

# NEAR EAST REPORT

AIPAC'S BIWEEKLY ON AMERICAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY

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Saad Hariri, head of the Future Movement, leads Lebanon's parliamentary majority.

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Supporters of Lebanon's anti-Syrian coalition celebrate their victory in parliamentary elections, which were held on June 7.

## U.S.-Backed Alliance Wins in Lebanon

An American-backed alliance has retained control of the Lebanese parliament after a hotly contested election. *Near East Report* asked three Lebanon experts to analyze what the results mean for the future of Lebanon, U.S. foreign policy and Israeli security.

### Hady Amr

Slightly more than half of Lebanon's voters turned out in what was billed as a "hotly contested election." It was obvious that the votes would be counted in a transparent way, given that supporters of each alliance were willing to pay to fly Lebanese voters in from around the world to participate at great expense. But much like the 2000 U.S. presidential elections, where Gore won the popular vote but lost the electoral votes that were counted to Bush, Hizballah's losing coalition received more total votes than the pro-American winning coalition, leaving the potential for lingering conflict over "unfairness."

The underlying system has many deep problems that continue to plague the country, causing sectarian division and corruption. Lebanon could learn a lot from its neighbor Israel in administering a proper election. Lebanon has no government ballots. Party activists generally hand the heads of families (or the voters themselves) a slate of names on a piece of paper and those pieces of paper are often put directly in the ballot box, leaving little room for personal choice.

Far worse, Lebanon's electoral system actually apportions seats by religion. Seats in each district are specified by sect: Greek Catholics, Orthodox, Maronite, Sunni, Druze, Shia, etc. If an American were told in advance that their congressional delegation would be composed

**Continued:** *U.S.-Backed Alliance Wins in Lebanon*

of, for example, a Jew, five Christians, a Muslim, a Hindu and an atheist, he or she would be offended if it didn't sound like the beginning of a tasteless joke. Candidates should run based on the force of their ideas, not how their parents pray.

Further, the fixed Lebanese sectarian system actually builds up the divisions between groups instead of reducing them, and has been a rallying cry for those who feel disadvantaged, sparking unrest. If South Africans—particularly White South Africans who had everything to lose—could put behind their despicable history of segregation to embrace a one-person, one-vote proportional representation system, so too can the Lebanese.

The elected Lebanese parliament members are fully vested in this system and so no change will come about in Lebanon unless international pressure calls for a true proportional representation system in Lebanon as in Israel or South Africa, combined with a final and permanent end to any group carrying arms, including Hizballah. Only then do the problems of Lebanon's sectarian strife have the opportunity to fade.

*Hady Amr* is a fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings and the director of the *Brookings Doha Center*.

## **Tony Badran**

The victory of the pro-Western incumbent majority in the 2009 Lebanese parliamentary elections was an important achievement for the pro-independence movement in Lebanon, as well as for the United States' regional policy. In denying the Hizballah-led opposition the chance at formally dominating the Lebanese state, the incumbent "March 14" coalition delivered a significant setback to Hizballah's regional backers, Syria and Iran.

Syria in particular emerges as the loser, in that it saw the coalition that it had tried hard to topple for the last four years return at the helm of the Lebanese government with a solid, electoral victory. More than ever, Syria's political influence in Lebanon is dependent on the Iranian surrogate, Hizballah. Moreover, the election result cemented the leadership of Saad Hariri (whose father was killed, most likely by the Syrians) in the crucial Sunni community in Lebanon, and thus established his policy line as reflective of the mood and choices of the Lebanese Sunnis. This goes as well for the Druze (behind Walid Jumblatt) and an increasing majority of the Christians, who, as the election results have shown, have moved away significantly from the renegade Michel Aoun, whose decision was to align with Hizballah and the regional axis it represents

**Continued: U.S.-Backed Alliance Wins in Lebanon**

Thus, the policy orientation of the March 14 coalition—aligned with the moderate Arab states opposed to Iranian hegemony, expansionism and subversion in the region—has been shown to be a popular reality. Moreover, this shows that the popular will in Lebanon is against military adventurism and having Lebanon serve as a proxy arena for Syria and Iran. While March 14 does not have the capacity to disarm Hizballah, their win will solidify the continued objection of the majority of the Lebanese to Hizballah’s continued military autonomy. Furthermore, it will ensure continued government support for the security architecture of UNSCR 1701, which has governed the Israel-Lebanon border, now quiet for the last three years.

This will also pave the way for the Obama administration to continue with its high-level diplomatic, financial and military support for the Lebanese state, in the

long-term project of strengthening its national institutions. Moreover, the administration might try to push for reviving the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Lebanon and Israel, a demand enshrined in the Taef Accord and one voiced by the leaders of the March 14 movement.

*Tony Badran* is a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies’ Center for Terrorism Research. His blog is called “*Across the Bay.*”

### **David Schenker**

Defying expectations, the pro-West March 14 (M14) coalition defeated the Iranian/Syrian-backed Hizballah-led March 8 (M8) alliance in the Lebanese elections. The re-election of M14 was a remarkable reaffirmation of moderate orientation of Beirut—and an unmistakable popular rejection of Hizballah’s militancy. Although March 14 polling had pointed to victory for months, few believed these surveys were credible. After all, how could this embattled pro-West coalition possibly withstand the Iranian-Syrian “resistance” juggernaut?

Apparently, Hizballah’s May 2008 invasion of Beirut was a bridge too far. While most Lebanese were generally willing to tolerate the Shiite organization’s activities against Israel,



Lebanese supporters of the Free Patriotic Movement of Christian leader Michel Aoun wave the Lebanese and the party’s orange flags as they ride their cars.

**Continued: U.S.-Backed Alliance Wins in Lebanon**

the near-coup—in which the militia turned its weapons on the Lebanese population—undermined its “resistance” credibility. Subsequently, voters punished Hizballah’s Christian ally Michel Aoun and his Free Patriotic Movement.

The M14 victory is a setback for Tehran and Damascus. These regimes had hoped to see their allies prevail—and to see Washington’s nose bloodied—in Beirut. But it is only a temporary



Hizballah is a powerful force in Lebanese politics. The group allied itself with Christian leader Michel Aoun, whose supporters, seen above, wave Hizballah flags.

setback. At present, the battle-lines are being drawn for the next (almost inevitable) political confrontation between M8 and M14. No less than three issues are likely to be contested in the coming months:

1) The Premiership: Hizballah and its allies did not like former PM Fouad Siniora, and Syrian proxies are already hinting that Damascus will not accept Saad Hariri—the leader of the M14 coalition—as the next premier. M8 seems to prefer

Nijab Miqati, who previously served as PM during the Syrian occupation years, as he likely would be more pliable.

2) The Blocking Third: Hizballah has made clear it will demand veto power for the minority in the cabinet in order to block key government initiatives. M14 has said it will not provide the minority with this concession. M8, via the Lebanese press, is already threatening the majority with violence if the organization doesn’t get its way.

3) Weapons: Hizballah says the weapons of the “resistance” are not up for discussion. This issue has taken on added importance lately, and not just because M14 wants to exercise and extend its sovereignty throughout Lebanon. Last summer, Hizballah forces killed a Lebanese helicopter pilot, believing the landing aircraft was Israeli. Likewise, in 2006, Hizballah provoked a very costly war with Israel. M14 would like to rein in the weapons, but is unlikely to be successful. In the meantime, it will remain a source of tension.

**Continued:** *U.S.-Backed Alliance Wins in Lebanon*

For Washington and its Lebanese allies, the elections were a great moment. Sadly, given Hizballah's impressive arsenal and demonstrated willingness to intimidate and kill its domestic adversaries, M14's success changes little on the ground. Iran, Syria and their Lebanese proxies will no doubt rebound from this setback and resume their offensive against Washington's allies in Lebanon.

*David Schenker is Aufzien Fellow and Director of the Program on Arab Politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.*

## Centrifuges Spin Regardless of Iran Vote

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has declared victory in his reelection bid, but is facing widespread allegations of fraud. Regardless of the final outcome of the vote, one thing will remain constant: The theocratic regime will press ahead with its nuclear program.

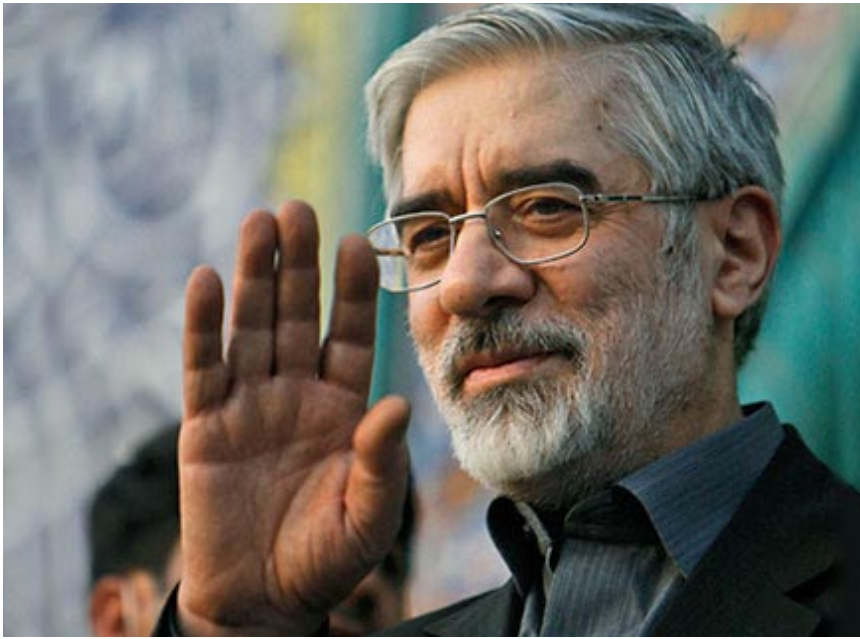
An alarming new International Atomic Energy Agency report released on June 5 said that Iran has installed more than 7,000 centrifuges at its Natanz enrichment facility—a 30 percent increase since February of this year. That amount of centrifuges is enough to make the required fuel for two nuclear bombs per year.



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed allegations of fraud in his landslide election victory, saying he has a bigger mandate now than ever before.

## Supreme Leader Khamenei Has Final Say

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who has final say over his country's nuclear policy, has hailed Iran's nuclear advances as a "great victory" for the Islamic Republic. He has stated repeatedly that Iran has no intention of halting its nuclear work. "We will continue on our path with power and will not allow the oppressors to deny this nation's right."



Presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi was Iran's prime minister in the 1980s. His wife has said, "Our main and everlasting enemy is Israel."

Khamenei's media adviser, Mehdi Kalhor, emphasized the limits of Iranian "democracy." "No one but the [supreme] leader can decide about any move to renew ties with America and Iran's nuclear work," Kalhor said. "Such issues cannot be traded by any president."

Indeed, an Iranian presidential election is "democratic" in the most limited sense of the word. Khamenei tightly controls nearly all aspects of the election, including appointments to the Guardian

Council, the powerful group of 12 high-ranking mullahs and jurists who strictly vet presidential candidates.

Of the 475 Iranian citizens who submitted paperwork to run in the June 12 election, only four met the Guardian Council's standards for approval, which are based on a strict interpretation of loyalty to the 1979 revolution. (Iran has never approved the candidacy of a woman for president.)

Before the election, Khamenei tacitly endorsed Ahmadinejad by encouraging voters not to support pro-Western candidates. The supreme leader also recently instructed Ahmadinejad to make plans for the next five years—a clear indication of Khamenei's preference.

### **Candidates Agreed on Nuclear Program**

Not surprisingly, all of the Khamenei-approved presidential candidates vowed to press ahead with Iran's nuclear work. Ahmadinejad has described his country's nuclear pursuit as a "train... without brakes" and has ruled out negotiations with other nations on its nuclear program, saying, "Iran's nuclear issue is over."

Ahmadinejad's main challenger, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, said in an interview with the Financial Times that he will push ahead with Iran's nuclear ambitions and will never halt uranium enrichment, adding, "No one in Iran will accept suspension."

**Continued:** *Centrifuges Spin Regardless of Iran Vote*

The two minor candidates expressed similar sentiment. Acknowledging that he has no power to control policy on the nuclear issue, Mehdi Karroubi has said he will defer to the supreme leader on Iran's nuclear efforts because the program "is not within [my] domain."

Moshen Rezai, who served for 16 years as the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has long supported Iran's nuclear program. In 2007, the United States designated the IRGC as an entity of proliferation out of concern for its efforts to obtain nuclear-sensitive components.

### **Proud Enemies of Israel**

Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called for the destruction of the State of Israel and has denied the Holocaust. "The Zionist regime has lost its raison d'être," he said last year. "[T]he Zionist regime has reached a total dead end. Thanks to God, your wish will soon be realized, and this germ of corruption will be wiped off."

Mousavi, who served as prime minister in the 1980s, refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist. During his campaign, his wife dismissed rumors that he favored improving relations with the Jewish state. "Our main and everlasting enemy is Israel," she said.

The minor candidates were no less extreme. Karroubi, who formerly served as speaker of the Iranian parliament, has vowed to continue Iran's support of the terrorist groups Hamas and Hizballah. "We want to have interaction with the whole world except Israel," he said in March.

Rezai, who is wanted by Argentina in the 1994 bombing of a Buenos Aires Jewish center that killed 85 people, volunteered in 2008 to carry out suicide attacks against Israel.



## Netanyahu Backs Two-State Solution

In a major policy address on June 14, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he was willing to support the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside Israel. “In my vision of peace in this small land of ours, two peoples live freely, side-by-side, in amity and mutual respect.”

Netanyahu said he would be prepared to accept a demilitarized Palestinian state as part of a future Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement if the Palestinians recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This condition is in line with long-standing Israeli policy backed by Netanyahu’s three immediate predecessors: Ehud Olmert, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak. President Bill Clinton also called for a “non-militarized” Palestinian state in his 2000 parameters for peace.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he was willing to support the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside Israel.

While Netanyahu emphasized that Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state is a prerequisite for ending the conflict, he did not demand this recognition as a precondition for negotiations. Instead, he called for resuming talks immediately without any preconditions.

“Peace has always been our people’s most ardent desire,” Netanyahu said. “Our prophets gave the world the vision of peace, we greet one another with wishes of peace, and our prayers conclude with the word ‘peace.’”

In addition, Netanyahu asserted the deep historical connection of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, but recognized that “within this homeland lives a large Palestinian community.” The prime minister emphasized that Israel has no desire to rule over the Palestinian people. “We do not want to govern their lives, we do not want to impose either our flag or our culture on them,” he said.

**Continued:** *Netanyahu Backs Two-State Solution*

Netanyahu also committed to refrain from building new settlements or confiscating land for settlements, while stating that residents in existing settlements will continue to enjoy normal life.

Furthermore, Netanyahu offered to travel “to Damascus, to Riyadh, to Beirut, to any place—including Jerusalem” to meet with Arab leaders to discuss ways to promote peace.

A White House statement on behalf of President Barack Obama welcomed “the important step forward in Prime Minister Netanyahu’s speech.” In sharp contrast, top Palestinian Authority officials said Netanyahu is “burying the peace process” and threatened renewed violence.

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## Heard on the Hill

### House Bill Backs Israeli Self-Defense

The House on June 10 passed legislation that includes provisions reaffirming the need to maintain Israel’s qualitative military edge over potential adversaries and endorsing Israel’s right to defend itself from any nuclear or military threat from Iran. The bill, which authorizes foreign affairs-related programs, also expands the War Reserve Stockpile, which pre-positions U.S. military equipment in Israel that the Jewish state can use in times of emergency.



The House of Representatives passed legislation that reaffirms the need to maintain Israel’s qualitative military edge over potential adversaries.

Sponsored by House Foreign

Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA), the legislation also authorizes \$25 million to Israel for refugee absorption. The bill passed by a vote of 235-187. The provision reaffirming Israel’s right to self-defense, which passed as an amendment by voice vote, was sponsored by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX).

**Continued:** *Heard on the Hill*

Sessions spoke on the House floor in favor of his amendment. “Israel seeks only peace with its neighbors and a homeland secure for its people,” he said, “but if an attack from Iran or from a terrorist organization becomes imminent, this Congress should declare that Israel, like the United States, should reserve for itself the inalienable right to defend itself and to protect its people.”

## **Lawmakers Call on Palestinians to Show Desire for Peace**

In speeches on the House floor on June 10, Reps. Shelley Berkley (D-NV) and Eliot Engel (D-NY) highlighted Israel’s historic willingness to make sacrifices for peace. The two lawmakers called upon the Palestinians and Arab states to demonstrate their own desire for coexistence.

“Are the Palestinians ready for peace?” asked Berkley. “Do they have a government that can stop terror? Will they recognize Israel’s right to exist? Will they abide by past agreements they signed? Will they turn over Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit? The Palestinians must answer those questions before I, for one, will believe that Israel’s overtures will be met with peace, rather than more violence.”

Rep. Engel expressed similar sentiments. “We hear a lot about what the Israelis must do,” he said. “Let us hear about what the Palestinians must do. The Palestinians must stop the incitement, stop the violence, stop the terrorist infrastructure and say that it recognizes Israel’s right to exist.”

## **Gates Warns of Iranian Nuclear and Missile Gains**

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on June 9 said that the United States is increasingly concerned about recent advances in Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs. “Our concern about the nature of the Iran problem has continued to rise as they continue to make further progress in enriching uranium, and also as they have enjoyed some success in their missile field,” Gates told a Senate Appropriations Committee panel. “Our concern with Iran, with Iran’s programs—and I believe I can say also Israel’s [concern]—has continued to grow given the unwillingness of the Iranians to slow, stop or even indicate a willingness to talk about their programs.”

In recent months, Iranian leaders have rebuffed the Obama administration’s repeated calls for dialogue. In the meantime, Iran continues to make rapid progress in its ability to enrich uranium, a key component of nuclear bombs.

## **Congressional Letters Articulate Key Peace Principles**

328 members of the House and 76 members of the Senate have signed letters to President Obama supporting America's efforts to help Israel achieve peace with all her neighbors while upholding the principles that, if followed, hold the best prospects for Israeli-Arab peace. These key principles include supporting direct, bilateral negotiations between the parties, remaining both a trusted mediator between the parties and a devoted friend to Israel, and insisting on an absolute Palestinian commitment to end incitement and violence against Israel.

The House letter – spearheaded by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA) – was sent to President Obama on May 28. The Senate letter – spearheaded by Sens. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Arlen Specter (D-PA) and John Thune (R-SD) – was sent on May 19.

### **Mullen: Iranian Bomb Would Be 'Calamitous'**

The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff said last month that Iran's attainment of a nuclear weapons capability would be a "calamitous" development.

"I'm one who believes that Iran getting a nuclear weapon is calamitous for the region and for the world," said Adm. Michael Mullen in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "It then, in my view, generates neighbors who feel exposed, deficient and then develop or buy the capability themselves. The downside, potentially, is absolutely disastrous."

Mullen added that major leaders of the international community must "come together to arrest this growth or the long-term downside for the people in the world is really, really tragic and drastic."

### **Clinton: Iranian Nuke an 'Extraordinary Threat'**

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said last month that the United States opposes Iran's quest for a nuclear weapons capability, which would pose an "extraordinary threat" to America. In testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Clinton warned that an Iranian nuclear bomb "is going to spark an arms race in the Middle East," which in turn would undermine Iranian security.

"Our goal is to persuade the Iranian regime that they will actually be less secure if they proceed with their nuclear weapons program," Clinton said. "At the same time," she added,

*Continued: Heard on the Hill*

“we see a growing recognition among a group of countries that they do not want to see this reality take place.”

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## Campus Leaders Tour Israel with AIPAC

Forty aspiring young leaders traveled to Israel this month on the annual AIPAC Campus Allies Mission. Their intensive ten-day itinerary covered a variety of subjects, including the U.S.-Israel



While touring Israel, the students visited an absorption center for Ethiopian immigrants and later returned with toys for the children.

relationship, the threat from Iran and pluralism in Israeli society.

AIPAC Campus Allies are Democrats and Republicans. They come from schools all over the country, including historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions and Christian campuses. They have three common characteristics: They are student leaders, they are committed to strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship and they are not Jewish.

The 2009 ACA Mission was the most successful to date and was filled with “life transforming” experiences, according to Louisiana State University activist Krista Allen.

Students forged genuine friendships with young Israeli soldiers, visited an absorption center focused on the needs of Israel’s Ethiopian community (and later returned with presents for the children) and learned, after visiting the Baha’i Temple in Haifa, that one Mission participant’s family, persecuted for their Baha’i faith, had been forced to flee Iran.

“This trip opened my eyes to the wonder and resilience of Israeli society,” said Peter Tilton of Harvard University. “My commitment to the U.S.-Israel strategic alliance has strengthened as a result of the emotional connection I developed to the people and the land of Israel.”

**Continued:** *Campus Leaders Tour Israel with AIPAC*

In any other setting, one would expect that some of the Mission participants—namely, 12 national leaders of the College Democrats of America and the College Republican National Committee—would find little common ground. But while in Israel, their ideological differences disappeared.

“When you are with such an amazing group, immersed in the most intensive experience of your life; when you’re meeting with leaders who face critical decisions, interacting with men and women your own age serving their country under immense threat—all else seems petty,” explained the University of New Mexico’s Antonio Gandara-Martinez.

The trip itinerary was packed from sunrise until after dark. Participants visited the Knesset and met with Ethiopian and Druze MKs. They traveled to the U.S. embassy for a special briefing. They toured the perimeter of Jerusalem with the IDF’s chief architect for the security barrier and later explored the Golan Heights.

The students also visited an Israeli naval base in the port of Haifa and learned about U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation. They toured the Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital Trauma Center—which, according to a 2006 estimate, treated 40 percent of the 8,500 victims of terrorist attacks since September 2000. And while visiting Nazareth, students engaged in an open forum with city officials about relations among the city’s Jewish, Christian and Muslim residents.

“As an international affairs M.A. student with over three years of Department of State experience, I found the trip to be both incredibly educational and powerful,” said George Washington University’s Christopher Biggs.

The next ACA trip to Israel is scheduled for spring 2010.



The AIPAC Campus Allies Mission toured a number of historical sites. Above, trip participants pose for a photo on the Mount of Beatitudes.

## Editorial: An Ancient Connection

Standing in Cairo, a major Arab capital and a cultural center of the Arab world, President Barack Obama emphasized some necessary but unpopular truths. He told his intended audience of Muslims worldwide that the U.S.-Israel relationship is “unbreakable” and is based upon “cultural and historical ties.”

The president also denounced the rampant Holocaust denial in Muslim societies. “Six million Jews were killed—more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today,” Obama said. “Denying that fact is baseless, it is ignorant, and it is hateful.”

When speaking about Israel, Obama explained that “the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history” of persecution, which “culminated in an unprecedented holocaust.”

There is much more to the story of Israel than persecution. Without a doubt, the Holocaust convinced much of the world of the urgent need to establish a Jewish state. But the urgency of Israel’s establishment and the timing of its creation must not be confused with the Jewish people’s deep historical roots in the Land of Israel.

By adopting the notion that Israel exists merely as a product of the Holocaust, Israel’s detractors can freely assert that the Palestinians were forced to pay for the crimes of the Europeans, and that there is no Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel. This is exactly what Yasser Arafat and his top aides did at Camp David in 2000, when they denied that any Jewish Temple ever existed in Jerusalem.

A Jerusalem Post editorial written after the Camp David summit explained the Palestinian Authority’s reasoning. “Without recognizing Israel’s ancient connection to Jerusalem, the Palestinians can cling to the notion that Israel exists only by might, not by right.”

What, then, is the Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel? Why, of all places for a state, did the early Zionists choose a tiny sliver of land on the eastern Mediterranean? What was the pale, Polish, 20-year-old David Ben-Gurion thinking when he got off the boat in sun-scorched Jaffa in 1906?

He was thinking not only of the challenging days ahead of him, but of the past. The Jewish connection to Israel is rooted in thousands of years of history, a significance that was never lost on Israel's first prime minister and the millions of Jews who followed in his footsteps.

The Hebrew tribes, led by Joshua Bin Nun, entered the Land of Israel around 1,400 BCE, after a long exile in Egypt. They were later united in a monarchy under King Saul and his successor, King David, who established Jerusalem as his capital. Except for a brief exile to Babylon in the 6th century BCE, Jews lived in their land until the Roman Empire crushed the last remnants of the Jewish revolt, led by Bar Kochba, in 135 CE.

After suppressing all Jewish resistance, the Roman emperor Hadrian attempted to erase the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. The area had long been known as Judea, but Hadrian renamed it Syria Palaestina (later anglicized as "Palestine"), after the Philistines, the Israelites' Biblical enemies. Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina, and Jews were barred from entering. One could be forgiven for thinking that Jewish history should have ended then, with most Jews forced out of the country, the Temple in Jerusalem a pile of rubble, the Galilee empty of its Jewish inhabitants and Masada a silent testimony to a tragic last stand.

But Roman efforts to eliminate the Jewish people would not be successful. Scattered thousands of miles apart, the Jews never gave up their aspiration to return to their ancient homeland. For nearly 2,000 years, Jews in all corners of the world longed for "next year in Jerusalem."

Many Diaspora Jews fulfilled this hope. By the 9th century, returning Jews revived Jewish life in Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias and elsewhere. Even after the Crusaders massacred many Jews during the 11th and 12th centuries, Jews continued to return. In fact, there has been continuous Jewish presence in the Land of Israel since Biblical times.

This is the key point. The goal of Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, was to re-establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, which was still inhabited by many Jews when Zionism emerged at the end of the 19th century.

What also must be emphasized when telling the story of Israel, regardless of the intended audience, is the fact that the Zionist movement sought, and won, international recognition and legitimacy long before the Holocaust. After World War I, the League of Nations incorporated the British government's 1917 Balfour Declaration—which favored the "establishment in



Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”—into the British Mandate for Palestine. The U.S. Congress endorsed the Mandate soon after.

In 1947, the United Nations called for the establishment of a Jewish state alongside an Arab state in Palestine. The Jews immediately accepted the resolution, while the Arabs vehemently rejected it and went to war with the stated aim of destroying the nascent Jewish state.

Less than a year later, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of Israel, proclaiming “the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign state.”

This is the truth about Israel’s roots that must be accentuated, even to the most unreceptive listeners.

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