

Why Israel Is Judged Differently

by Shale Horowitz

As Israel celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary, it remains the only state in the world that is constantly threatened with extinction by immediate and more remote neighbors. Yet, with a disturbing regularity that has become all-too-familiar over recent decades, whenever the Jewish state responds in strength to acts of aggression, it is most often chastised for its “disproportionate use of force.” That such opprobrium has been uniquely reserved for Israel is all the more stunning, both because it remakes a victim into an aggressor and because of the tolerant international attitude to countless conflicts that involve far harsher and more indiscriminate use of force in response to far lesser threats. How is this discrepancy to be understood, and what are its implications for Israel?



House destroyed by Hamas rocket, Yahud, Israel, July 22, 2014. Most often, whenever the Jewish state responds in strength to acts of aggression, it is chastised for “disproportionate use of force.”

Its Enemies' Genocidal Goals

From the onset of the Arab-Jewish conflict in the wake of World War I, the Arab states and the Palestinian Arabs strove to prevent the reestablishment of Jewish statehood in the Land of Israel as stipulated by the League of Nations in 1922 and its

successor, the United Nations, in 1947.¹ Failing to achieve this goal, they resolved to destroy the nascent Jewish state at birth—not

¹ [“The Palestine Mandate, July 24, 1922,”](#) Avalon Project, Yale Law School, New Haven, Conn.; [“United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, November 29, 1947.”](#)

to establish an Arab state on its ruins but to divide its territory among the neighboring Arab states. In the words of the Arab League's secretary-general Abdel Rahman Azzam:

Israel's enemies have used all available means at their disposal to destroy the Jewish state.

[Transjordan's king] Abdullah was to swallow up the central hill regions of Palestine, with access to the Mediterranean at Gaza. The Egyptians would get the Negev. [The] Galilee would go to Syria, except that the coastal part as far as Acre would be added to Lebanon.²

Repeated battlefield defeats convinced some Arab states that military force had outlived its usefulness, culminating in the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, followed by the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement of 1994, and the Abraham accords with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan in 2020. Many Arab states, however, have remained adamantly opposed to Israel's right to exist, joined since 1979 by the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxy militias, notably Lebanon's Hezbollah. Nor has a single Palestinian leader from the 1920s to date reconciled himself to the idea of Jewish statehood or eschewed the desire for Israel's destruction. Even the supposed foremost indicator of Palestinian moderation—the Oslo process of the 1990s between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel—was viewed by the PLO leadership as a strategic means not to a two-state solution—Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza—but to the

substitution of a Palestinian Arab state for the state of Israel.³

Israel's enemies have used all available means at their disposal to destroy the Jewish state—from economic boycott and political ostracism, to recurrent inter-state wars, to incessant terrorist campaigns. Only during the 1948 war were Arab armies able to overrun a number of Jewish localities and to expel their entire population.⁴ Still, Israeli civilians have always been targeted for killing or deportation, the only barrier to this genocidal goal being Israel's superior power. All along, Arab statements and actions have left little doubt of the horrific fate awaiting Israel's Jewish population should it lose a single war.⁵

Seeking Co-existence

By contrast, the Zionist movement and the state of Israel have always sought coexistence, both with the surrounding Arab states and with the Palestinian Arabs.⁶ While seeking national self-determination in the

² Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 233.

³ Efraim Karsh, "Arafat's Grand Strategy," *Middle East Quarterly*, [Spring 2004](#), pp. 3-11.

⁴ Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*, p. 211; Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 397, 409.

⁵ Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 10-25, 52, 56, 58, 63-4, 71-2, 75-9, 99-100, 107, 114, 127, 147, 152-3, 162-6.

⁶ David Ben-Gurion, *My Talks with Arab Leaders* (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1972); Neil Kaplan, *Futile Diplomacy, Vol. I: Early Arab-Zionist Negotiations Attempts 1930-1931* (London: Frank Cass, 1983); Kaplan, *Futile Diplomacy, Vol. II: Arab-Zionist Negotiations and the End of the Mandate* (London: Frank Cass, 1986).

entire Land of Israel—the Jews’ ancestral homeland—Zionist and Israeli leaders, facing geopolitical and demographic constraints and self-imposed normative restrictions, have always been willing to compromise on their territorial goals. This ranged from initial acceptance of the “two-state solution” when it was first evoked in July 1937 by the Peel Commission,⁷ and yet again by the U.N. General Assembly in November 1947, to continued acceptance of the idea by all Israeli prime ministers in the Oslo era (with the exception of Yitzhak Rabin, who envisaged “an independent Palestinian entity short of a state”).⁸ In line with this thinking, a PLO-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in 1994 and given control over 95 percent of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip’s Palestinian residents by January 1997. In the Camp David and Annapolis summit meetings under U.S. auspices (July 2000 and November 2007 respectively), Israel agreed to establish a Palestinian state in all of Gaza and nearly the entire West Bank, only to be rejected by its PLO counterparts.⁹

Moreover, while Jerusalem’s relative military power has grown substantially over time, it has posed only a limited threat to its enemies. Not only has Israel never sought to



The Israeli flag is raised at Eilat at the end of the 1948 war, March 1949. Great-power intervention saved Arab armies from destruction in their 1948 and 1973 wars against Israel.

conquer and destroy the surrounding Arab states even as they sought its destruction, but its moderation and susceptibility to great-power pressure have given its enemies significant latitude to launch conventional and unconventional attacks without fear of catastrophic results. Great-power intervention saved Arab armies from destruction in the 1948 and 1973 wars, prevented losses of Arab-held territory in 1948 and 1956, and yielded Arab territorial gains in 1973.¹⁰ The 1967 war, in which

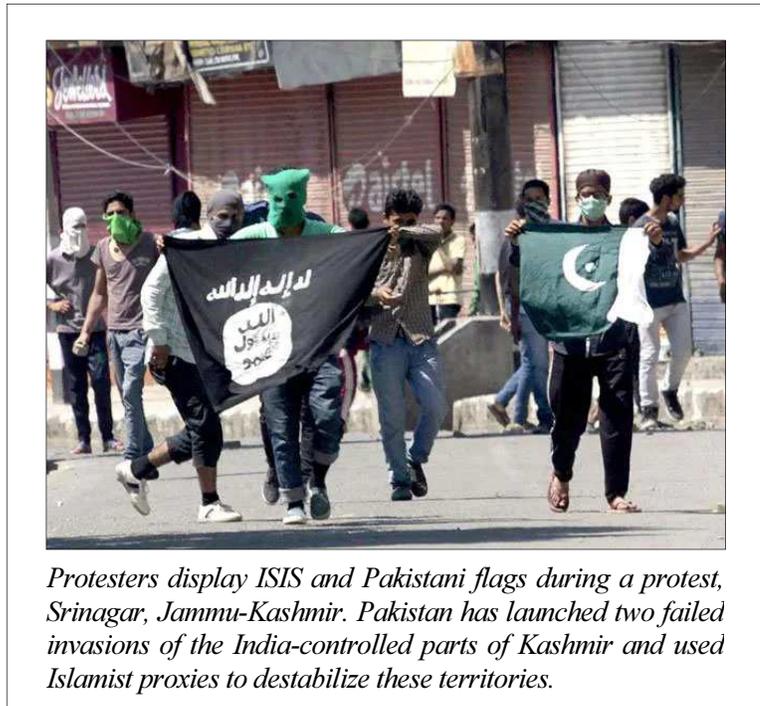
⁷ “Report. Presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Parliament by Command of his Majesty, July 1937,” Palestine Royal Commission (London: HMSO; rep. 1946).

⁸ Yitzhak Rabin address, 376th sess., 13th Knesset, Oct. 5, 1995.

⁹ Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 22, 36, 115, 135, 148, 150-5, 170, 180-2; Efraim Karsh, *Arafat’s War* (New York: Grove, 2003), pp. 57, 136, 139, 151-2, 160-1, 168; Amira Schiff, “The ‘Annapolis Process’: A chronology of failure,” *Israel Affairs*, Nov. 2013, pp. 660-78.

¹⁰ Morris, *1948*, pp. 327, 329, 351, 365-71, 403-4; Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1984), pp. 82, 94, 97, 101-4, 138-40, 166, 180, 278-9, 283-4, 299, 321-2.

Israel captured and retained long-standing control of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, was an exception that proves this rule as its outcome defied expectations based on previous conflicts. Between wars, Israel responded to terrorist attacks with retaliation, which was limited not only by the absence of far-reaching goals beyond deterrence but also by the desire to minimize civilian casualties and to avoid escalation to an all-out war. This restraint has in turn weakened deterrence, often leading to more sustained, low-intensity attacks and higher Israeli civilian and military casualties.



Protesters display ISIS and Pakistani flags during a protest, Srinagar, Jammu-Kashmir. Pakistan has launched two failed invasions of the India-controlled parts of Kashmir and used Islamist proxies to destabilize these territories.

No Margin for Error

Israel's growing military prowess notwithstanding, its enemies' genocidal goals and its own small size have given rise to an ever-changing array of strategic threats that have left little margin for error. The 1973 war showed the devastating consequences of strategic surprise, with Egypt's newly acquired Soviet weapons nearly producing a military victory and Israel desperately seeking a large-scale U.S. replenishment of arms to stand its ground.¹¹

Likewise, new and nonconventional methods and technologies have repeatedly threatened to impose huge costs and to undermine living conditions in Israel. This ranged from cross-border terror attacks from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon from the 1950s to the 1980s, to Lebanon-originating, sustained rocket and missile attacks by the PLO and Hezbollah, to Yasser Arafat's 2000-04 war of

terror (euphemized as "al-Aqsa Intifada"), to Hamas's decades-long rocket and missile attacks on Israel's population centers. Most dangerous of all has been the Iraqi, Syrian, and Iranian dogged quest for nuclear weapons with the attendant, existential threat to Israel. And while Israel destroyed the Iraqi and Syrian nuclear reactors, each with a single air strike, the destruction of Tehran's nuclear weapons program, which is rapidly nearing fruition, may not only be beyond Israel's operational capability but is also bound to trigger an all-out war with Iran and Hezbollah. Iran's proxy has now amassed some 150,000 rockets and missiles that can strike population centers and strategic targets across Israel's entire territory.

Comparing Conflicts

It is difficult to find a single inter-state conflict in the post-World War II era that involves such a glaring asymmetry of goals,

¹¹ Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, pp. 229, 307-10, 322.

means, and threat levels as the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, for example, Pakistan launched two failed invasions of the India-controlled parts of the disputed region of

Almost all national liberation movements did not covet their neighbors' territories or seek their complete annihilation.

Kashmir and used Islamist proxy rebels to destabilize these territories; Azerbaijan and Armenia clashed intermittently over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ethiopia and Somalia fought repeatedly over the Ogaden desert. Moscow invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and has been locked in an ongoing confrontation with Kyiv since 2014 when it invaded Ukraine's eastern regions and annexed the Crimea peninsula. Yet all these inter-state conflicts, plus others, involved limited territorial and security-related goals and had limited effects on the wider respective societies. They did not threaten the existence of the belligerent states. The February 2022 Russian invasion sought to seize some Ukrainian territory and recreate a Ukrainian satellite state. It did not seek to exterminate the Ukrainian people.¹² The only states facing a hypothetical threat of extinction are Taiwan and South Korea, but these cases involve the unification of divided countries or ethnic and national groups, which entails no genocidal threat of the sort awaiting Israeli Jews. This difference was vividly illustrated by the Vietnamese and German re-unifications.

These limited threats notwithstanding, with the exception of Ukraine since 2022 and India, all of the combatants in these conflicts indiscriminately targeted civilians, whether in the form of mass killings and ethnic cleansing or deliberate attacks on civilian

infrastructures and population centers.¹³ This in stark contrast to Israel's constant striving to avoid non-combatant casualties despite the genocidal goals and indiscriminate

strategies of its enemies in recent decades: notably Iran and its Hezbollah and Hamas proxies, whose vast missile and rocket arsenals exclusively target the Jewish state's population centers and civilian infrastructure—an unequivocal war crime and crime against humanity.

A similar pattern pertains by and large to the far more common internal conflicts in the post-World War II era. Almost all national liberation movements during this period sought self-determination in territories considered the national patrimony but did not covet their neighbors' territories, let alone seek their complete annihilation: Moluccans, West Papuans, and East Timorese have not sought to destroy Indonesia; Tibetans and Uighurs have not pursued China's annihilation; Kurds have not threatened the existence of Iraq, Iran, or Turkey; Sahrawis have not threatened all of Morocco; South Sudanese have not coveted all of Sudan; Eritreans and Oromos have not sought to annihilate Ethiopia; Kosovo Albanians have not sought to eliminate Serbia; and Northern Ireland Catholics have not pursued the United Kingdom's destruction. And so on and so forth.

¹² Frederick Kagan, "[The Case against Negotiations with Russia](#)," Institute for the Study of War, Washington, D.C., Nov. 17, 2022.

¹³ Michael Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), pp. 28, 37-42, 78-87, 92-5, 139; Alexei Zverev, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus, 1988-1994," in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996); *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), pp. 74-9.

Even in territories viewed as part of the national homeland, these movements usually did not seek to destroy rival ethnic groups. Islamist rebels fighting non-Muslim foes have by far been the most glaring exception to this rule, often reverting to ethnic cleansing as part of a campaign to expel enemy groups from claimed territories. Such campaigns have unfolded where Islamists had the necessary capabilities—for example, in parts of the southern Philippines, in southern Thailand, in the India-controlled part of Kashmir, and in the Cabo Delgado region of Mozambique. Elsewhere, such campaigns have been attempted but failed in the face of more capable and ruthless states—such as in Dagestan and other parts of Russian Transcaucasia and in heavily Somali regions of Ethiopia.¹⁴ In none of these cases, however, have Islamist rebels posed a significant threat to overrun the entire country.

In the far more common case where groups did not seek total annihilation of ethnic foes, their warfare was largely confined to territories under dispute and attacks on civilians were usually more restrained. In East Timor, for example, Fretilin rebels mainly attacked the Indonesian

Islamist rebels fighting non-Muslim foes have often reverted to ethnic cleansing and campaigns to expel enemy groups.

security forces; and while they killed hundreds of people who collaborated with the Indonesian authorities, they did not indiscriminately target Indo-

nesian or East Timorese civilians. The same applied to the Free Papua Movement rebels in West Papua, and to Tibetan rebels fighting to drive the Chinese communist regime from Tibet.¹⁵ Iraqi Kurdish rebels often fought each other alongside their war against the Baghdad regime and conducted targeted political killings but did not systematically target civilians.¹⁶ Sahrawi rebels sought independence for Western Sahara, but did not target Moroccan civilians.¹⁷ Igbo and other Biafran rebels focused attacks on Nigerian security forces.¹⁸

On the other hand, many rebel groups

¹⁴ Zachary Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2009), pp. 72-3, 127-33, 211-8; Richard Sakwa, ed., *Chechnya: From Past to Future* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), pp. 3-4, 11-16, 22, 80-6, 99, 101, 227, 230-5; “[Jammu and Kashmir: Assessment, 2001](#),” South Asia Terrorism Portal, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi, 2002; Sunguta West, “[Islamist Militants in Mozambique Intensify Attacks in Cabo Delgado Province](#),” *Terrorism Monitor*, June 3, 2020.

¹⁵ James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence* (Longueville, Astl.: Double Bay, 2003), pp. 251-2, 263-7, 276; Dunn, “Genocide in East Timor,” in Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons, eds., *Centuries of Genocide: Essays and Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 304-7, 314; Otto Ondawame, “[“One People, One Soul”: West Papuan Nationalism and Organisasi Papua Merdeka \(OPM\)/Free Papua Movement](#)” (PhD Dissertation: Australian National University, 2000), pp. 126, 129-40, 145-61, 207-8, 399, 401, 403-12; Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2013), pp. 126-9.

¹⁶ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 307-17, 337, 343-51.

¹⁷ Paul et al., *Paths to Victory*, pp. 126-9.

¹⁸ Michael Gould, *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria: The Biafran War, 1967-1970* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 63-5, 87, 97-102.

with moderate goals have had no qualms about using extreme methods. Pakistani Balochi rebels demanding independence targeted non-Balochi civilians, government officials, and Chinese diplomats and workers.¹⁹ Sri Lankan Tamils expelled other ethnic groups from the territories they claimed while waging terror campaigns against both Tamil and non-Tamil civilians.²⁰ Jumma rebels in Bangladesh conducted repeated mass killings of Bengali civilians; Assamese rebels regularly killed non-Assamese residents and migrants in India's Assam region; Abkhazian rebels expelled nearly all ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, and Bosnian Serb rebels killed Bosnian Muslim and Croat civilians as part of an ethnic cleansing campaign.²¹



Muslim refugees fleeing Srebrenica gather in eastern Bosnia, July 13, 1995. Bosnian Serb rebels killed Muslim and Croat civilians as part of an ethnic cleansing campaign.

Israel's Measured Response

How does Israel's decades-long counter-terrorist fight in the West Bank and Gaza compare to other counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies in internecine conflicts? Contrary to the common misrepresentation of its post-1967 control of these territories as "systematic oppression," Israel adopted a hands-off policy in the political and administrative spheres that sought to preserve normalcy in the territories through a mixture of economic inducements and minimal Israeli intervention. Accompanied by the hitherto unavailable access to the far larger and more advanced Israeli economy, the West Bank and Gaza experienced a dramatic socioeconomic boost that placed their residents ahead of most of their Arab neighbors. So much so that during the 1970s, these territories constituted the fourth fastest-growing economy in the world—

¹⁹ Abreen Agha, "[Pakistan: Unending Tragedy in Balochistan—Analysis](#)," *Eurasia Review*, Dec. 3, 2012; "[Balochistan: Assessment, 2021](#)," South Asia Terrorism Portal, New Delhi.

²⁰ Jagath P. Senaratne, *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1977-1990* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1997), pp. 16, 75, 148.

²¹ Amina Mohsin, *The Chittagong Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2003), p. 34; Nani Gopal Mahanta, *Confronting the State: ULFA's Struggle for Sovereignty* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), pp. 67-71, 102-5; Zverev, "Ethnic Conflicts," sect. 4 (no pagination); Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 171-81.

ahead of such “wonders” as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Korea, and substantially ahead of Israel itself. As a result, and due to the low level of national consciousness among the local population, during the two-and-a-half decades from their capture to the onset of the Oslo process in September 1993, there was very little armed resistance in the West Bank and Gaza, with most terrorist attacks emanating from outside—from Jordan in the late 1960s, then from Lebanon.²²

Ironically, it was only after Israel relinquished control of 95 percent of the territories’ Palestinian population by January 1997 that terrorism in these territories spiraled to unprecedented heights. In the two-and-a-half decades of Israeli occupation preceding the Oslo accords, some 400 Israelis were murdered; since the conclusion of these “peace” agreements, over 1,700 Israelis were murdered, and another 10,000 wounded—four times the average death toll of the preceding decades.²³ This was accompanied by the transformation of the Gaza Strip, since 2007 under Hamas’s control, into an enduring terrorist bastion that has fired tens of thousands of rockets and missiles on Israel’s population centers and has triggered four inconclusive wars: December 2008-January 2009, November 2012, July-August 2014, and May 2021.

Israel’s response to Arafat’s war of terror—the most devastating outburst of Palestinian violence since the 1948 war—

Until the 1993 Oslo process, most terrorist attacks on Israel emanated from Jordan and Lebanon.

was surprisingly slow and hesitant. Although brought to power in February 2001 on the crest of a public drive to suppress the “al-Aqsa Intifada,” it

took Ariel Sharon more than a year to authorize a large-scale operation in April 2002 to destroy the PLO’s terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank, leaving Gaza terrorism virtually intact. And even this came on the heels of a month-long suicide-bombing assault that saw 126 Israelis murdered—29 as they celebrated Pass-over at a coastal town hotel.

Jerusalem’s response to Hamas’s years of incessant missile and rocket attacks on Israeli cities and villages has been similarly restrained. Only two of the four Gaza wars involved substantial ground incursions. These stopped far short of an attempt to destroy the terror organization, let alone seize the entire strip. The operational onus for the counterterrorist campaigns was thus vested with the Israeli Air Force (IAF), which went out of its way to avoid noncombatant casualties, including the adoption of the unprecedented “knock on the roof” tactic. This involved firing non-lethal munitions on buildings that hosted terrorist bases or weapons depots so as to allow residents to vacate before the actual attack. Obviously, many terrorists exploited the early warning to flee the scene. In one instance, the IAF deliberately used a much smaller bomb than necessary to attack a high-level Hamas meeting for fear of civilian casualties, thus missing a unique opportunity to eliminate the organization’s entire leadership in one fell swoop.

²² Efraim Karsh, “What Occupation?” *Commentary Magazine*, July/Aug 2002.

²³ Efraim Karsh, “[The Oslo Disaster](#),” *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 123, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2016, p. 18-19.

Countries That Slaughter

In contrast, many states—including some democracies—have used extreme methods in their counterinsurgency and

counterterrorist campaigns. Having invaded and annexed East Timor in 1975, Indonesia's counterinsurgency regularly killed or massacred civilians with deaths exceeding 10 percent of the population by the time the region was granted independence in 1999; the stark population loss was replaced by Indonesian migrants who formed a new ruling elite.²⁴ Similar events unfolded in West Papua where, following Indonesia's seizure of the territory from the Dutch, fighting has been ongoing since 1965. Indiscriminate civilian killings have probably amounted to 5-10 percent of the native Melanesian population. Migrants brought in from other parts of Indonesia have again formed a new elite, now accounting for about 900,000 of the 2.4 million-strong total population.²⁵ Going back to 1949, Burma has fought a series of vicious wars against a variety of ethnic rebel groups—the most intense and longest being those against Karen and Kachin rebels, rather than the more recent and heavily publicized one against the Rohingyas. Systematic killings of suspect civilians, indiscriminate warfare, and forced



Muslim Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh. Myanmar, formerly Burma, has engaged in systematic killings of civilians and forced expulsions in its campaigns against ethnic rebel groups.

expulsions have been regular tactics.²⁶

When the Bengali self-determination movement won an outright majority in Pakistan's first democratic elections in 1971, Islamabad responded with a campaign to "terrorize the population"—killing anywhere from many hundreds of thousands to as many as three million, raping an estimated two hundred thousand women, and expelling tens of millions internally and into India.²⁷ In Baluchistan, in 1974-77, Pakistani security forces indiscriminately attacked villages where insurgents were present and intentionally targeted civilians from such villages.²⁸ Since 2004, Pakistani security forces and Islamist

²⁴ Dunn, *East Timor*, pp. 244-7, 253, 260-6, 271-5, 283-8, 292-6; Dunn, "Genocide," pp. 304-17.

²⁵ "[United Liberation Movement for West Papua \(ULMWP\)](#), [Free Papua Movement-Organisasi Papua Merdeka \(OPM\)](#)," [Globalsecurity.org](#); Ondawame, "[One People](#)," pp. 64-5, 98, 100, 108, 124, 138-41, 150-7, 177-8, 206-7, 390, 395-9, 402; Robin Osborne, *Indonesia's Secret War: The Guerrilla Struggle in Irian Jaya* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 37, 50-1, 58-61, 66-9, 71-3, 87-8, 93, 100-2, 127-33, 141-6.

²⁶ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed, 1999), pp. 116-7, 207-21, 257-61, 307-8, 321, 378-9, 398, 401, 425-31; Andrew Selth, *Interpreting Myanmar: A Decade of Analysis* (Acton: ANU Press, 2020), p. 439.

²⁷ Rounaq Jahan, "Genocide in Bangladesh," in Totten and Parsons, *Centuries of Genocide*, pp. 269-76.

²⁸ Paul et al., *Paths to Victory*, pp. 358-61.

proxy militias, facing more elusive Baluchi rebels who avoid direct combat, have reverted to a “kill-and-dump” strategy of disappearances and murders of suspected Balochi rebels and supporters. As of 2021, there are about 7,000 missing, apart from those known to have been killed.²⁹ Bangladesh instituted a Bengali settlement program along with a forced assimilation campaign in the Jumma-dominated Chittagong Hills, and when the Jummas rebelled, conducted mass killings and forced expulsions of civilians.³⁰ China, in Tibet and Xinjiang, has conducted long-term campaigns of forced assimilation against ethnic minorities and settled large populations of Han Chinese while ruthlessly targeting civilian supporters or bystanders along with rebels. Recently, Beijing has intensified its forced assimilation campaign in Xinjiang where over a million Muslim Uighurs are incarcerated in forced labor camps.³¹

Bosnian Muslims, in response to Bosnian Serb killings and expulsions of Muslim civilians, retaliated with their own murders and expulsions of Bosnian Serbs, and initiated a similar round of mutual

Sudan sought victory in two wars by annihilating the civilian presence in rebel-held rural areas.

civilian killings and expulsions with the Bosnian Croats.³² The Serbian state of Slobodan Milošević, responding to Kosovo Albanian insurgents,

killed civilians as part of a campaign to expel ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.³³ Iraq, over the course of a decades-long Kurdish insurgency, murdered large numbers of civilians, destroyed over four thousand villages, and systematically expelled Kurds from border and oil-rich regions. In 1987-9, these operations intensified: chemical weapons and organized murders took the lives of some one hundred thousand civilians with over a million more expelled.³⁴

In Sudan, major wars against southern rebels occurred in 1963-72 and 1983-2005. In both wars, Sudan sought victory by annihilating the civilian presence in rebel-held rural areas—killing civilians, destroying villages and food sources, and driving huge refugee flows and famines. Estimates vary, but 5-10 percent of the southern population was likely killed in the first war and well over 10 percent in the second.³⁵ In Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam (1977-91),

²⁹ Agha, “Pakistan”; “Balochistan.” South Asia Terrorism Portal.

³⁰ Syed Aziz-al Ahsan and Bhumitra Chakma, “Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh: The Chittagong Hill Tracts,” *Asian Survey*, Oct. 1989, pp. 963-8; Suhas Chakma, “Chittagong Hill Tracts: Appalling Violence,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct. 1992, pp. 2295-6; Mohsin, *The Chittagong Tracts, Bangladesh*, pp. 24, 32-5.

³¹ Paul et al., *Paths to Victory*, pp. 126-9; Gerry Groot, “Internment and Indoctrination—Xi’s ‘New Era’ in Xinjiang,” in Jane Golley et al., eds., *Power: China Story Yearbook* (Acton: ANU Press, 2019), pp. 98-112.

³² Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp. 171-81; Charles R. Shrader, *The Muslim-Croat War in Central Bosnia: A Military History, 1992-1994* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), pp. 160-2.

³³ Henry H. Perritt, Jr., *Kosovo Liberation Army: The Inside Story of an Insurgency* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 9, 49-54.

³⁴ Michiel Leezenberg, “The *Anfal* Operations in Iraqi Kurdistan,” in Totten and Parsons, *Centuries of Genocide*, pp. 414-6, 420-1, 425; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 327-40, 348-61, 371-5.

³⁵ J. Bowyer Bell, “The Conciliation of Insurgency: The Sudanese Experience,” *Military Affairs*, Oct. 1975, pp. 106-10; Alex De Waal, “The Nuba Mountains, Sudan,” in Totten and Parsons, *Centuries of Genocide*, pp. 441-7.

similar systematic assaults on civilian populations were conducted in areas of Eritrean, Tigrayan, and Oromo rebel activity, including forced expulsions and relocations and man-made famines. In Eritrea and Tigray, 5 or 10 percent of the population may have been killed. After Mengistu's fall, Ethiopian operations against Oromo, Somali, and more recently, Tigrayan rebels, have been less brutal, but have relied on largely arbitrary police repression, and sometimes, indiscriminate use of conventional force and destruction of villages. In Tigray, the recent blockade produced large-scale famine.³⁶ Morocco, fighting Sahrawi rebels in Western Sahara, used indiscriminate force that led about half the Sahrawi population to seek refuge across the border in Algeria and introduced enough Moroccan migrants and soldiers to turn Sahrawis into a minority.³⁷ In Nigeria, when Igbos rebelled in response to mass killings and expulsions of Igbo civilians, the Nigerian military periodically massacred and regularly killed and raped civilians and repeatedly bombed civilian targets while imposing a blockade



Turkish troops invade Cyprus, 1974. During the 1974 conquest by Turkey of northern Cyprus, Ankara forced the deportation of the territory's entire Greek population.

that starved huge numbers of Igbos to death.³⁸

Some states using such extreme methods, including Bosnia, Pakistan, Iraq, and Nigeria, faced rebel threats to larger, more important territories. Others, such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, China, Serbia, Sudan, and Morocco, were at risk of losing less significant, more peripheral territories. Not one faced the prospect of total annihilation as does Israel.

Turkey's Conflicts

Also consider Turkey, whose World War I genocide against the Armenians and postwar ethnic cleansing of its largely Greek Christian minorities were followed by the 1974 conquest of northern Cyprus (about 36

³⁶ *Evil Days*, pp. 3-16; "[Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromo Region](#)," Human Rights Watch, New York, May 9, 2005; "[Ethiopia: Probe Years of Abuse in the Somali Region](#)," Human Rights Watch, Aug. 20, 2018; "[Famine as Weapon of War. Tigray Timeline: January 2022-Current](#)," Reliefweb.int, Oct. 19, 2022.

³⁷ Geoffrey Jensen, *War and Insurgency in the Western Sahara* (Carlisle: Army War College Press, 2013), pp. 16, 23, 59.

³⁸ Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 174; Gould, *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria*, pp. 31-4, 42-8, 65, 76-80, 85-6, 96, 141-3, 203.

percent of the island's territory) and deportation of its entire Greek population. Since then, settlers from Turkey have more than doubled the original Turkish Cypriot population.³⁹ Ankara also persistently suppresses its large Kurdish minority, which has at times spilled over to anti-Kurdish operations in Syria and Iraq. With modern Turkey's founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk preventing the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the wake of World War I, Turkish Kurds were declared "Mountain Turks," and Kurdish language and culture were repressed in education, in the mass media, and in daily life. In the interwar period, Kurdish rebellions, which usually sought some level of political self-determination, were met with the same methods used against the Anatolian Christians—forced expulsions and massacres.

The conflict erupted again in 1984 when the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) launched an internal and cross-border insurgency aimed at attaining statehood in Turkey's Kurdish-populated southeastern region. Ankara responded with a repressive campaign during the late 1980s and 1990s that destroyed some 3,500-4,000 Kurdish villages and expelled some two to three million people.⁴⁰ The capture

Jerusalem's military conduct has been exceedingly restrained in view of the existential threat it confronts.

and incarceration of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 led to a reduction in violence but not to its total elimination, with lower-inten-

sity insurgency and government countermeasures continuing intermittently alongside failed negotiations. And while, in 2003, Ankara changed the law to allow the use of the Kurdish language in the mass media and non-school cultural activities, this made little difference in practice as the authorities hounded Kurdish-language media and purged Kurdish cultural and political leaders.⁴¹

Conclusion

Viewed from a comparative perspective, Jerusalem's military conduct has been exceedingly restrained, especially in view of the perennially existential threat it confronts. Yet its right to self-defense, indeed to national existence, continues to be challenged while its enemies' explicit genocidal intentions and indiscriminate practices are ignored or whitewashed. While the inadvertent killing of a single Palestinian civilian in the course of an Israeli counterterrorist operation can trigger an international uproar, the massacre of over half-a-million Syrians by their unelected ruler, and decades-long repression of the Iranian people by their Islamist rulers are hardly news.

This extraordinary anomaly may be explained by considering the working definition of antisemitism issued in May 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance

³⁹ Van Coufoudakis, *Cyprus: A Contemporary Problem in Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Modern Greek Studies, 2006), pp. 74-8, 87-9.

⁴⁰ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 420-6, 440-2; James Ciment, *The Kurds* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), p. 157; Mustafa Cosar Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 60-6.

⁴¹ Unal, *Counterterrorism in Turkey*, pp. 5-11, 78, 121-9; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 424, 427, 429; Paul White, *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains* (London: Zed, 2015), pp. 43, 51-4, 61.

Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental organization comprising thirty-four member states, including Canada, Britain, the United States, and twenty-five of the EU's twenty-seven members. The IHRA stressed that "criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic." Yet it identified the application of double standards "by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation" as well as "[d]enying the Jewish people their right to self-determination" as prominent manifestations of contemporary antisemitism.⁴²

Given the pervasiveness of both elements in the ongoing war for Israel's ostracism and de-legitimization—with a view to its eventual destruction—its enemies must not only be called out as antisemites. They must also be challenged to name a single state that has acted better than Israel in similar circumstances. They must be asked to

explain why the Jewish state alone is persistently subjected to such double standards while far more brutal states are given a free reign. In view of the rapid mainstreaming of antisemitism across the Western world, a determined, sustained effort to expose this reality is not only crucial for Israel's perennial struggle for survival but also for the future of Jewish communities around the world.

Shale Horowitz is a professor in the political science department of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His research interests include ethno-territorial war and China's foreign and domestic policies. shale@uwm.edu.



⁴² "Non-legally binding working definition of [antisemitism](#)," International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Berlin, [May 26, 2016](#)