

Malignant role-reversal

Joshua Muravchik's new book warns that the relentless campaign to recast Israel as a malevolent Goliath places it in grave peril **By Tibor Krausz**

COME ON, Israel, go easy, buddy. Here you are, this mighty power armed to the teeth with the best armaments money can buy, squaring off against those poor Palestinians with their slings and pebbles. Every few years a weird bloodlust comes over you and you lash out at them, murdering innocent men, women and children for no reason at all.

Now tell me: What have the Palestinians ever done to you? Those barrages of rockets from Gaza, you say? They're mere annoyances, child's play. Those suicide bombers from the West Bank, you whine? That's all in the past; stop dwelling on it. Those knifings and deadly car ramming attacks of late in Jerusalem, you splutter? You've had them coming.

And so it goes. Ask people in the West, and many, if not most, will tell you that Israel is brutish Goliath to Palestine's plucky David, and in the permanent tussle between the two, it's always Israel that is at fault. That's because the Jewish state allegedly keeps fueling the "cycle of violence" by its "disproportionate" response to Palestinian attacks, which are, we're assured, driven purely by desperation and rightful self-defense.

Israeli aggression is always assumed to be coldly calculated to exact the heaviest toll on Palestinians. By contrast, Palestinian violence, however brutal, is viewed simply as the collective sigh of the oppressed and as such not only understandable but morally justifiable.

So carry on butchering those "Zionist occupiers," if you will, Hamas and Fatah. And since both Palestinian groups consider all of Israel to be "occupied" Palestinian territory, presumably Israelis have no right to defend themselves any time anywhere. Just as in the biblical story, Goliath has only one way to go: down. And down we must help him go.

How has a tiny, beleaguered state, whose youth must give their best years to the army so that the country's citizens can sleep peacefully at night, come to be widely regarded as an insufferable bully who is in the wrong just by defending itself?

In his first-rate new book, "Making David into Goliath," the American author and political scientist Joshua Muravchik explores the dynamics that underline such thinking and the developments that have shaped them.

The reason that Israel, the author reminds us, has long been singled out for virulent scorn and censure, alone of the world's nations, is not that it "was so strong but that it was not strong enough." In

the face of the country's unrelenting demonization by the League of Arab States, whose 22 members automatically gang up on the single Jewish state at international forums like the UN (to say nothing of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with its 57 member states), Israel has been cornered from the get-go.

After they failed to eliminate the Jewish state militarily in 1948, 1967 and 1973, Arab nations set about trying to do away with "the Zionist entity" politically by seeking to isolate it through their collective economic and political might. "They threatened those who crossed them with terrorism, oil cutoffs, and economic boycotts; and they rewarded those who appeased them with protection, economic favors, and the power of their diplomatic bloc," Muravchik writes.

THE TACTIC worked, not least because the Arabs found willing accomplices both among the countries of the former Soviet bloc, which despised Israel for being a staunch ally of the US, and among large segments of the West's educated "multiculturalist" elite who came to regard Israel as a latter-day imperialist outpost that reminded them of the sins of their own countries against "people of color" in the former colonies.

In modern progressive thought, the putative liberation struggle of these former colonials in Asia and Africa from the yoke of their erstwhile European masters, who allegedly continue to exert undue political and economic influence over them, has replaced the older Marxist model of class struggle as "the central moral drama of world history," Muravchik notes.

"Championed by the Left's network of organizations and intellectuals," he explains, "a [would-be] Palestinian state became a kind of Holy Grail to enlightened opinion, even when almost no one gave a fig for the aspirations of the Kurds or Tibetans or numerous other bereft peoples. Whether this state would rise alongside Israel or in place of it was of secondary concern."

But that ideological development required two sleights of hand.

According to an EU poll, well over half of Dutch, Austrians, Finns, Brits and Germans regard Israel as 'the greatest threat to world peace'; an anti-Israel demonstration in central London, July 19



LUKE MACGREGORY / REUTERS

Books

One was the creation of a new category of Arabs, the Palestinians, whose national identity crystallized only after the war of 1967 when Israel captured Gaza and the West Bank. In short order, the Arabs living in the occupied territories became proxies for collective Arab grievances against Israel. “The emergence of Palestinian nationalism following the Six Day War transformed Israelis from ‘pioneers’ into ‘colonizers,’” Muravchik notes.

And by embracing their cause, Arab states managed to rebrand, for the sake of Western audiences, their formerly religious and ideological enmity to the Jewish state as support for Palestinians’ national aspirations. And as any public relations consultant will tell you, branding is everything.

For all its might, Israel remains a David, struggling against the odds to secure its small foothold in a violent and hostile region

In succinct and apposite chapters, Muravchik charts the history of Arab opposition to the very idea of a Jewish state in the Middle East. We listen to them insist, in aptly selected quotes from the 1930s and ‘40s, that they will never accept such a state on even “one inch” of Palestine. We hear them issue full-throated genocidal threats prior to the war of 1967, crowing with anticipated bloodlust that “No Jews shall be left alive,” in the immortal words of the PLO’s first chairman, Ahmad Shukeiri.

We see them go on murderous rampages of terrorism against Jews and Israelis worldwide in the 1970s and ‘80s, even while, in a form of economic gangsterism, oil-rich Arab states wield the threat of embargoes against nations that dare cross them over Israel.

Then first comes one bloody intifada in the 1980s, then another, even more brutal one, at the dawn of the new millennium, before a Hezbollah attack on Israel in 2006 and years of rocket attacks by Hamas from Gaza. Meanwhile, the UN, dominated largely by the myriad Muslim states and their political fellow travelers, pass one

stinging resolution after another against the diplomatically besieged Jewish state. “[O]f all General Assembly resolutions that criticize a particular country,” Muravchik points out, “three-quarters apply to Israel.”

DEPRESSING, YES. Commendably, however, the author is prudent enough not to portray Israel as simply the victim of Arab ill will. Some of the country’s plight has been self-inflicted, Muravchik rightfully observes. He’s unflinching, as he should be, in highlighting flawed and reckless policies by successive governments, including Ariel Sharon’s ill-fated invasion of Lebanon and the Likud’s extensive settlement building in the West Bank in the 1980s whose malignant effects are still with us.

Still, the fact remains that through the years the Arab world’s loathing of Israel has little abated. What has changed over time is the alignment of Western views with those of the Arabs about Israel. Cowed by the dangers of Islamist terrorism and violent backlash from their own volatile Muslim immigrant populations, successions of European governments have long adopted conciliatory attitudes toward Arab states on the issue of Palestine.

Meanwhile, over in academia, postmodernist claptrap has blowtorched its way through the humanities, creating whole new generations of intellectuals, scholars and teachers who are instinctively wedded to a hopelessly ahistorical, Manichean view of the conflict.

We can largely thank the late Arab-American literary critic Edward W. Said for that. Hardly a nuanced thinker, the Columbia University professor of English was prone to spurious ex cathedra pronouncements such as this: “Every European, in what he could say about the Orient, [has been] a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.” Nor was Said above misrepresenting other scholars’ views, launching malicious ad hominem attacks on his critics and falsifying his biography to turn himself from privileged Egyptian into Palestinian refugee.

Yet he became widely hailed as a supremely gifted intellectual, whose “Orientalism” — a muddled, pedantic, error-strewn treatise published in 1978 as a founding text of postcolonial studies — has served up an oversize, distorted prism through which many Westerners now view Israelis and Palestinians. By lending an intellectual veneer to Palestinian rejectionism and Islamic ob-



scurantism, Said did more than most to help legitimize them.

Which brings us to the second ideological sleight of hand that has been coopted to delegitimize Israel: the repainting of Jews as “white” (or ethnically amorphous at best). That’s been done because as “people of color” themselves with their ancestral roots in Palestine they would less obviously qualify as axiomatic colonialist oppressors in the eyes of Western progressives.

And so a people who for centuries were scorned as hook-nosed Semitic aliens in white Europe now find themselves demonized as white European intruders — variously identified as ethnic Russians or Poles or the descendants of Khazar converts to Judaism — in a hitherto ethnically harmonious Middle East.

For that too we have Edward Said to thank. The intellectual succeeded in “portraying ‘Orientals’ as the epitome of the dark-skinned; Muslims as the representative Orientals; Arabs as the essential Muslims; and finally, Palestinians as the ultimate Ar-



Arab-American literary critic Edward W. Said lent an intellectual veneer to Palestinian rejectionism and Islamic obscurantism

Muslims worldwide through their “illegal” occupation of Palestine.

One of the world’s smallest countries – and a thriving liberal democracy at that – has come to be seen not only as a colossal nuisance but as a positive menace. According to an EU poll, three-quarters of Dutch people, two-thirds of Austrians, and well over half of Finns, Brits and Germans regard Israel as “the greatest threat to world peace.” North Korea? Iran? Russia? China? Bah, they’re bastions of freedom, liberalism and common decency, compared to Israel.

Is there hope for change? Precious little. And that’s a worry. Faced by implacable enemies, Israelis are forever treading a fine line between self-preservation and dangerous compromise for the sake of peace. “For all its might, Israel remains a David, struggling against the odds to secure its small foothold in a violent and hostile region,” Muravchik warns. “The relentless campaign to recast it instead as a malevolent Goliath places it in grave peril.” ■

abs,” Muravchik observes. “Abracadabra, Israel, in conflict with the Palestinians, was transformed from a redemptive refuge from two thousand years of prosecution to the very embodiment of white supremacy.”

In one fell swoop, Said and likeminded intellectuals helped reframe the conflict as a “Palestinian-Israeli” one in lieu of what it actually has always been: an “Arab-Israeli” one. The result: Israel is a jackbooted Goliath lording it smugly over a helpless minority, on whose stolen land this obnoxious behemoth has been squatting.

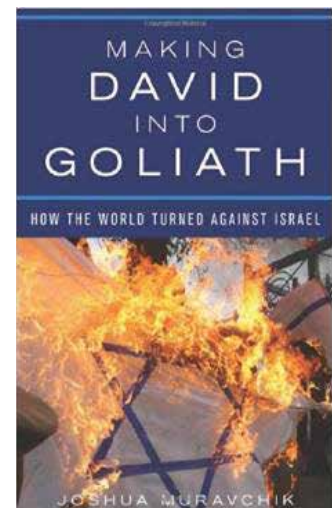
Point out, though, that the Jewish state occupies a fraction of one percent of Middle Eastern territory with a little more than 6 million Israeli Jews pitted against 370 million or so Arabs (and another 1.2 billion Muslims further afield), and the logical conclusion about who is David and who is Goliath looks rather different.

But accepting the implications of such a role-reversal is anathema to the country’s enemies and detractors. And so they fall back on exaggerating Israel’s political and

economic might through the usual canards of sinister Jewish influence in world affairs. Playing second fiddle to them is the Arab-Muslim world, which is awash with inane conspiracy theories and pernicious blood libels about Jews and “Zionists.”

LIKEWISE, MANY Western media outlets and commentators fixate almost obsessively on Israel’s shortcomings, magnifying them mercilessly out of proportion through both sheer repetition and barefaced hyperbole (Gaza is an “open-air prison” or “concentration camp,” Israel is an “apartheid state,” Palestinians are experiencing “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” etc.).

All the old slanders about Jews have been transferred wholesale to their state. Once, Jews were accused of ritually slaughtering Christian children for their blood; now, Israelis are accused of deliberately slaughtering Palestinian children in Gaza. Once, Jews were accused of fomenting wars for profit; now, Israelis are accused of hindering “world peace” by allegedly radicalizing



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By Joshua Muravchik
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