As I stated at the end of my Israel travelogue (www.lakesidepress.com/IsraelTrip.html), you can go to Israel and come away with information to support any opinion or interpretation of history regarding the Israeli-Palestinian situation. Whatever your prejudices, a trip there should help inform what you think should be done to resolve the decades-old conflict, if in fact you think it is resolvable. Before offering my own opinion, I will recommend a website that answers many basic questions about the conflict in a straightforward manner.

https://www.vox.com/cards/israel-palestine

My own opinion, strongly reinforced after the trip, is that the conflict is not resolvable under the current set of circumstances. My reasons are as follows.

1) The Palestinians, or perhaps more accurately their leaders – no matter from what era – do not want to co-exist with Israel. They want all the land, not just the West Bank, or the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They want the whole place, all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. They feel Israel has no right to occupy the land that was theirs at the time Jewish migration began in the early 20th century. This is one reason why Palestinians have never agreed to negotiate a two-state solution in good faith. The following is from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-state_solution.

The first proposal for the creation of Jewish and Arab states in the British Mandate of Palestine was made in the Peel Commission report of 1937, with the Mandate continuing to cover only a small area containing Jerusalem. The recommended partition proposal was rejected by the Arab community of Palestine, and was accepted by most of the Jewish leadership.
Partition was again proposed by the 1947 UN Partition plan for the division of Palestine. It proposed a three-way division, again with Jerusalem held separately, under international control. The partition plan was accepted by the Jewish leadership. However, the plan was rejected by the leadership of Arab nations and the Palestinian leadership, which opposed any partition of Palestine and any independent Jewish presence in the area. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War for control of the disputed land broke out on the end of the British Mandate, which came to an end with the 1949 Armistice Agreements. The war resulted in the fleeing or expulsion of 711,000 Palestinians, which the Palestinians call Nakba, from the territories which became the state of Israel.

...Support for a two state solution varies according to the way the question is phrased. Some Israeli journalists suggest that the Palestinians are unprepared to accept a Jewish State on any terms. According to one poll, "fewer than 2 in 10 Arabs, both Palestinian and all others, believe in Israel's right to exist as a nation with a Jewish majority." Another poll, however, invoked by the US State Department, suggests that "78 percent of Palestinians and 74 percent of Israelis believe a peace agreement that leads to both states living side by side as good neighbors" is "essential or desirable".

2) There have been so many meetings, negotiations and summits over the decades, it’s fair to say you can extract any facts you want from this history to show one or the other side has been unreasonable in its demands. But it is more than not agreeing to any specific proposal. The Palestinians have not come forth with serious counter proposals, serious meaning something that would allow Israel to exist and thrive as a Jewish state. The Camp David Summit in 2000 (under President Clinton) failed in part because Israel’s plan was simply not acceptable to PLO leader Yassir Arafat. According to the Palestinian negotiators the offer did not remove many of the elements of the Israeli occupation regarding land, security, settlements, and Jerusalem. President Clinton reportedly requested that Arafat make a counter-offer, but Arafat proposed none. Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami who kept a diary of the negotiations said in an interview in 2001, when asked whether the Palestinians made a counterproposal: “No. And that is the heart of the matter. Never, in the negotiations between us and the Palestinians, was there a Palestinian counterproposal.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli%E2%80%93Palestinian_conflict

3) At this juncture, Israel also does not believe in, nor want, a ‘two-state’ solution. Since the 1967 six-day war, when Israel took over the West Bank, some 500,000 Jews have settled there; this is what most Americans think of as the “occupied territory,” although as stated above, to the Palestinians the whole country is illegally occupied. However one wishes to define “occupation,” having 500,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank presents, as intended, a formidable obstacle to returning the West Bank to full Palestinian control (currently some sections are under Palestinian authority, but not the Jewish settlements). Israel is not about to move half a million people to satisfy some peace agreement that they have no guarantee would ever be honored. One can view these settlements as a way of almost guaranteeing that no future Israeli government will succumb to the siren song of a ‘two-state solution.’

4) Palestinians talk about a “one-state” solution, and it’s easy to see why. A one-state solution is not realistic for Israel because of the demographics. About 21% of Israel’s 8.5 million citizens are Arabs, a group integrated in the economy and with representation in the Knesset. If you add in all the people living in Gaza and the West Bank, the total comes to around 12 million people. Of this number, about 50% are Jewish. See https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/israels-dreaded-tipping-point-has-finally-arrived/273830/.

Given current birth rates, it is predicted that in the near future, Jews will be minority of the population living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. If there were, say 50 million Jews and 10 million Arabs, then a one-state solution would make sense for Israel, but that is not the case. Israel must maintain a large majority of Jews, for it is a democracy. If it became an Arab-majority country it would cease to exist as a Jewish nation.

5) Corruption and hypocrisy dominate the Palestinian leadership. This is common knowledge and not anything new. See:
The NY Times article (last link above) describes the current Palestinian government under Mahmoud Abbas as “a corrupt gerontocracy.” Negotiations with Palestinian leaders who are corrupt and seem more interested in self-aggrandizement than their own people is not conducive to securing a solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, pointing out Palestinian corruption inevitably leads the anti-Israel crowd to crow about Israeli corruption and “moral equivalence,” arguing that “Israeli leadership is also corrupt.” Indeed there are corruption investigations of the current Israeli administration. See:


Whatever Israeli corruption exists is not, in my opinion, morally equivalent. The Israeli leadership is not focused almost exclusively on destroying another country to the neglect of its own citizens’ well-being. It does not stifle dissent nor jail journalists who object to Israel’s policies.

If not for the Palestinian leaders’ manifest corruption and mis-allocation of resources, the Palestinian people would likely lead a better, healthier and more productive life. But it is very dangerous for Palestinians who object to this corruption. See:


https://www.wsj.com/articles/if-the-oslo-accords-are-over-the-real-work-of-peace-can-begin-1516233947


6) Terrorist organizations have significant influence in the region. There is Sunni Hamas in Gaza, and Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon. Though Hamas was elected to power in Gaza in 2006, it is recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union. Hamas has stated repeatedly that Israel has no right to exist. Since 2007 Hamas has carried out hundreds of attacks against Israel and Israel-occupied territories. See:

Hezbollah is a political party and militant group based in Lebanon. Israel last fought an all-out war with Hezbollah in 2006, and there have been numerous skirmishes since then. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Lebanon_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Lebanon_War)

Both Hamas and Hezbollah want to destroy the country. For political reasons Hamas may “soften” its stance on wanting Israel’s destruction, as it did in the spring of 2017, but Israel does not see this as a real change of heart. In response, a spokesman for the Israeli government noted: “Hamas is attempting to fool the world but it will not succeed. They dig terror tunnels and have launched thousands upon thousands of missiles at Israeli civilians. This is the real Hamas.” See: [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-hamas-document/hamas-softens-stance-on-israel-drops-muslim-brotherhood-link-idUSKBN17X1N8](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-hamas-document/hamas-softens-stance-on-israel-drops-muslim-brotherhood-link-idUSKBN17X1N8)

7) Fatah, the main Arab political party, controls the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank. It is the party of Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the “State of Palestine” and Palestinian National Authority. Palestinian president since January 2005, Abbas is currently in his 14th year of a four-year term. The Authority hasn’t held an election in over a decade because its leaders can’t guarantee they will be re-elected. Thus the main Arab factions are Hamas, Hezbollah, Fatah. A fully-unified Palestinian nation would likely be ruled by terrorists or corrupt politicians in league with the terrorists. And it is abundantly clear that the Palestinian leadership, certainly the terrorist factions, want what Hitler wanted: for the Jews to disappear. And if it requires all the Jews to be killed to achieve that purpose, so be it. The average Palestinian may not feel this way, and would likely choose (if given a choice) for a better standard of living over spending vast sums to terrorize Israel. But like the German citizens before and during WW2, the Palestinian people are going to follow their leaders, no matter the cost in terms of dollars or lives lost; this could be because of real conviction, or simply because they know dissent would lead to imprisonment or death. Thus if militant Arab leaders obtained real power over Israel, there is no stopping another Holocaust. Israelis know this. For them, it is truly “Never Again.”

Israel has already fought three major wars against the Arabs that, had Israel lost, would have led to the country’s dissolution (1948, 1967, 1973). In addition there have been several smaller wars, against Hamas and Hezbollah, plus numerous skirmishes. Israel has also suffered through two intifadas (see Part 1 of the Travelogue). Yet despite the fighting, the hatred, the frequent condemnations by the UN (the most condemnations of any nation) and despite the country’s small size, it remains one of the most prosperous on the planet, and the only true democracy in the Middle East. It has a first-world economy and standard of living, and more high-tech start-ups than any other country in Europe and Asia. Compare what Israel has accomplished in the last three generations with other Arab countries. Israel is not perfect, and there are many aspects deserving of criticism, but in terms of true diversity, democracy and economic opportunity for ordinary citizens, it has no equal in the region.

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In the 1930s Germany made war on its Jewish citizens, an intelligent, prosperous, highly productive group. The war against the Jews was irrational and insane, the result of delusion, megalomania and unchecked power, made possible by a culture steeped in centuries-old anti-semitism. However, before Hitler’s rise and despite the long history of European anti-semitism, most German Jews were reasonably well accepted in German society, and many fought for Germany in WW1.

What happened? The key word is, I think, irrational. An irrational Hitler could build on the latent anti-semitism and, in so doing start a war that killed not only 6 million Jews and untold more millions throughout the world, but roughly 7 million Germans, including 5 million German soldiers. And for what? If anything, the war against the Jews probably hastened Germany’s defeat, by expelling or killing all the Jewish scientists and physicists. (Einstein was in the U.S. when Hitler came to power in 1933 and did not return to Berlin.)
The United States, not Germany, built the atomic bomb, unfortunately too late for Europe’s Jews.

What happened to the Jews 1933-1945 informs us of what could happen again. Or did the holocaust happen at all? Not according to Hamas. The following is from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas#Statements_on_the_Holocaust.

“Hamas has been explicit in its Holocaust denial. In reaction to the Stockholm conference on the Jewish Holocaust, held in late January 2000, Hamas issued a press release that it published on its official website, containing the following statements from a senior leader:

This conference bears a clear Zionist goal, aimed at forging history by hiding the truth about the so-called Holocaust, which is an alleged and invented story with no basis. (...) The invention of these grand illusions of an alleged crime that never occurred, ignoring the millions of dead European victims of Nazism during the war, clearly reveals the racist Zionist face, which believes in the superiority of the Jewish race over the rest of the nations. (...) By these methods, the Jews in the world flout scientific methods of research whenever that research contradicts their racist interests.”

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That the world (or much of it) would repeatedly condemn the only democracy in the Middle East because it tries to defend itself is, on the surface, irrational, insane. It simply makes no sense except as a manifestation of root prejudice.

The progressive, liberal academics in this country (and their student followers) who support a “boycott Israel campaign” exemplify the utter hypocrisy of this prejudice. They never rally against Arab countries that treat women like slaves, that foster and finance terrorism, or that operate as totalitarian theocracies. Instead, they go after Israel, a successful democracy and ally of the U.S., because…. Well, there is no “because.” They might tell you it’s about the settlements in the West Bank, or the treatment of the Palestinians, or the latest wall Israel has put up to keep out stone-throwing hoodlums. But it’s really not. It is root hatred that is at its core anti-semitic, unexplainable by any rational study of history, and immensely hypocritical; it is all of those things, and it won’t go away.


Such advocacy also appears irrational. Who knows what these organizations’ real motives are? Some of their statements actually border on anti-semitism (see https://www.adl.org/education/resources/profiles/jewish-voice-for-peace). The best that can be said about them is they are naïve in the extreme, have little understanding of history, and are clueless about what would ensue from their proposed “one-state” solution. The worst that can be said about them is they want Israel to disappear.

There are other Jewish organizations that are clearly pro-Israel and against the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions), but advocate for what, at this point in history, seems highly unrealistic. T’ruah, a “rabbinic human rights organization,” has the following statement on its web site (https://www.truah.org/twostates):

We believe that a just and secure future for Israelis and Palestinians will best be achieved by a negotiated resolution that results in both peoples living within their own sovereign states. As such, we advocate for an end to the military occupation of the West Bank and an end to the continued expansion of the settlements that extend this occupation, that infringe on the human rights of
Palestinians, and that compromise the safety and security of Israelis. We also affirm Israel’s right to exist as a homeland for Jews, just as we advocate for a future Palestinian state where Palestinians can thrive and enjoy the right of self-determination.

If only… The words are just that, words. The Palestinians don’t just want “an end to the military occupation of the West Bank.” They want it all, starting with the pre-1967 territories, which includes East Jerusalem, and that’s not going to happen. There is no basis for realistic negotiations, and position papers like T’ruah’s seem to me full of nice-sounding language that is unrealistic and will lead nowhere.

There might have been a possibility of a two-state solution in the 1930s and 1940s, had more pressure been applied by England and the United States, but after that it became increasingly unlikely. Clearly, the Arab wars against Israel in 1967 and 1973, plus the many unprovoked attacks since then on Israel and its citizens, have hardened Israel at the negotiating table. Israel’s reprisals have hardened the Arabs as well.

Indeed, Israel’s reactionary treatment of Palestinians has served as major rallying point for further indictment of Israel as the aggressor and oppressor. In this version of history, it’s not the Arabs and their wars against Israel, nor the Palestinian leaders’ refusal to consider a two-state solution when they had the chance, not the manifest corruption of the Palestinian leaders that has prevented a ‘peaceful solution’; the reason is Israel’s oppressive treatment of the occupied Palestinians. See:

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/deconstructing-netanyahus_b_11371564.html?utm_hp_ref=israeli-palestinian-conflict
https://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n23/nathan-thrall/rage-in-jerusalem

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Israel would love a solution that guaranteed its sovereignty and also satisfied the Palestinians, but that solution simply does not exist. As David Remnick wrote in a 2013 New Yorker article on the West Bank settlements:

https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/01/21/the-party-faithful

There have been countless plans for division and resolution—the U.N. partition plan in 1947; the Oslo process in the mid-nineties; Ehud Barak’s offers to Yasir Arafat at Camp David and Taba, in 2000 and 2001; Ariel Sharon’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, in 2005; Ehud Olmert’s offer to Mahmoud Abbas, in 2007—and with what results? Wars, intifadas, terror, rocket fire, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, hostility in the U.N. and Europe, threats of boycotts and delegitimization. Most Israelis no longer care that the Palestinians see this stark narrative of rejectionism and terror in a very different way; there is scant recognition of the role of settlements, roadblocks, harassment, evictions, detentions, the abuses of the I.D.F., and much else.

Yes, the Palestinians and Israelis see all this history – the attacks on Israel and Israel’s acts of defiance and retaliation – in very different ways, and is a major reason why there is no two-state solution acceptable to both sides. All the talk and posturing and statements and proposals are not going to lead to peace.

To summarize:

Israel simply cannot abide by any “solution” that threatens her very existence as a Jewish state, or that cedes East Jerusalem back to an Arab power when that power includes elements intent on destroying the country.

As for the Palestinians, they feel they are the victims, and that Israel is occupying their land. No division of existing lands is ever going to change their belief. They won’t be satisfied until there are no more Jews left between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.