists who see Israel as a Trojan horse that will bring Western liberalism into the Middle East, and from leftists, who paint Israel as a tool of imperialism. At the Durban UN Conference on Racism, Yasser Arafat stated that Israel is the last outpost of colonialism, a view that has many adherents.

A Tunisian, Latif Chokri, stated in a dialogue:

Imperialist support for the Zionist institution has not decreased, simply because the institution is a convenient tool and spearhead for terrorising the peoples of the region, for laying hands on their resources, plundering their wealth and preventing them from uniting together and gaining their independence

(From "Dialogue - Review for discussion between Arab and Jewish activists of Palestine,"
www.miftah.org/Doc/Reports/2005/DialogueReport.pdf)

Salah Salah, Chair of the Commission of Refugees of the Palestinian National Council stated:

I do not want to enter into a grand debate, by stating that Israel is an outpost of colonialism and imperialism in the region. I do not wish to impose my point of view on anybody, but you should know that there is an alliance between the Zionist project and the global imperialist regime, under various forms.

(From "Dialogue - Review for discussion between Arab and Jewish activists of Palestine,"
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The rights of Palestinian Arabs and concern over those rights were always an issue for the Palestinians, beginning in Ottoman times, when Palestinians protested against land sales to the Zionist movement. The problem took on much more urgency following the Israeli War of Independence (1948 War), when [hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees](#). There is no doubt that the emergence of the new PLO following the 6-Day war took the Palestinian issue out of the deep freeze, where it had been hidden for the convenience of Israel and the Arab countries. However, Palestinian antagonism to Zionism was, from the start, related to larger issues of Arab nationalism and resentment of the West, as well as to traditional Arab and Muslim attitudes toward Jews, and it would be a mistake to think that these larger issues could be resolved solely by ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, or even by resolving all the substantive issues that divide Palestinians and Israelis.



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It is certainly true that hostility to Israel and Jews is fanned by the occupation and the plight of the Palestinians. Ending the occupation and the conflict will simplify US diplomacy in the region and improve sentiment toward Israel. However, It is not necessarily the case that extremists would be satisfied with a resolution that left an intact Israeli state or that hostility to Israel would vanish if ever the Palestinian issue were resolved. Racist and xenophobic views like the ones quoted above would continue to threaten the peace and challenge the legitimacy of governments that had signed peace treaties with Israel. It is even less likely that resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict would somehow magically resolve the very real conflicts between Western and Arab/Muslim interests in controlling the oil resources of the Gulf or the fiction created by differences in Western and Muslim cultural and political outlooks.

Ami Isseroff

Notes:

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3. Landis, J., Syria and the Palestine War: Fighting Abdallah's 'Greater Palestine' Plan in Rogan, E. and Shlaim. A. (eds) *The War for Palestine*, Cambridge, 2001, pp 178-205.
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5. The Brookings Report on the Middle East Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter, 1977) , pp. 195-205.

From Association for Israel Studies

The Masada Complex
Jewish identity constructions and Israeli foreign policy

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Summary

This article examines Jewish identity and Israeli foreign policy, arguing that the state of Israel has developed a personality of self-isolation. In comparison, Israel, with its sixty two years of existence, is a young state which is just in process of developing its own identity. Taking this trajectory into account, it is argued that today's role of Israel in the international community of states be best understood with reference to the concept of a self-isolating state. As the article will discuss in more detail, this concept nicely reflects the context conditions including the continuation of Diaspora where the Jews continue to see the outside world as dangerous and the very last potentially anti-Semitic. This leads to a policy of separating the country from its neighbours rather than engaging in peaceful dialogues with them. In fact, the dangerous and lonely situation of Israel exist more in the minds of its people and their memory of the past than in the current situation.

This article argues from an interdisciplinary perspective including International Relations Theory and other Social Studies such as Political Psychology. For the purpose of the presented argument it is important to note that the traditional approaches such as e.g. neo/realism as well as structural constructivism conceptualise states as the main actors in international relations (Bull 1979; Krasner 1999). Following this tradition, constructivist



scholars have, however, pointed to the significant impact of 'social facts' such as norms and belief-systems as a structured constrain of state behaviour (Ruggie 1998) and regimes (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

This article is linked to the discussion on Israel as an outcast in the world by other states (Allon 1976; Brecher 1972; Eytan 1958; Heller 1999), and follows the more recent work of the political psychologist school of thought and their work on isolated states (Geldenhuys 1990; Inbar 1985). I argue that the sources of modern Israeli identity, and therefore the lonely situation of the state, are found in Jewish history itself which contributed to creating a self-image of Israel as a modern ghetto. It focuses on Israel isolating itself by a complex and paranoia of being permanently discriminated against. And while other scholars have only focused on analyzing identity categories in conflict societies (Bekerman 2009; Auerbach 2009; Etkes 2006; Klein Halevi 2001; Monroe 1993), this article will rather than looking at negative interactions between states and isolations caused by it, highlight the construction of identity within a state. My article seeks to show that Israel's foreign decision making processes are highly influenced by the trauma of Jewish history, and therefore making the state acting paranoid towards the international. Israel views its situation too negative and the state developed a disorder out of a Jewish past of persecutions.

With reference to the legend of Masada, we can demonstrate the feeling of Israel of being alone in the world without any friends or supporters. This syndrome is in relation to the historical event of 72 A.D. where a Jewish revolt against the Roman occupier was defeated until the rock of Masada at the Dead Sea. After fighting for years against the Romans, the Jewish people of Masada felt that the whole world, as Rome conquered most of the known world at that time, was against them. So when the Romans were about to conquer the mountain, the Jews decided to take their own lives rather than surrender. For modern Israel,

Masada has, thus, become a symbol of survival just as the slogan 'Masada shall not fall again' characterises the spirit of the young country. This notion refers to the concept of a 'Masada complex' that the country has in the words of former Prime Minister Golda Meir. This complex has led the state to the belief that Israel feels alone in the world without any friends, and that Israel could only rely on the world Jewry as former Prime Minister Ben-Gurion described it in his 'two camp thesis' (Ben-Gurion 1955).

Today, Israel feels it is surrounded by a hostile world once again, and it maintains the central belief that the rest of the world has negative behavioural intentions towards the Jewish state. Israel tends to see itself as lonely in the world, which is believed by many in the Israeli government and society.

There are other examples in the world of countries with a 'Masada Syndrome', but the Israeli case finds its origin not only in the current situation but in the past experience of the Jewish people. The belief of the world's being anti-Semitic has become part of the common understanding of the Jews and the state of Israel (Bar Tal 1986; Caplan 2001; Diker 2002; Zerubavel 1995; Grosbard 2003). Prime Minister from 1969 to 1974 Golda Meir expressed this in the words: 'We do have a Masada complex. We have a pogrom complex. We have a Hitler complex.. And former Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir said in the Israeli parliament Knesset:

'We have a Warsaw Ghetto complex, a complex of the hatred of the Jewish People, just as we are filled with a Masada complex. . . We inherited the justified feeling of our backs to the wall. This feeling guided us in our various struggles and wars. . . .

In this complex, political actors in Israel, thus, believe that the world has negative feelings towards the Jewish state, which can lead to drastic measures being taken in order to prevent possible danger. And in this context, we can understand actions taken by the Israeli government which may not be within the range of accepted norms within the international community. A country which feels it is in danger may decide that the struggle of survival is so strong that all means can be used. And, in this very situation, unfavourable reactions from other countries can be interpreted as indications of negative intentions.



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For the founder of Israel, Ben-Gurion, the world Jewry was the only certain and reliable ally for Israel as he expressed in his 'two camp thesis' in the speech on Independence Day 1955 at Ramat Gan: 'It is not important what the Goyim [non-Jewish Nations] say, but rather what the Jews do..1 Since then, his thesis has become part of the Israeli foreign policy. Ben-Gurion declared what kind of bond Israel has with the Jews in the world and, at the same time, expressed his pessimism towards all the other nations. In this context, we can understand the statement by the Minister of Energy, Yitzhak Berman, after the Beirut massacre: 'The belief is held by several ministers that 'the proper shall dwell alone' which in practise means that Israel does not have to take the reactions of other countries into consideration. . . .2

It is true that there are some countries such as Iran that want to destroy Israel, but that does not mean that Israel is alone in the world without any friends and supporters. In this regard, Israel has developed an identity which is too negative. The way Israel views the world determines its reactions, and this has direct implications on Israel's allegedly uncompromising position towards the Arab states, the Palestinians and the rest of the non-Jewish world. The character Israel has developed of itself from the legend of Masada is one of being alone in the world, which, however, does not reflect the reality. The Jewish state has not come to a self-

understanding of assimilation in line with the universal norm of nationhood, and the new Jewish identity is not free from the nervousness of the Diaspora.

After Masada, the Jews were forced to leave their home in the land of Israel and were spread around the world. Their times in the ghettos, their status as minorities, persecutions and discrimination began. When Herzl had his inspiration of Zionism, most of the Jews in the world did not live in ghettos anymore but were still faced with anti-Semitism and danger in countries where they were in minorities. Herzl's Zionism wanted to bring the Jews out of these countries and into the land of Israel but also out of their ghetto mentality – indeed, to create a Jew who can face the world and who is not concentrated on his own nervousness.

During the period of the Diaspora, which is the main part of Jewish history, the Jews were separated from the surrounding peoples, which created feelings of being both permanently persecuted and superior. Such isolation brought the idea with it that because the Jews were so talented in business, arts and so on, others would hate them for it. However, clinical experience in psychopathology shows that the feeling of superiority, in which one sees himself or his own people as the best, most often goes hand-in-hand with the opposite – the feeling of being worthless. Life in the Ghetto balanced these opposing feelings resulting in a state of self-perception as the 'chosen people' whereas the non-Jewish world around the ghetto remembered the Jews for what the Jews, themselves, more deeply felt and wanted to forget – the feeling of being worthless, a people without their own home, their own king and so on (Grosbard 2003).

Of course, what happened to the Jewish people in history is without any comparison, but to solve the problems the Jewish nation is currently faced with, it has to think about the role it has played in the hatred towards it, and what feelings others have about it. The proud feeling

of all the Jewish thinkers who changed the world such as the prolific artists and the successful Jewish businessmen was connected to the feeling of something like 'see what they do with us, because we are worthless without home and state' (Grosbard 2003).

This self-nourishing emotional system was the starting point of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel. The problem in this regard is that the early Zionists thought of coming back to a land which had been waiting for them for two thousand years, but which was, in fact, populated by other people. The founder of the state, Ben-Gurion, referred to Israel as 'a country which had been inhabited by Arab invaders for 1,300 years' (Ben-Gurion 1955). The difficulty to see and to recognise the Arab, the Druze, the Armenian, simply the others in the land of Israel shows the same old pathology of the ghetto by only seeing themselves. 'If you want it, it is no dream!', the words of Theodor Herzl, seen at an emotional level lead to an interpretation of an omnipotent person, who only has his own will in view, and that he can do with it whatever he dreams of.



Israel needs to come out of this vicious circle and stop seeing the rest of the world as the enemy. Among the countries of the world, Israel is the one everybody picks on whereas it thinks it is always innocent and right. But, how could Israel solve this narcissistic disorder if it does not get the empathy it feels it deserves? As a child must first get before it can give, Israel needs to receive empathy from the countries in the world meaning they have to understand its fears of the actual fact that others wanted and want to destroy the state.

The United States does well, in this regard, by giving Israel the security it needs. Israel as a child has to solve its problems by itself, and it can do so in knowing Washington is waiting on the sideline if it needs any help. But, Israel needs others, as well, to understand its situation and give it the feeling of being strong enough not to be in fear, in return. Similarly, the US

Secretary of State Warren Christopher said, 'Only a strong Israel can make peace!'. (Grosbard 2003). Only a child who feels safe enough by external support can be strong enough to recognise the feelings of others. The European Union, on the other hand, does not give the support it could. It more often tries to impose its opinion on Jerusalem. Israel and the European Union regard each other with very high expectations. What Israel expects from Europe is understanding, sympathy, and support – not only materially but also politically. But, the leaders of the European countries berate Israel for its treatment of the Arab population and for its anti terrorist incursions into neighbouring countries. So, even if there are many economic relations between Israel and Europe, the understanding of the emotional needs of the Jewish state is not very strong in most of the countries of the European Union, which may explain why their engagement in the peace process is less effective. Europe should understand that its opinion is not extremely important in the given context, but rather it should make Israel feel safe (Laufer 1997).

We can see very well what an understanding of Israel's feelings can bring when we look at the peace process of the Rabin administration from 1992-1996, in which Israel felt for the first time that the world loved it. Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel at that time, declared:

'The train that travels towards peace has stopped this year at many stations that daily refute the time-worn canard – 'the whole world is against us.' The United States has improved its relations with us. . . In Europe, our dialogue with the European Community has been improved and deepened. We have been inundated by visiting heads of state – and we have responded to them with friendship and with economic and other links. We are no longer =a People that dwells alone'..3

What we find here in the idea of a historic nation .that dwells alone. is, in fact, the antithesis of Zionism, which regarded participation in the international community of states as essential

(Sofer 1998). Israel has not become the strong Jewish state which deals with other nations face to face but has rather entered into a state of paranoia in regard to the rest of the world.

And even during the Rabin administration a notion of self-isolation occurred under Israeli foreign policy-makers. Shimon Peres, Nobel Prize Winner for Peace, former prime minister, defence minister, foreign minister, and current president of the Jewish-democratic state has hold the opinion that a country with good policies does not need public diplomacy. And, if the policy is bad, even the best public diplomacy in the world will not help (Meir 2005). This idea is fundamental to Israeli politics and society. Even to make an attempt at public diplomacy would be useless as the world is perceived to be against Israel. It is an idea which caused substantial damage to Israel's image and reputation among the nations since it does not explain the actions of the Jewish state (Diker 2002). In fact, even a good policy, such as what one would call the peace initiative, requires public diplomacy to explain to others that it is actually a good and useful one. So, Israel would do well to understand that public diplomacy must not only deal with its own respective policy but also with the policies and actions of other international actors.



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Nevertheless Israel got a Public Diplomacy (Hasbara) Department in the Foreign Ministry now, but it is not seen as vital for Israeli Diplomacy as it should be. The Hasbara spokesmen and –women spend most of their time arguing against the Hamas or Arab leader’s role in terror, instead of focusing on words such as .peace, security, friendship, freedom, and democracy.. What we see here are policy-makers who do not use Public Diplomacy as a tool to explain the Israeli view, but rather as an attempt to make the other side look bad, or at least worse than the own side. Israeli public diplomats do not believe in their friends and supporters ability to understand the country, but rather try to only make the other side look like the bad guy.

It is true that in 1975 and 1979, the General Assembly of the United Nations branded Zionism as a form of racism. But, there is no other state, according to Deon Geldenhuys, of the size and population of Israel that has established such a wide network of diplomatic legations throughout the globe. In 1964, for example, Israel ranked twelfth among 119 nations in terms of the number of foreign states in which diplomatic missions were maintained. So, there is no reason to feel as an outcast in the world. Israel has many friends and supporters around the globe. But, the Jewish state is too negative in its self-understanding – just as the nervousness of the Diaspora Jew. Israel was supposed to bring an end to this wrong idea of the own, but its foreign policy-makers have failed here so far.

Conclusion

This article aimed at highlighting the influence of Jewish identity constructions upon Israeli foreign policy. It did so by focusing on ‘Jewishness’ as the radical influenced of the world-view of Israeli foreign policy makers and their threat perception, and their attitudes towards the value of public diplomacy. The paranoia of the state of Israel and the fears of Israeli politicians, we can only understand with reference to their Jewish identity and the collective historical memories associated with it—above all, of the Holocaust and the experience of isolation in the ghetto. The belief that anti-Semitism is inherited in non-Jewish societies and therefore makes Israel’s existence one of a permanent struggle for survival created fears and anxieties of Israeli Jews, including policy-makers who tend to view the state of Israel as a second Masada only surrounded by enemies and without anybody in the world to rely on except the Diaspora Jewry.

The assumption of a paranoid person that he is friendly and the outside is bad and against him has to do with his past and which bad experiences he has had. He is seeking warmth, love, and

acceptance he did not get before. The Jewish past gives us endless exemplars of persecution while even the present situation the Jews and the state of Israel are in is threatening, as well. But Israel has to understand that the dangers the country is faced with are worse in the mind of the Jewish people than they really are. The Jewish state sees itself surrounded by enemies while it understands the very situation as a given instead of changing it. If Israel does not even trust its friends and supporters in the world it self-isolates itself.

It is easier for the world to make a connection with the situation of the Palestinians rather than with the state of Israel. It is, in part, because Israel does not communicate its views of the world enough. . If the country does not explain its actions, its friends will criticise it as they do not understand. And as a result of it, Israel will see the whole world as being anti-Semitic and will isolate itself even more.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Herzl’s *The Jewish State*, Hannah Arendt wrote about his work and vision. In her understanding Herzl regarded anti-Semitism as a perpetual immutable force which the Jews must learn to use to their own advantage. For Herzl, the Jews were everywhere and at all times ‘surrounded and forced together by a world of enemies’ according to Hannah Arendt. In his view of reality, she goes on,

....any segment of reality that could not be defined by anti-Semitism was not taken into account and any group that could not definitely be classed as anti-Semitic was not taken seriously as a political force..4

Hannah Arendt also said:



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.The ideological elements with which [Herzl] injected the new Jewish will to political action are only too likely to lead the Jews out of reality once more – and out of the sphere of political action..5

And, in fact, we find the Jewish state today not in the notion of creating a new society liberated from the psychological distortions of the Diaspora but rather in continuation of the nervousness of the Diaspora Jews. We can rather find the old ghetto mentality in the young state of Israel which built up its ghetto walls again. Israel sees itself too much as being surrounded by enemies and too much in danger. But if Israel continues to stand on the top of Masada, it will not see the world surrounding it.

Biographical Information

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From The Tablet

Grand Strategy

Contrary to Washington wisdom, Israel is a clear strategic asset to the United States, says a new study by a bipartisan pair of veteran diplomats

By **Lee Smith** | November 9, 2011 7:00 AM

Many foreign-policy experts, even as they acknowledge that the United States has a moral responsibility to stand with the sole democracy in the Middle East, argue that Israel is a strategic liability. Robert Blackwill, a high-level diplomat in Republican administrations and a self-described Kissingerian realist, is someone who you'd safely assume shares that view. But Blackwill wanted to see if that way of looking at things was actually true.

Along with Walter B. Slocombe, who served as undersecretary of Defense for Policy under President Bill Clinton, Blackwill detailed his findings in a **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** just published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Israel: A Strategic Asset for the United States" argues that the United States not only shares national interests with the Jewish state—like preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and combating terrorism—but also reaps numerous advantages from the alliance.

The paper offers chapter and verse on Israeli contributions to the U.S. national interest. They include: Israeli counter-proliferation efforts, such as the 1981 bombing of Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility and the 2007 attack on Syria's secret nuclear facility at al-Kibar; joint military training exercises, as well as exchanges on military doctrine; Israeli technology, like unmanned aerial systems, armored vehicle protection, defense against short-range rocket threats, and robotics; missile defense cooperation; counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation; and cyber defense. Blackwill and Slocombe conclude that the alliance is in fact so central to U.S. national interests that U.S. policymakers should find ways to further enhance cooperation with Jerusalem.

Blackwill and Slocombe's detailed list is a unique event in the ongoing U.S. policy debate over the advisability of this bilateral relationship. Blackwill says that for all the media attention devoted to Israel, he and Slocombe were surprised to find no comprehensive account of Israel's contribution to the U.S. national interest existed previously. "I figured I'll just Google it," he told me this week over the phone. "But there was no existing encompassing list. So, we went item by item, making sure we had the facts straight. We didn't exaggerate or overstate the contribution."

The fact that Slocombe is a Democrat and Blackwill is a pillar of the Republican policy establishment is meant to drive home the strategic nature of their argument. According to Blackwill, the alliance has nothing to do with who's in the White House, whether the Israeli prime minister is Labor or Likud, or how much movement there is on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. "It is meant to be a grander argument," he says. "National interests don't change, except over the very long term."

What has changed—in a positive way—is Israel's ability to advance U.S. national interests. The national-interest case for Israel would have been harder to make 20 years ago, argues Blackwill. That shifted as "defense cooperation in the '90s began to be enhanced," he told me. "It's increased greatly over the last



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few decades.”

Though Blackwill served as Condeleezza Rice’s National Security Council deputy for Iraq during 2003 and 2004—in Rice’s recently published memoir she calls him “one of the best policy engineers I had ever known”—it would be a mistake to identify him with the famously pro-Israel neoconservative camp of Republican policymakers. Rather, Blackwill traces his intellectual roots to Henry Kissinger, for whom he worked as a staffer during the 1973 Arab-Israeli crisis. And it was Kissinger, President Richard Nixon’s secretary of State during that crisis, who was perhaps the first Republican policymaker to understand Israel’s strategic value.

Where President Harry Truman felt a moral responsibility and emotional attachment to Israel, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the first Republican commander-in-chief to deal with the newly formed Jewish state, saw Israel is a strategic liability. He believed the Arabs were offended and alienated by America’s closeness to Israel. Eisenhower eventually came to a different understanding—Arabs’ hostility to Israel was far less crucial to the region’s dynamics than he previously thought—but, more significantly, he recognized that the Middle East was a key venue to defeat the Soviet Union.

This was Kissinger’s starting point. With the 1973 war, Kissinger saw that Soviet arms in the hands of Egypt and Syria could not be allowed to triumph over Israel, Washington’s client. During the course of the war, Kissinger came to understand that Cairo could no longer afford the cost of being Moscow’s ally. In order to enable Sadat to jump sides and join the American camp, Kissinger had to prevent the Egyptians from being humiliated and give Sadat a defeat that he could sell to his people as a victory. A peace treaty between Israel and the largest Arab state would both neutralize Moscow’s role in the Middle East and establish Washington as the undisputed power broker in the region. With Israel backed unconditionally by the United States, the Arabs could no longer afford to wage war against the Jewish state, he believed. And if they wanted anything from Israel, then only Washington, as Kissinger understood, could deliver those concessions.

As Martin Kramer explained in his 2006 [essay](#) “The American Interest,” the Pax Americana in the eastern Mediterranean was a tremendous accomplishment for U.S. policymakers. At \$3 billion in aid annually, Israel’s friendship is a bargain. If the United States had an Israel in the Persian Gulf, another powerful ally it could count on to do its heavy lifting and keep the United States from having to land troops, Washington might well have avoided three decades worth of trouble in that part of the Middle East, from Saddam Hussein to al-Qaida to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The fact that Israel’s strategic value is lost on so many American journalists, analysts, and policymakers is largely a function of dogma, Blackwill argues. Given that so many American groups, from Christian evangelicals and the American Jewish community to the oil lobby, have a position on the U.S.-Israel relationship, it’s hardly surprising the issue generates heated emotions that tend to make the subject impervious to analysis. This affects American decision-making and public diplomacy. For instance, the U.S. Department of State, Blackwill’s home shop, is certainly not known for sending its foreign-service officers out to the Middle East to challenge Arab officials and journalists every time they say something negative about the Jewish state. The U.S.-Israel relationship really does make it harder for American diplomats to do their job—and so they just keep their mouths shut and internalize the Arab argument against the alliance.

But the hazards of the diplomatic profession shouldn’t obscure the facts of the matter for U.S. policymakers. If the alliance with Israel really is a liability to U.S. national interests, there should be concrete evidence to back it up. “We tried to identify episodes when you could plausibly argue that Arab governments exacted a price from the U.S. for its alliance with Israel,” Blackwill said. He and Slocombe found only one example: the Arab oil embargo after the 1973 war.



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“Without doubt that embargo was related to the U.S. re-supply during the ’73 Arab-Israeli war,” Blackwill said. “We thought, ‘Well, there have to be other examples. We’re just not looking hard enough.’ But to our surprise, we couldn’t find another example from that instance to today.”

Why, then, is the notion that the United States pays a price for its alliance with Israel such a prevalent theme? “People confuse what Arabs say and what Arab governments do,” Blackwill explained. “No doubt Arabs complain very genuinely about our relationship with Israel. They don’t like it. And it’s not surprising then that U.S. ambassadors send these negative Arab views back to Washington. However, our piece doesn’t argue that the American relationship with Israel is popular in the Arab world. Our approach was to gauge the question analytically, and ask, what action have Arab governments taken? And it turns out that the policies of Arab governments toward the United States are dominated by their overall perceptions of their national interests, not by the U.S.-Israel relationship.”

For instance, as Blackwill and Slocombe speculate in their paper, would the Saudis lower their oil prices “if Washington entered into a sustained crisis with Israel over the Palestine issue during which the bilateral relationship went into steep systemic decline?” The answer, of course, is no. As is the case with all rational actors, what matters most to the Arabs are their own national interests. Yet Blackwill acknowledges that the Arab Spring may change the equation insofar as it empowers potential populist movements that look at the U.S.-Israel relationship from a very different perspective than their governments have.

In any case, the core of Blackwill and Slocombe’s argument is that the alliance with Israel is vital to U.S. interests regardless of how the Arabs see it, or how it’s interpreted by any given American administration or Israeli government. “Israel’s people and politicians have a deeply entrenched pro-American outlook that is uniformly popular with the Israeli people,” they write in their paper. “Thus, Israel’s support of U.S. national interests is woven tightly into the fabric of Israeli democratic political culture, a crucial characteristic that is presently not found in any other nation in the greater Middle East.”

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