

# SHALOM

*Jewish Peace Letter*

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Stefan Merken

## We Need to Care for Each Other

**I**N 1985 I TRAVELED TO THE SOVIET UNION WITH SEVENTEEN members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The purpose was to meet and talk with like-minded individuals and make some solid connections between their peace groups and ours. I went on the trip because I believed in the Fellowship of Reconciliation's vision of creating new bonds of friendship. But I had a personal reason too. My grandparents were from the Russia, and I have always felt a certain bond with people of Russian Jewish descent. Even though we were not planning to visit the area my grandparents had lived in, I still believed meeting Russians in general would be a link to my deceased grandparents and their lost world.

In preparation, I studied the prior twenty years of the US and Soviet Union and their stormy relationship. I realized there had been very little meaningful communication between the two countries. I wondered how, in the long run, this could affect my family. I should mention that at this time I had been married about five years and we had a three-year-old son.

I also realized that the relationship between the US and the Soviet Union was critically important in avoiding a devastating war which could cause mutual destruction. I knew, too, that the fate of my son was in the hands of the leaders of both countries. Even so, ordinary people of both countries had to organize to help prevent a war between the two nuclear powers.

So I took a photograph of my three-year-old son, made a hundred copies, and stuck them in my camera bag. I was prepared to give a photograph to anyone and everyone I met and tell them that they needed to care for my son just as I would care for their children.

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*STEFAN MERKEN is Chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.*

It worked. Thanks to those of my companions who spoke Russian, I distributed the photos with my brief explanation and everyone, Americans and Russians, understood my message. The response was overwhelming. The average person on the street grasped the honesty of my words and the photo and why I was asking them to be the caretakers of all children.

My Russian trip has much relevance in the increasing tensions today, especially in the Middle East. The problems between Israelis and Palestinians continue to fester. It is time to stop the rhetoric and reach some sensible understanding of how dangerous the conflict has become, and that the alternatives are not very attractive to either side.

The possibility of war with Iran is no different. Social media and the Internet have opened a new way to communicate with others. Reaching other like-minded folks is much different now than in 1985. One can post a photograph on a Web page and tens of thousands or more people can see it and respond. An Israeli designer, Ronny Edry, created a poster of himself with his young daughter holding an Israeli flag (<http://jhaines6.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/a-very-special-talk-israel-and-iran-a-love-story/>) telling Iranians that he loved them. His point was to inform anyone who would listen that he didn't want to go to war with their country. The response was incredible. Not only did Iranians respond with photographs and expressions of love and peace, but people from all over the world responded.

At least it is a beginning. Perhaps it too can work in defusing a conflict on the Korean peninsula. In any event, we need to insist that politicians and the mass media support peace rather than perpetual war, and, most importantly, ordinary people need to organize and demand: No more wars. ☆

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### *A Reminder*

## **Nominations Deadline for JPF's Abraham Joshua Heschel Award *Extended***

The Jewish Peace Fellowship is calling for nominations for its Abraham Joshua Heschel Award, given to an individual or organization that shows exceptional contributions to peace in the Jewish tradition. When making a nomination for the Abraham Joshua Heschel Award, please provide the name of the person(s) or organization(s), along with a brief explanation for your nomination. News articles and other supporting documentation you provide will be appreciated. Please send your nomination(s) by June 1, 2013, to: Stefan Merken, Jewish Peace Fellowship, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960; or email: [jpf@forusa.org](mailto:jpf@forusa.org); and place "Attn: Stefan Merken" in the Subject line.

Rachel Antony-Levine

## Subtle Tactics

### *My surprising Birthright trip*

#### 1-5-13: DAY THREE OF BIRTHRIGHT, NEGEV DESERT

*It's a meditation exercise to sit on the ground and imagine how supported you are. But sitting here, in the desert in the Negev, you don't feel supported by the earth, you feel engulfed by it. Like it might crack open and swallow you at any moment in its teeming, shifting crust. The shadows of the clouds are massive countries superimposed on the yellow-brown sand like oil slicks, and the clouds themselves move like steamboats, slowly but perceptively through the vast ocean of this massive sky. They're not so much mountains, but rather, harsh scabs on the arms of war, wounds that don't heal but merely change form. This place offers nothing like the mothering comfort one feels in the dank and mushroomy cocoon of the redwood forests of my native California. It offers only you, alone with yourself and the knowledge that others have also known solitude and survived, regardless.*

At this point, most people who are at all interested in Israel are familiar with Birthright, the free ten-day tour of Israel provided to young Jews from around the world. The pro-Zionist lobby hails it as a fantastic success story; an in-

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credible opportunity for young people to get in touch with their Jewish ancestry, feel connected to Jews their own age, and gain an appreciation for Israel. Those on the left who are critical of Israel tend to view it as a terrifying source of propaganda and brainwashing that uses creepy forms of manipulation to make young Jews support Israeli policies, perhaps even to the point of "making aliyah," emigrating to Israel.



*A Birthright expedition by camel to a Bedouin settlement, 2012.*

I certainly identify more with the latter category, which is why I had mixed feelings about attending Birthright in the first place. Not only did I not want to legitimize the idea that I actually *had* some kind of birthright to the land of Israel and Palestine just for being Jewish, but I was nervous that I would be forced into situations that would bother me, like having to sing along to lots of Jewish songs that I didn't know, or cry about the Holocaust in some kind of ritualized group catharsis, or be surrounded by people who nodded vigorously when outrageously racist comments about Arabs were made. I decided to go for two main reasons: I had never spent any time around Zionists before, and I felt that it was important for me to try to understand their point of view and I wanted to go to Palestine afterwards, and I didn't think it was likely that I would make it there if not for a free trip. So I hesitantly arrived at the LAX airport on January 1, armed with an open and patient mind, took a deep breath, and hoped for the best.

My experience was complicated. I can't say that what I went through amounted to brainwashing or propaganda, at least not in the traditional sense. I believe that part of the reason for this was the particular trip I was on: a niche trip, of which there are more and more. The group I participated

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in was the “outdoors”-themed East Bay trip. (East Bay refers to the eastern part of the San Francisco Bay area in California, which includes Oakland and Berkeley.) I actually believe there was more to this niche than we initially realized. Here’s an excerpt from my journey on the fifth day:

1-7-13

*I’ve never been surrounded by so many atheists my own age. Who would have thought? Maybe it’s because Jews come around to secularism easier than Christians? And I’ve never really kicked it with a bunch of Jews before. How ironic that that’s how I ended up relating to my fellow Jews. That’s how I’ve found community amongst the Jewish people. Through atheism.*

Even our tour guide was an “out” atheist. I considered the possibility recently that we were all selected to be on this group together partly because we were either atheists or “spiritual.” I think that our American trip leaders were the only ones who were full-on religious Jews. So they avoided a lot of biblical talk that I’ve been warned about on Birthright. There was no reference to the “holy land” and they didn’t try to talk about the stories in the Bible as if they were real history. In fact, there was no reference to the Bible at all. It was like they knew that these triggers would immediately turn us off, so they avoided them.

Our tour guide was also very willing to admit that the Palestinians had some legitimate complaints. He didn’t get into any of them, but he didn’t vilify the Palestinians either. His attitude struck me as sort of courageous but cynical libertarianism, which mistrusted government of any kind and had a somewhat pessimistic view of humanity as a whole, but a strong sense of respect and integrity about the humans whose paths he crossed, including his “Arab friends” whom he mentioned vaguely on more than one occasion.

What it *felt* like we were getting on this trip was a very apolitical, fun, first-hand experience of Israel. Furthermore, as has been documented by other writers who attended Birthright, the social dynamics end up taking up a lot of your focus. First of all, each evening ends around 5 or 6 p.m. and you’re not allowed to leave the hotel, so there’s nothing to do but get drunk and hang out, a situation ripe for a regression to high school. Crushes develop, cliques form, some people struggle to make friends, gossip starts; what else are we going to do with our time? At a certain point on the trip, participants began to ask: Why can’t we have a structured conversation about Judaism or the Israel-Palestine conflict? A few evenings we were told that we would have some kind

of group discussion, but nothing actually happened. This puzzled me until I read more about what others have written about Birthright. It’s apparently common practice for the organizers to avoid anything too heavy that might lead to critical thinking about Israel. They like to keep it light and fun while occasionally hinting at the tragic cross the Israelis have to bear by living in a war zone. By avoiding any kind of detailed discussion of the conflict, but keeping a hint of tragedy in the background, the organizers made it feel like our fun-loving attitude was courageous, rather than indulgent.

What was tricky about Birthright’s biased message was that it came in the form of omission, which is inherently hard to spot and even harder to criticize, especially when you’re tired and hung-over and preoccupied with why your crush didn’t sit with you on the bus. My fatigue and social stimulation paired well with my decision to keep a low profile on the trip. I didn’t ruffle any feathers. I just enjoyed myself. And though my pro-Palestinian views stayed intact, I didn’t feel particularly obliged to share them with anyone unless I was talking to someone one-on-one.

But once you cross that wall into the Occupied Territories, you want to vomit up all the Kool-Aid you realize you’ve just swallowed over the past ten days. I didn’t so much feel as if I’d been lied to; I just felt sheltered. The diary that I kept on my experience in Palestine has a totally different voice than the diary I kept while in Israel. It was as if I had been thrown head first into an urgent and tangible reality where what was happening around me mattered. Instead of extended soliloquies about my new friends or thoughts about home, I was writing pages and pages about the wall, villagers whose homes had been demolished, how the universities have to have their lab equipment smuggled in, what sustainable agriculture looks like in Palestine. I felt as if I had come out of a cocoon and realized that there were all these flowers that needed pollinating.

Returning to the US, with all my feelings of urgency and inspiration, I tried to pin down exactly which flowers were meant for me to pollinate. I’ve decided that I want to put my energy into helping Birthright participants get to Palestine. I feel strongly that young Jews need to visit Palestine, and though I obviously have my problems with Birthright, I think it’s a pretty amazing and informative trip to go on as well. This is why my recommendation for anyone considering a Birthright trip, from any political point of view at all, is to go on the trip. Enjoy it, get everything you can from it, but afterwards, visit Palestine. You won’t know that you’re in a container until you see what’s outside of it, and that it all begins with checking out the other side of that wall. ✨

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Ruth L. Hiller

## Daring to Say ‘No’

**D**IFFERENT PEOPLE REFUSE TO ENLIST IN ISRAEL’S occupation army for a variety of reasons. Some of them, like Natan Blanc, publicly refuse to serve in the occupation and are willing to go to jail over their decision.

A recent blog post by Uriel Kitron, professor of environmental studies at Emory College in Atlanta, Georgia, raised some very important points regarding militarism, refusal and the culture of war in Israel, and looks at the wider refusal movement.

Professor Kitron admires and respects Natan Blanc, who as of this writing, is serving his seventh prison sentence for refusing to be drafted. Much like Kitron, many people here in Israel consider Natan a modern-day hero. He is indeed brave. It is admirable that any eighteen-year-old Israeli would know so much about human rights, and stand true to his or her convictions and beliefs.

Kitron also stresses how Natan is a product of his environment. His family raised him to be a caring person with humane ideals and an appreciation for and understanding of human rights. There is a lot to be said for the courage it took to let Natan develop his own sense of values that cherish human life and recognize the Palestinian right to self-determination as well. This is not always a given in Israel.

Without personally knowing the Blanc family, I admire their ethical code, which enabled Natan to question Israel’s policies and make his decision to refuse military service. I identify with his moral values and the way he was raised. I know it is not easy to develop a critical perspective on Israel’s occupation policies, and that it is even more challenging to encourage your children to do so. It is difficult and exhausting to continually question and oppose Israel’s brutal policies, especially when indoctrination to believe otherwise is

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**RUTH HILLER, mother of six, is a longtime Israeli peace activist and an original founder of New Profile. Four of her children have refused to serve in the Israeli military. You can follow her on Twitter @hillerruth.**

ever-present.

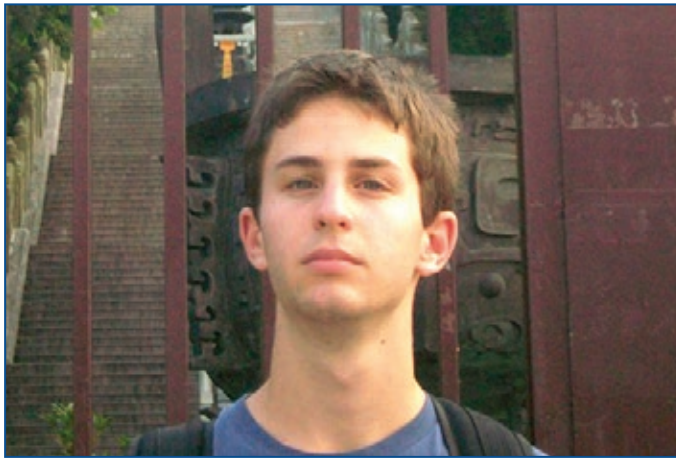
Refusers like Natan, who openly oppose conscription on moral grounds, are few and far between — for good reason. But before we can even begin to examine who chooses to be a refuser and how refusal is manifested, it is important to understand that within Jewish Israeli society, conscription

is mandatory for all Jewish youth, as well as for young secular men from the Druze community. It can be seen as normal and part of the development of young Israelis, a rite of passage meant to instill a sense of national responsibility, service and pride.

Israeli society can be vicious and judgmental; loyalty to the state is measured by one’s commitment to military service. It is frightening to step outside the consensus of what is considered acceptable behavior

by daring to say “no.” A sense of belonging is an essential human need, and deciding to go without it requires strength and support. Most refusers don’t want to be isolated from their peer group, and if, like Natan, they choose to make a political statement, they require a close support network. Among the large number of refusers whom New Profile counsels (an average of 100-110 people a month), most choose not to make a public political refusal for a variety of reasons. They are not as visible as Natan; but are their refusals less meaningful?

Militarism is strongly embedded in Israeli society: It starts at home and continues with our children’s education. Personally I think there is something very warped in the way Israeli parents are expected to raise their children, nurture and protect them, teach them to be safe and make rational decisions, and then once they are eighteen, as if feeding them to the wolves, we send them off to the military, no questions asked. What is the price that we and our children pay? We, as parents, are an integral part of this well-oiled induction system. We are obedient to our leaders and raise generation after generation of fighters for a “war of no choice.” Our compliance is rarely questioned. Conscription inspires pride amongst parents; military rank brings social status, placing



*Natan Blanc, refuser.*

soldiers on a pedestal. This idealization can be compared to hero-worship.

But what constitutes a hero? Our children are brought up on the remembrance of exile and the Holocaust, Israel's fight for independence, and our perceived need to be stronger than our enemies. They are taught that soldiers can be national heroes. Those that die in battle are often given exalted status. They are raised in the belief embodied in Joseph Trumpeldor's reputed last words: "It is good to die for your country."

New Profile examines "what is heroism" and "who is a hero" through a balanced dialogue. Each refuser, both men and women, whether they are pre-conscripts, conscripts or reservists, are welcomed and admired for the type of refusal they chose and the path they took to achieve their goal.

Some of the viewpoints we consider are: Does civil society necessarily have to reflect the accepted militarized hierarchical ranks, or can one proceed in ways refusers choose to resist? If every military hero is judged on his or her merits, should we do the same with refusers?

An act of refusal may be instrumental in changing the conscription process, or chip away at occupation policies. Even so, we do not advise what path should be chosen. We only map out the different options available. We give those who choose to openly defy the Occupation and go to jail as much support as we can, rather than holding them up as examples for others.

Refusal to serve in the Israeli military is not always be-

**NEW PROFILE** is a feminist group working to demilitarize Israeli society, end Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, and help create an egalitarian and humane society. New Profile also raises public consciousness about the militarization of Israeli society. Active membership includes women, men and young people, all of whom work to develop a climate of equal, nonhierarchical decision-making. Above all, it seeks to advance the belief that peace is neither beyond reach nor out of our hands. New Profile's Web page can be found at [www.new-profile.org](http://www.new-profile.org).

— R. L. H.

cause of the Occupation. Other reasons for refusal may be pacifism, the interconnection between feminism and anti-militarism, and religion and national identity. Sometimes young people are unable to define "what feels wrong," yet they still opt to vote with their feet and refuse to be drafted.

Any person who challenges Israel's policies and chooses to refuse to do military service requires fortitude and deserves our support. Refusal takes great courage. One refuser is no better than the next; each is significant in his or her own way and each way works effectively in building a movement that from time to time successfully manages to shake the pillars of the establishment. ☆

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Noah Millman

## The One-State Illusion

**E**VERY NOW AND AGAIN, WHEN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN conflict looks particularly intractable and/or when the Israelis seem to be operating with particularly obtuse intransigence, someone will point out that Israel desperately needs a viable two-state solution, because the alternative is a one-state “solution” that ends the Zionist dream of a Jewish state (whatever a “Jewish state” might mean — and nobody seems to agree on what it does mean). Some even declare that a two-state solution is already impossible, and that the only remaining option is granting the Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank (and Gaza?) equal voting rights within a binational state.

It should be clear to people who say these things that a one-state “solution” is an illusion, and this kind of rhetoric amounts mostly to moral posturing on the part of critics. By “posturing” I don’t mean to impugn the moral stance of said critics — they may or may not have right on their side; that’s another question — but to suggest that this stance has little chance of actually affecting reality.

Allow me to explain why a one-state “solution” is not going to be implemented.

First of all, the Israeli Jews simply won’t agree to it, because they are fully aware that it would mean dissolving their state, and would be understood almost universally as the surrender of their country to a hostile enemy. I can’t think of a historical instance where this happened in the absence of massive military defeat.

The two examples often used to compare to the Israeli situation in this regard are Algeria and South Africa, and there are some ways in which those analogies are quite appli-

cable. But in other ways they fail. The Algerian analogy fails because Algeria, although an integral part of France, was only a part — and not a particularly central part. The *pieds noirs* (descendants of immigrants from mainland France to Algeria) could go “home” to metropolitan France; the Israeli Jews cannot go home anywhere — if they left, they would be leaving home, and going into diaspora.

Of course, the Boers of South Africa couldn’t go “home” anywhere either — they had been in Africa for hundreds of years, longer than the Jews have been a substantial community in Israel. (There have been Jews in Israel continuously since antiquity, but between the Roman expulsion and the Zionist era they were not a large community, much less a dominant one.) But the Boers were a relatively small minority among South Africans, whereas Israeli Jews are a community of roughly equal size to their Palestin-

ian Arab opponents. Moreover, the Boers were not the only white community in South Africa, and the English did not hold identical attitudes toward the land or toward racial purity.

Then there’s the question of what kind of pressure could be brought to bear on Israel, practically, to force it to change. The South African economy depended substantially upon black labor in a way that the Israeli economy no longer depends on Palestinian labor. Israel has gone out of its way since the first Intifada to reduce that dependence, and has been quite successful, both by changing its industrial mix and by importing alternative labor sources from Thailand, the Philippines, Romania, Nigeria and other places. This means that the Palestinians have less economic leverage over Israel, but it also means that a practical argument for a single state — that these two communities are really part of a single entity — is less true than it has been in the past. The opposite was true of South Africa.

Israel’s dependence on American largesse can be easily



*A ‘two-state’ solution? Israel’s ‘security wall’ across the Jericho road at Bethany/Al-Eizariya, seen from the Palestinian side.*

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overstated. Yes, the end of American aid would be a budgetary blow to Israel, and Israel uses many American weapons systems. But American aid is only about four percent of Israel's budget, and were that relationship to go badly, Israel would have a number of options for continued military development. American support for Israel can be criticized because it implicates America in Israel's policies; or can be defended as buying America a certain amount of influence over Israel's policies. But it's far from clear that America's support has been crucial to the success of Israel's policies. It seems far more likely that a withdrawal of American support would lead Israel to seek new partners to pursue its preferred policies, rather than adopting a more conciliatory line.

Israel is dependent on access to international trade to maintain its First-World economy, so a concerted international effort at economic isolation could impose very substantial costs on the country. However, such pressure is extremely difficult to orchestrate, since cheaters reap outsized benefits. Moreover, the examples of Iran, Cuba, Myanmar and North Korea suggest that the strategy of international isolation has limited effectiveness when the isolated country has a sufficiently strong commitment to its own stubborn course. I wouldn't bet against Israel on this score.

Given the extreme nature of the stakes for Israel, it strikes me as likely that Israel's response to a concerted effort to push it towards a one-state solution would be to turn in an aggressively nationalist direction and implement its preferred solution unilaterally.

Finally, of course, there are the Palestinians, and what they actually want. There is little evidence of a Palestinian interest in a truly binational state as an alternative to a Palestinian state. The liberal position among Palestinians is to favor a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli state that has become a "state of all its citizens" — that is to say, that does not discriminate in favor of Jews and does not have an explicitly Jewish character even if it has a Jewish majority. The hard-line position among Palestinians is that there will be one Palestinian state between the river and the sea.

The liberal Palestinian position is certainly something Israel can work with if it actually wants to. The demand that the Palestinians "recognize" Israel as a "Jewish state" is extremely silly, since the only practical question is how the refugee question gets settled, and if it is settled to Israel's satisfaction, then the "character" of the Israeli state is an internal matter, not a diplomatic one. But my point is that the Palestinians are very far from making the argument that Jews and Arabs need to live in harmony and equality in one binational state. Which, again, is not at all surprising given the histori-

cally nationalist character of Palestinian resistance and the way in which relations between the communities has evolved over the course of Israeli occupation, but it once again illus-

trates a contrast with the ideology of the African National Congress in South Africa.

As Gershom Gorenberg argues in his excellent book, *The Unmaking of Israel*, binationalism can only actually work in the context of reasonably peaceful relations between Jews and Arabs. In an atmosphere of intercommunal warfare, all a hypothetical binationalism would do is turn those unwilling to accept union into rebels against the state. Since these are currently an overwhelming majority of both communities, you'd have civil war, not coexistence.

That sounds like a very pessimistic note to end on, so I won't end there because a two-state solution remains much more possible than pessimists think. Indeed, the only way to make a one-state solution seem more plausible than a two-state solution is by playing a logical shell game.

The same people who argue for a one-state binational solution frequently assert that because of Israeli settlement activity, a two-state solution is "impossible." But this impossibility depends entirely on the as-

sumption that Israel will be allowed to get its way in keeping whatever territory it has substantially settled. And that assumption logically precludes a one-state binational solution as well. After all, if Israel cannot be pressured into surrendering Ma'ale Adumim to a future Palestinian state, then why should we assume it can be pressured into surrendering Tel Aviv? Wouldn't the former be much more acceptable in any plausible universe?

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon worked very hard to get America to agree that "facts on the ground" had to be taken into account in the context of any final settlement — effecting a soft revision of America's longstanding position that a resolution of the conflict should be "based on" the 1949 armistice lines (which didn't imply that those lines had to be the future borders, but did imply that any unilateral "revisions" to the border were illegal). But this concession only has any meaning if there is an actual effort to come to a resolution. In the absence of that diplomatic context, there's no reason for Israel to assume that anyone is particularly interested in pressuring the Palestinians to accept that Israel is going to retain this or that settlement bloc.

And once you throw away the assumption that Israel will be allowed to keep the large settlement blocs in pretty much whatever form they wish to keep them, the impossibility of a two-state solution vanishes. The settlement blocs might wind up becoming an integral part of Israel. Or they might wind up being torn up by Israel as part of a unilateral retreat

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*It seems far more likely that a withdrawal of American support would lead Israel to seek new partners to pursue its preferred policies, rather than adopting a more conciliatory line.*

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to more defensible borders (as with Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza). Or they might wind up being handed over to a sovereign Palestinian state. In the absence of agreed borders, every dollar Israel pours into settlements is very plausibly a dollar poured down a rat hole — but that waste doesn't make a two-state solution impossible.

Israel does need a two-state solution, because the continuation of the conflict is wrecking the country. It's an enormous waste of money and human potential. It's pushing Israeli politics in a frighteningly antiliberal direction. It's fueled increased conflict within Israel between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority, conflict that has already turned violent at times and that could get much uglier. As Goren-

berg demonstrates persuasively in his book, the settlement enterprise has undermined the rule of law within Israel, with wide-reaching negative consequences. And there's always the potential for a truly catastrophic war. But there is no one-state alternative to a two-state solution. The alternative to a two-state solution is continued war.

I can't be optimistic in the short term. The new Israeli government remains right-wing and Israel may one day be surrounded by populist Islamist regimes rather than conservative personal dictatorships. But objective conditions have a way of forcing their way to the surface, against any and all ideological resistance. Even in the most ideologically-charged patch of land in the world. ✧

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Leon Hadar

## Why Stay in the Middle East?

*No more Iraqs please*

**B**ASHING THE CRITICS OF THEIR FOREIGN-POLICY agenda as “isolationists” has become the last refuge of military interventionists and global crusaders. The tactic helps sidetrack the debate by putting the onus on their opponents — those skeptical of “regime change” here, there and everywhere — to disprove the charge that they want Americans to shun the rest of the world.

And now proponents of maintaining American military hegemony in the Middle East have been applying a similar technique, accusing those who call for a debate on US interests and policies in that region of advocating retreat and appeasement.

Like the accusation of “isolationism,” the suggestion that a reassessment of current US policies in the Middle East amounts to geostrategic retrenchment is part of an effort to shut down debate and maintain the status quo. But questioning the dominant US Middle East paradigm, which assumes that Americans have the interest and the obligation to secure a dominant political-military status in the region, now goes beyond strategic and economic calculations being debated by foreign-policy wonks in Washington.

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**LEON HADAR is a Washington-based journalist and foreign policy analyst who writes regularly for Haaretz and is the author of *Sandstorm: Policy Failure in the Middle East* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1995). This essay originally appeared in *The National Interest*.**

Most Americans have only basic knowledge about the Middle East and US interests there, beyond words that trigger a visceral fear (“oil” and “Israel” and “terrorism”). But most of them are now telling pollsters that they want to see US troops withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan as soon as possible, are opposed to new US-led regime change and nation-building in the Middle East, and are skeptical about the utility of Washington taking charge of the Israeli-Palestinian “peace process.”

Indeed, you don't have to be a deep strategic thinker to conclude that the US invasion of Iraq was a major military and diplomatic fiasco (no more Iraqs please); that Washington exerts very little influence on the political weather (where it's “spring” or “winter”) in the Arab World, a place where they lost that loving feeling for America a long time ago; or that Israelis and Palestinians are not going to live in peace and harmony anytime soon, even if President Obama would spend the rest of his term engaged in diplomatic psychotherapy sessions with them at Camp David.

It is becoming quite obvious to most Americans that sustaining the foundations of the Pax Americana in the Middle East is no longer cost-effective. Especially at a time when many members of the middle class have yet to recover from the economic devastation of the Great Recession and their representatives in Washington cannot agree on how to manage the ballooning federal deficit.

Reversing the classic model of foreign-policy making (lead-

ers decide and then the public follows), leaders and the experts in Washington have been the ones doing the catch-up when it comes to US policy in the Middle East as they muddle through the default position of gradual disengagement. At the same time, the Washington consensus that America should always be ready to “do something” to resolve the problems of the Middle East has been shuddering. Consider President Obama’s reluctance to intervene in Syria, to go to war with Iran or jump into another Israeli-Palestinian peace exercise, or signs that the neoconservatives are starting to lose their hold over the GOP’s foreign-policy agenda. The old status quo is still alive, but kicking less frequently.

But the growing public sentiment against military interventionism in the Middle East cannot be a substitute for a debate in Washington over US policy in the region. Public opinion tends to be fickle and another 9/11-like terrorist attack or a military confrontation with Tehran could reverse the current trend of disengagement.

Moreover, the current reactive policies being pursued by the Obama administration in the Middle East (not to mention the dominant Republican approach) are still based on an old paradigm that evolved during the Cold War. This strategy assumes that only US military power can contain global and regional aggressors (the Soviet Union during the Cold War; Iran and al-Qaeda today). It also demands that Washington secure access to the oil markets of the Middle East and ensure the survival of Israel.

But old paradigms don’t die, and unlike old generals, they don’t just fade away. The end of the Cold War should have provided an opportunity for the US to reassess its Middle East paradigm. There was no more a Soviet Union seeking to dominate the Middle East, and Washington’s European and Asian allies were strong economic powers that should have been ready to protect their access to oil — instead of continuing to act as free riders on US military protection. At the same time, Israel was in the process of negotiating peace with the Palestinians (the Oslo Process) and transforming into a strong economic and military power.

But the power of inertia — along with the influences of the entrenched bureaucracies and powerful interest groups like the



**‘Most Americans have only basic knowledge about the Middle East and US interests there, beyond words that trigger a visceral fear (“oil” and “Israel” and “terrorism”).’ A US Navy F-14A Tomcat flies over burning Kuwaiti oil wells during Operation Desert Storm.**

military-industrial complex, the “Israel Lobby” and the oil companies — combined to keep the US Middle East paradigm in place, triggered anti-American terrorism and drew the US into new limited (Iraq War I) and expansive (Iraq War II) military interventions.

All this played into the hands of the nationalist and religious Greater Israel forces in the Jewish state. At the same time, continuing US military intervention only helped radicalize the Arab world and eroded the power of the military dictators and monarchs allied with Washington. This made it even more difficult to secure its hegemonic positions in the region while diverting

military resources from other parts of the world — in particular East Asia, where China has emerged as a major global challenge to US interests.

Thus withdrawing from Iraq and reducing the US military footprint in the Middle East would make sense only as part of new US strategy. This new approach must encourage regional powers like Turkey, Egypt, Iran, the Arab Gulf States and Israel to operate under the assumption that the US would not be there to micromanage the balance of power in the region. It also should provide incentives for Washington’s European allies to protect their interests in a region that is after all in their strategic backyard.

Moreover, the US economy has never been dependent on oil imports from the Middle East (it now receives about fourteen percent of its energy supplies from the region). There is no reason why America should continue to spend its resources to provide economic competitors like China with free military protection for access to Middle Eastern oil.

Israel would also have to adjust to the new realities of US power in the Middle East. Israelis need to recognize that Washington would not be able to bail them out if and when they behave irresponsibly: US support cannot be a substitute for reaching an agreement with the Palestinians and being integrated into the Middle East.

The US could continue to act as the “balancer of last resort” in the Middle East, working together with regional and global powers to help strengthen stability and promote economic prosperity in the region. But it cannot and should not sustain the current status quo there anymore. ☆

## Murray Polner

# After the ‘Good War’

**T**EN YEARS AGO TAD BARTIMUS WROTE *WAR TORN: Stories of War from the Women Reporters Who Covered Vietnam*, about the effect that war had on its participants. She had reported from Vietnam but was also assigned to cover an R&R reunion in Hawaii of Vietnam combat troops and their wives. “I expected to find happy, vacationing couples reuniting,” but instead she watched “traumatized men and distraught women,” the soldiers crying “as their stricken wives sat beside them, unable to comprehend what had transformed the boys they’d married into these grim-faced soldiers returning to war.” It has never been any different, as Dale Maharidge discovered.

From an early age Maharidge knew that his father Steve, a former World War II marine veteran of the battles of Guam and Okinawa, was different from other fathers. Often inscrutable, he was given to sudden eruptions of anger (once striking his wife, Dale’s mother), drank heavily and would be silent for long periods of time, so unlike the young man who went to war, his family said. And then there was a photo of himself and a marine named Mulligan, which his father always kept near him. One day, after staring at the photo his son heard him scream, “They said I killed him! But it wasn’t my fault!”

Maharidge, who teaches at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, set out to understand what had happened and why it had so changed his father in *Bringing Mulligan Home: The Other Side of the Good War* (Public Affairs), an engrossing, probing and painful memoir about “what occurred after the men came home. Many families lived with the returned demons and physical afflictions. A lot of us grew up dealing with collateral damage from that war — our fathers,” he writes. And so he began a twelve-year journey to unravel his family’s mystery, inevitably in-

volving other aging ex-marines, a journey which led him to track down and interview twenty-nine former members of his father’s platoon — Love Company, of the Third Battalion, Twenty-Second Marines, Sixth Marine Division — men who had rarely spoken about the war after their discharge.

What started as a personal fixation with a photo of his father and a dead marine inescapably led him to a discovery of the real nature of the war’s impact. What he uncovered barely resembled the party line of the war’s home-front cheerleaders and the subsequent flow of commercialized hyperbole about the “greatest generation.”

What he learned was that blast concussions had damaged his father’s brain and that post-World War II medical and psychiatric treatment for veterans was not as extensive as it is



*Okinawa, May 1945: A demolition crew from the 6th Marine Division watch dynamite charges explode and destroy a Japanese cave.*

today; in fact his father was never treated for his brain injuries. Fenton Grahnert, a former marine, told Maharidge that despite the GI Bill, “they turned on us — eight and a half, nine million people loose from the military after World War II. Just kicked your ass out on the street with not a goddamn penny of psychiatry help or nothing. You was on your own.”

He learned too that the Pacific war as recounted by the aging veterans he interviewed was filled with atrocities, each side slaughtering the other’s captives. No Japanese prisoners were taken on Guam, one veteran told him. Not many prisoners were taken alive on other Pacific islands.

The battle for Okinawa — where some twenty-five thousand US troops still remain, often over the objection of Okinawans — began on April Fool’s Day in 1945. Relying on Frazier Hunt’s *The Untold Story of Douglas MacArthur*, Maharidge claims the fight caused the deaths of an estimated one hundred and fifty thousand civilians, a hundred and ten thousand Japanese and 12,520 Americans, plus 36,707 Americans wounded. His sketches of the carnage, while nowhere as complete as E.B. Sledge’s brilliant Pacific war memoir, *With*

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*the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, nevertheless portrays the bitter battles in places he eventually visited.

The elderly ex-marines he interviewed had Maharidge worrying about their forgetfulness, exaggerations and possible fabrications. He says he quoted only those he believed. Some said they had adjusted well, but most were casualties of war. Charles Lepant told him, “We were brainwashed from boot camp ... You didn’t hesitate. And when someone told you ‘go,’ you went.” Looking at a photo of Japanese soldiers he picked up in Guam, he said the deaths of Japanese soldiers “bothered” him. Maharidge explains that Lepant believed “most of those guys [in the photo] probably didn’t want to be in the war any more than he did.”

Tom Price dissuaded his grandson from enlisting after the Iraq and Afghan wars began; his wife told the boy, “Tom still knows you don’t come back the same. You don’t come back a free-hearted, loving, caring person anymore.” Captain Frank Haigler, Jr. told of a brutal senior officer, and that a grieving sister of a dead marine wrote him, “Nothing has been accomplished by his dying, or by all the other men dying. The world is not a better place to live in; on the contrary, it becomes a rottener place day by day by all appearances.”

An ex-marine, Joe Lanciotti, self-published a book in 2005, *The Timid Marine* (available through Amazon), and wrote about GIs who suffered from combat fatigue and oth-

ers and were discharged for psychiatric reasons or who simply deserted. Only one World War II soldier, Eddie Slovik, was executed for desertion. “I, and hundreds of thousands of combat-fatigued veterans could sympathize with Eddie Slovik, that frightened soldier... I was a very frightened and timid marine.” A few men mentioned a marine who allegedly raped an Okinawan girl but was never punished. Maharidge finally found the alleged rapist and, filled with loathing, conducted an unsatisfactory interview, the old marine denying everything.

In the end, Mulligan, it turned out, was Herman Walter Mulligan, a twenty-two-year-old Southern-born Baptist, part-Jewish, part-Irish marine who was killed, Maharidge concludes, when he tossed a grenade into an Okinawan burial place filled with Japanese explosives, which the grenade inadvertently detonated. Steve Maharidge had not killed Mulligan but obviously felt that in some way he had contributed to his death. When Steve died, the photograph of the two ex-marines was buried with him in Arlington National Cemetery.

*Bringing Mulligan Home* is also filled with anger at official unconcern about the killing of civilians and inept military leaders. But most of all it should prompt some Americans to wonder when and where our next generation will be sacrificed in yet another of our many wars. ☆

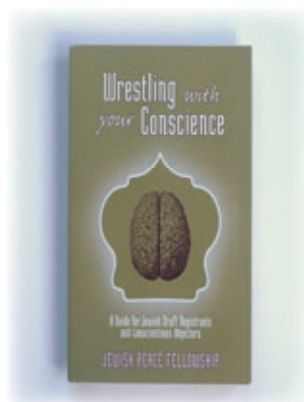


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Brian Doyle

## Draft Card

### *Remembering the call to fight*

**F**OUND MY DRAFT CARD YESTERDAY while clearing out a drawer, and the mind it did reel. The leap of time — *40 years ago!* The terse stamped words, revealing nothing of the seethe and roar and argument of that time. That boy, just eighteen years old, registering for a draft for a war of which he knew essentially nothing. I remember Brother Four shouting furiously at the dinner table, later that evening, that he would join *Canada* rather than the army. I remember Brother Five pointedly registering immediately as a rebuke and rebuff to Brother Four. I remember Brother Two joining the Navy and then unjoining, testifying about his conscience to this very draft board, Local Board Number Four, in New York. I remember my father, an Army veteran of the Second World War and the Korean War, going with him, and being proud of his son's



*December 1, 1969: Congressman Alexander Pirnie (R-NY) drawing the first capsule for the Selective Service draft.*

honesty. I remember being asked my height by the grim lady registering kids for the draft, and she never looked up, so I added two inches, and that is why I was six feet tall then and am seventy inches tall now. I remember watching the draft lottery on television with my friends and the way they turned and looked at me when my number was called first among the four of us. I remember my dad explaining that the army had basically stopped call-ups the year before and probably nothing would happen. I remember being terrified anyway. I remember wondering if I was brave or not, and concluding probably not. I remember wanting to be angry and sure, like Brother Four, or calm and sure, like Brother Five, but being totally at sea about duty and citizenship and war and peace, like Brother Two.

I remember thinking, as I stood with the other skinny sweating pimply kids in line at the post office, that blowing a guy's head off to settle an argument about the government of a country more than ten thousand miles from where we stood seemed like a relatively poor idea, as ideas go. It still does. ✧

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