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THE FAILURE OF ISRAEL'S "NEW HISTORIANS" TO EXPLAIN WAR AND PEACE.

The Past Is Not a Foreign Country

by Anita Shapira

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Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999
by Benny Morris
(Knopf, 751pp.)

The Iron Wall: Israel and The Arab World since 1948
by Avi Shlaim
(Norton, 704pp.)

I.

In the fall of 1988, the journal *Tikkun* published an article called "The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past." Its author was a relatively unknown historian named Benny Morris. A year before, Morris had brought out *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, a richly and rigorously detailed book that had not yet made much of a splash. His *Tikkun* article would fix that. In his article, Morris described himself and three of his confederates (Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé from academia, and Simha Flapan from political journalism) as "new historians," arguing that they had together undertaken to expose the skeletons in Zionism's closet, to declare war on the dogmas of Israeli history. The label stuck, and soon the Israeli media was abuzz about the "new historians," who were catapulted into notoriety.

Morris also accused Israel of creating the Palestinian refugee problem, a charge that he had not levelled in his book. In his view, Israel bore a terrible burden of guilt. The vehemence of his accusations, and the moralizing tone in which they were delivered, fell on receptive ears: Morris was writing in the inflamed days of the Intifada. It is unlikely that the scholarly tomes of Morris and his fellow revisionists had many readers, but many Israelis were exposed to their heterodoxies in the media, which relish positions that are brief and barbed. And in this respect the "new historians" certainly delivered the goods. Suddenly an argument raged over the true nature of what Israelis call the War of Independence, or what Palestinians call *al-naqba* or the Catastrophe, or what historians call, more neutrally, the 1948 war. That war

furnished the founding myth of the state of Israel; and it is but a short step from questioning its justice to doubting Israel's very right to exist.

In fact, the ideas advanced by Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and Ilan Pappé, the vanguard of the "new historians," were nothing new. An anti-narrative of Zionism, counterposed to the Zionist (and Israeli) narrative of Zionism, had existed since the very inception of the Zionist movement. Opponents of the movement, Jewish and non-Jewish, had created an entire literature explaining what was foul in Zionism and why Zionism was destined to fail, and later why the state of Israel was an illegitimate and unjust construct that had to be resisted. The Soviet propaganda machine excelled in developing this anti-narrative, and in proliferating it. Arab propaganda also did its work. And at the margins of the Israeli left, there had always been groups and currents that doubted the right of Israel to exist and stressed the wrongs that were perpetrated against the Arabs. Yet those heretical elements remained marginal in Israeli politics and culture, and failed to gain wide public support. The advent of the "new historians" changed all that. These views now gained a certain legitimacy, since they appeared in the context of a debate between ostensibly objective scholars.

Revision in history is salutary. A critical look at premises refreshes historical inquiry and helps to generate new understanding. Every generation reexamines the present and the past under the impact of changing realities. Sometimes revisionism is the result of a generational shift among historians, and sometimes it springs from dramatic historical developments that throw an unexpected light on the past. The Vietnam War led American historians to reconsider certain accepted accounts of the cold war. Forty years after the end of World War II, a heated debate flared among historians in Germany about how to interpret the Nazi era: was it a rupture in Germany's past, or evidence of its continuity? Some British historians have responded to the belligerence of Thatcherism by attempting to rehabilitate Chamberlain and the Munich agreement. To be sure, not all revisions are laudable; the denial of the Holocaust is also a variety of revisionism. But historical revisionism does not take place in a vacuum. It is surrounded by politics. The revisionist scholar feels obligated to a particular political purpose, and proceeds with his research, and sometimes with his ready conclusions, to substantiate that purpose.

The "new historians" of Israel have not exactly pioneered fresh critical approaches in Israeli historiography. Already in the 1970s, scholars had begun to develop new and sophisticated views of Jewish-British relations under the Mandate, of Zionism's relation to the Arab problem, of the rise of the Arab national movement, of the nature

of Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. There was a tense and constant dialogue between collective memory and historical scholarship, as the new approaches slowly penetrated into the educational system and public consciousness. Since the advent of the "new historians," however, a new polarization has set in. For the "new historians" dismissed all previous historiography as apologetic. Whoever dares to oppose or to criticize the pronouncements of these self-styled iconoclasts is savagely maligned.

In 1996, for example, when the historian Ephraim Karsh charged that Benny Morris had falsified certain documents, Morris did not even deign to reply; instead he asserted that Karsh's article on "re-writing Israel's history" was replete with distortions and half-truths, and he went on to add: "His piece contains more than fifty footnotes but is based almost entirely on references to and quotations from secondary works, many of them of dubious value." A look at Karsh's notes indicates that thirty of his references actually refer to writings by Shlaim and Morris, and fifteen others cite primary sources, and the rest refer to studies by major historians such as Avraham Selah and to several books by journalists that Morris himself now adduces in his new book. Of dubious value, indeed.

The revisionist dispute quickly spilled over from history into sociology and cultural studies, as new topics and new heresies were added to those that treated the War of Independence and the relation to the Palestinians: the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine and its conduct during the Holocaust, the absorption of Holocaust survivors and Oriental Jewish immigrants, and so on. No longer were particular Zionist or Israeli figures impugned; Zionist ideology as a whole was now the real culprit. Several of the new school's devotees labelled themselves "post-Zionist," and charged that the "lunatic" ambition of Jews to transform themselves into a people with a state of their own was senseless, and opposed to the natural inclinations of the Jews. They claimed that the Jews had never been a people until the Zionists muddled their thinking, and had no desire for nationhood. Post-Zionism turned out to be a peculiar form of anti-Zionism. In contrast with the anti-Zionism of an earlier era, the post-Zionists made their peace with Israel's existence as a state. (It is hard to argue with success.) But they sought to undermine the state's moral and philosophical foundations, to dismantle the Jewish identity of the state and reconfigure it as a state of "all its citizens."

Academic disputes tend to thrive on their own momentum, even when the realities that gave rise to them have changed. The controversy about "the new historians" began during Yitzhak Shamir's tenure as

prime minister, while the Intifada raged and Israeli politics was gridlocked. The debate fumed on during the Gulf war, when some Israelis with post-Zionist sympathies felt compassion for the embattled Iraqi ruler. It continued into the years of Rabin's premiership, as a kind of atonal accompaniment to the Oslo accords. But Rabin's assassination in 1995 took the wind out of the confrontation over the new historiography; and it is beginning to seem a little stale.

Now two new studies by major figures in the controversy have appeared. Benny Morris and Avi Shlaim appear to have mellowed, casting off their anti-establishment tunics for academic gowns. Shlaim is professor at St. Antony's, Oxford and Morris, who liked to portray himself as the innocent victim of the Israeli scholarly guild, currently holds an appointment as professor at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba. In both books, there are elements of Shlaim's and Morris's old and egregious views; but in both books there are also new elements, reflecting the changing times. About both books one can say that what is bad is not new and what is new is not bad.

Shlaim and Morris have both taken on the task, in a hefty tome each, of recounting the course of the Israeli-Arab dispute from its inception to the recent fall of the Netanyahu government. Shlaim devotes precious little space to the period prior to 1947, hastening on to the United Nations partition plan and the War of Independence; Morris accords nearly 200 pages to the period prior to the war in 1948. Shlaim is basically interested in political and diplomatic history, and minimizes his account of the wars; Morris treats the military operations in copious detail, in the War of Independence and in later conflicts.

Both studies are largely based on secondary sources. Only in those chapters that treat the subjects of their previous research do Shlaim and Morris ground their investigation on primary sources. The books do not pretend to scholarly innovation. They wish only to present an interpretive synthesis of the secondary sources. Such an approach is certainly valid, especially when the era involved is so close to our own--so close, indeed, that there are times when you cannot be sure whether today's headline might not up-end the chapter that you completed last night. In both books, the boundary between historical writing and journalistic writing eventually blurs.

One of the more serious charges raised against the "new historians" concerned their sparse use of Arab sources. In a preemptive move, Shlaim states at the outset of his new book that his focus is on Israeli politics and the Israeli role in relations with the Arab world--and thus he has no need of Arab documents. Morris claims that he is

able to extrapolate the Arab positions from the Israeli documentation. Both authors make only meager use of original Arab sources, and most such references cited are in English translation.

Shlaim goes out of his way to praise the Israel State Archives for the access that it offers to scholars, unlike the archives of the Arab states, which are hermetically sealed to the outside. Yet the situation is really not that simple. In recent years, documents housed in the State Archives in Jordan have been made available to researchers. Many relevant memoirs published in Arabic have also appeared. And so one cannot attribute the scant use of the Arab sources in these two books solely to the relatively closed situation of research in the Arab world. Shlaim and Morris could have tried harder.

To write the history of relations between Israel and the Arab world almost exclusively on the basis of Israeli documentation results in obvious distortions. Every Israeli contingency plan, every flicker of a far-fetched idea expressed by David Ben-Gurion and other Israeli planners, finds its way into history as conclusive evidence for the Zionist state's plans for expansion. What we know about Nasser's schemes regarding Israel, by contrast, derives solely from secondary and tertiary sources. The same is true for the planning of defense ministers of Syria and their fantasies of a "Greater Syria." We are given no first-hand source for King Hussein's designs over the years other than what it was convenient for him to tell Avi Shlaim in the ceremonious interview that he granted him not long before his death. (The somewhat fawning interview by this otherwise anti-Hashemite scholar appeared in *The New York Review of Books* last summer.) The upshot of all this methodological self-limitation is a history of the conflict in which one side completely disrobes, disclosing all its weaknesses and its flaws, while the other remains conveniently shrouded in the mystery of the veil.

Morris and Shlaim write diplomatic and military history, and hardly mention the political, social, and cultural dimensions of Israel and the Arab world. Can a conflict as profound as this one really be grasped without probing its psychological and cultural underpinnings? But Morris and Shlaim have chosen not to inquire into such realities--which is perfectly fair, except that they should also have chosen to adhere to high standards of factual accuracy even when treating topics with which they are not overly familiar. Lapses in accuracy are evident whenever the authors enter the realm of domestic and internal developments: Morris's account of the political landscape in the Yishuv during the 1920s is replete with errors, as is Shlaim's brief foray into Israeli politics at the end of the 1960s.

I will give only one example. Describing the political background of Levi Eshkol, who replaced David Ben-Gurion as prime minister in 1963, Shlaim tries to explain why Eshkol was consistently a liberal and a humanist who understood the need for dialogue with the Arabs. This is itself a dubious proposition; but Shlaim links Eshkol's alleged dovishness to his emigration to Palestine in 1914 as a representative of the left-wing youth movement Ha-Shomer ha-Tzair (The Young Watchman). But Ha-Shomer ha-Tzair was founded after Eshkol came to Palestine, and Eshkol was never a member of Ha-Shomer ha-Tzair, then or later.

Shlaim appears to have confused the moderate Palestinian political party Ha-Poel haTzair (The Young Worker), founded in 1905, with the radical Zionist youth movement Ha-Shomer ha-Tzair established in Galicia and Poland during World War I. This detail would not be worth mentioning, except that Shlaim bases an entire explanation, an unfounded explanation, on a patent error. This is reminiscent of the pseudopsychological interpretations to which the Israeli "new historians" sometimes resorted, as in their crude accounting for the moderation of Moshe Sharett (the foreign minister and second prime minister of Israel) by the biographical circumstance that when he was a boy his family lived for a time in an Arab village.

There is another striking similarity between Morris's book and Shlaim's book, and it is their very superficial treatment of the implications of the cold war for the Middle East. More serious attention to this dimension of the conflict could have led to an entirely different interpretation of the Israeli-Arab dispute: namely, that its worsening from the 1950s on was a by-product of the Soviet Union's penetration of the region beneath the cloak of radical Arab nationalism. It is a fact, after all, that a genuine window of opportunity for peace between Israel and the Arabs opened only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of its support to states and organizations on the hard-line front of rejection. Morris claims that one of the factors that led to a softening in the PLO's stance was fears about the influx of a million Jews from the former Soviet Union; but surely the buckling of the Soviet Union had something to do with that, too.

Blurring the aspects of superpower rivalry in the Middle East conflict makes it possible to present the conflict in isolation from world politics--that is, to present it moralistically. In both these books, there are two layers of research and argument: a deeper stratum, based on earlier research, that has a strong moralistic slant, and a newer level that expresses a more realistic approach to events. The older layer is far more ideological, and it is especially conspicuous in Shlaim's work. The evolution from moralism to realism is a reflection of the changing

times in which these books were written, as the high tide of the peace process puts the past in a new light. These books start out as the story of the good guys and the bad guys, in the "new historical" manner, but somewhere along the way the plot thickens, as the writers' ideologies collide with the region's realities.

II.

The title of Avi Shlaim's book is an allusion to an article called "On the Iron Wall," by Zeev Jabotinsky, the Zionist leader and ideologue who founded the Revisionist movement in 1925. (Jabotinsky's famous essay was published in Russian in 1923 and in Hebrew in 1933.) The Revisionist movement functioned as the militant right wing of Zionism, and the Likud party views itself as the rightful heir of Jabotinsky's mantle. The concept of the "iron wall" posited that it was impossible in Palestine, as in any country of colonization, to avoid a clash between the indigenous population and the settlers. The Arabs of Palestine were a separate people, and they would not surrender the land without a struggle. Consequently, Jabotinsky argued, the only path forward for the Zionist project was the path of force: to erect an "iron wall" in the form of a Jewish battalion in the British army, which would halt Arab resistance.

The basic problem with Jabotinsky's conception was not philosophical, it was practical: there was no chance at all that the British would agree to setting up a Jewish army in British khaki. Jabotinsky's opponents in the labor movement disagreed with him not only on Zionist priorities, as Shlaim mentions, but also on what was realistic in the circumstances. They wished to postpone the explosion of the Arab-Jewish conflict for as long as possible. They believed that the sooner the Jewish-Arab conflict reached the flashpoint, the worse the Jewish prospects for victory; but the later the moment of truth, the better.

In its time, "On the Iron Wall" was considered a little mad, and divorced from reality; but Shlaim believes that Jabotinsky's essay reads today like a very clear-eyed view of future Jewish-Arab relations. Contrary to what he claims, Jabotinsky and his ideas had only a marginal influence on the ideas of the political elite in the Yishuv generally, and on Ben-Gurion in particular. But Shlaim nonetheless seizes on the concept of the "iron wall" as an organizing paradigm to explain the evolution of the politics of the Yishuv and the state of Israel from the 1920s to the 1980s.

According to Shlaim, Jabotinsky's achievement was to have foreseen that Arab acceptance of Jewish settlement in Palestine would come only after the Arabs were

finally persuaded that they could never throw the Jews into the sea. Only then would they learn to speak about compromise; and the compromise, according to Jabotinsky's essay, would take the form of a generous autonomy within the framework of the Jewish state. In his epilogue, Shlaim observes:

In a way, this is what has happened. The history of the state of Israel is a vindication of Jabotinsky's strategy of the iron wall. The Arabs--first the Egyptians, then the Palestinians, then the Jordanians--have recognized Israel's invincibility and were compelled to negotiate with Israel from a position of palpable weakness.

And so the revisionist endorses the Revisionist, and *les extremes se touchent*.

Shlaim's appropriation of the "iron wall" as the controlling idea of his book is far from coincidental. It is an effort by a "new historian" to get a handle on the highly fluid situation before his eyes, in which the old categories and the old enmities are changing and receding. The notion of the "iron wall" denotes a realistic perspective, and presupposes that the changes in Israeli and Arab consciousness are largely a function of power relations; and such realism implies that the making of peace between Israel and its neighbors was not the result of Israeli breast-beating, but the outgrowth of a mutual recognition that peace is desirable. Yet Shlaim balks at a full acceptance of realism and its implications, as he must; for it is deeply at odds with his older, more tendentious thinking. Deep down, Shlaim really does believe that the Middle East is Arab turf, and that the Palestinians are innocent victims, and that the Israelis are outsiders and intruders. Thus his book is sorely weakened by a kind of historian's cognitive dissonance. His recognition of the realities on the ground flies in the face of his deepest feelings. As a result, his book is divided against itself.

Shlaim's sentiments are revealed in his differing attitude toward Jews and Arabs. His approach to the latter is shaped by a kind of Realpolitik. After all, they are the indigenous inhabitants of the region; and so their actions require no justification, and are motivated by entirely understandable and self-evident interests. Yet Jews are repeatedly viewed through a moralistic prism: they are transgressors, and have come as invaders into the Arab East. Shlaim is prepared to accept the principle of national interest when it comes to the Arabs, but not when it comes to Israel. Israel's agreement with King Abdullah at the end of the war of 1948 is criticized for its instrumentality: "It was a striking example of the unsentimental Realpolitik approach that had dictated Israel's conduct throughout the first Arab-Israeli war." But Shlaim offers no criticism of Abdullah's takeover of the West Bank, or of Egypt's seizure of the Gaza Strip or of Syria's grab of territory west of the international frontier.

The same disparity obtains also for peace feelers. Shlaim assumes that it was legitimate for the Syrians and the Egyptians to demand from Israel half of the Sea of Galilee and portions of the Negev as the price for peace; but he deems Israel's refusal to agree to massive territorial concessions as sufficient reason to put the blame on the Jewish state for bungling the opportunities for peace. Shlaim is also sympathetic to Syrian views on the demilitarized zones along the Sea of Galilee. Even though this land was territory forcibly occupied by Syria in the War of 1948, Shlaim is vehement in castigating Israel for trying to extend its sovereignty over it. As a general principle, Shlaim rejects the right to seize land by force, when it is a question of Israel's territorial gains; but Syria's irredentism is different. Since the land that Syria seized was taken by a rightful Arab "owner," it should not be faulted. But all of Israel's territorial gains are illegitimate and have to be returned.

In Shlaim's book, Israel emerges as the neighborhood bully in the 1950s. The main villain is David Ben-Gurion, whose policy, in Shlaim's account, was essentially a harsh display of military muscle. The hero in the white hat, by contrast, was Moshe Sharett, the moderate foreign minister who is a darling of the "new historians." In truth, Sharett's perspective on the Israeli-Arab conflict did not differ in principle from Ben-Gurion's. He, too, did not believe in the prospects of peace in the foreseeable future. Yet he showed much greater respect for the United Nations, and he wanted Israel to avoid actions that would provoke international criticism. He also believed that Arab animosity could be diminished by Israel's refraining from aggressive military acts, hoping that eventually this would lead to a reconciliation.

In the Middle East in the 1950s, however, Sharett's approach hardly had a chance, considering the balance of power. Even in Shlaim's morally rigged account, the real situation of Israel in the 1950s is detectable. Between Shlaim's lines one can recognize a weak state, lacking in self-confidence, isolated. It had no source for the weapons that were necessary for its defense against the Soviet arsenal that began to pour into Egypt from the mid-1950s. Shlaim himself notes that Sharett's efforts to procure weapons came to naught:

He returned empty-handed and deeply disillusioned. His unsuccessful and highly publicized mission only served to underscore Israel's international isolation in the face of the rising tide of Egyptian military strength.

If this was indeed Israel's predicament, then maybe Ben-Gurion was right in his conviction that a bit of muscle-flexing by the fledgling state would prove useful.

In that same period, the Western powers treated Israel like a poor relative whose land they were trying to sell

behind her back. In his famous Guild Hall speech in 1955, the British prime minister Anthony Eden demanded that Israel relinquish territory in the Negev in order to facilitate a land bridge between Egypt and Jordan. John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's secretary of state, entertained notions of finessing a peace deal between Israel and its neighbors, in which Israel would give up territory and agree to absorb 100,000 Arab refugees as the price for peace. Shlaim views those demands, which were really designed to strip Israel of territory that was allotted it by the United Nations in the partition plan of 1947, as legitimate demands. He does not utter a word about the questionable morality of the attempt by the great powers to violate massively the territory of a small state.

Shlaim recounts the Sinai Campaign as a grand conspiracy by Israel, France, and Britain. Israel is the main rogue in the cabal. And, as befits a moralistic tale, the bad guys lose. There is a pinch of malicious glee in Shlaim's account of the calamity of the belligerent Israelis, and of Ben-Gurion in particular, forced to climb down from the heights of victory to the pits of a forced pullback. Shlaim also tries his level best to prove that the Sinai war did not achieve its aims. He cannot deny that the Egyptian army was defeated, and the Straits of Tiran were opened, and the fedayeen bases in the Gaza Strip were destroyed. Still, he prefers to emphasize that Nasser was not removed from power, and Israel did not expand its territory, and a new order was not achieved in the Middle East. Shlaim makes no reference to the fact that in the wake of the Sinai Campaign, Israel enjoyed a decade of relative calm on the Israel-Egyptian frontier, and that the port of Eilat indeed remained open to international shipping, and that Israel's standing in the international arena was significantly enhanced. After 1956, schemes that resembled Eden's Guild Hall speech disappeared.

1958 was a stormy year in the Middle East. In Iraq, an army coup toppled the pro-Western government. In pro-Western Lebanon and Jordan, there were Nasserite attempts at subversion. President Eisenhower dispatched the Marines to Lebanon in order to forestall a possible collapse of pro-Western forces there. Israel was requested to allow British overflights for transporting troops to aid the Hashemite regime in Jordan. Shlaim takes a neutral stand when commenting on the subversive actions by pro-Nasserite forces. There are no "conspiracies" or "plots" here; he reserves those dark terms for the relations between Israel and King Abdullah, and for the Sinai Campaign. Nasser, after all, was an indigenous leader in the Arab East, and in Shlaim's eyes internecine Arab intrigue is not a fit subject for condemnation. Yet Shlaim is astounded that Israel should be so brazen as to even consider requesting recompense for having permitted Western powers to use

its airspace: "Israel was not being asked to do anything to help Jordan, except to permit the use of its airspace. Nevertheless, Ben-Gurion earnestly hoped to get something in return for helping the Western powers."

The Americans and the British refused to bargain with Ben-Gurion about a military or political reward for his compliance with their requests. Yet when the Soviets threatened Israel for having opened its airspace to Western forces, and Ben-Gurion, deeply distressed, tried to cancel the permission for overflights, he was strongly rebuked by Dulles. The incident pointed up Israel's fundamental weakness, and its desperate search for allies against the threat posed by Nasser and Nasserism--and it pointed up also the exploitative attitude of the United States and Great Britain toward Israel at the time. In Shlaim's portrayal, however, Israel's positions are presented as demanding and immoderate. With another pinch of glee, he notes that Ben-Gurion's hopes for strategic cooperation with the West against the forces of radical Arab nationalism came to naught.

It was not until 1964 that an Israeli prime minister was officially welcomed at the White House, when Lyndon Johnson received Levi Eshkol. In their joint statement at the conclusion of the visit, Johnson proclaimed the need to maintain the territorial integrity of all the states in the region. Shlaim remarks that this was the first time Washington abandoned the idea of changing the borders of the 1949 armistice line. Such a fact, you might think, casts a different light upon Israel's search during those years for allies and arms. If even a government as friendly to Israel as the government of the United States was not prepared during that perilous time to guarantee the 1949 borders (what today is called the "Green Line"), then Israel's situation was in truth fraught with great danger, and Ben-Gurion's obsession with Israel's fragility was not illusory.

Shlaim's tendency to assume an air of objectivity toward Arab actions and to point a scolding finger at Israel is also conspicuous in his account of the deterioration that led to the Six-Day War. Meeting in Cairo in 1964, the Arab League resolved to divert the waters of the Jordan River, which are vital for Israel's existence. At that same conference, there was a public declaration of the intention to destroy Israel, and the PLO was founded. Shlaim avoids any judgment of those bellicose moves against Israel's very existence: after all, one must not berate the virtuous Arab determination to extirpate the foreign body from their midst.

Instead Shlaim dwells on the Israeli responses to the attempts to divert the Jordan River, responses that he deems disproportionate to the provocation. He blames the deterioration of the situation on those escalating Israeli responses--Israel used its air force to destroy the

Syrian positions, and bombarded the Syrian water diversion project, after which the Syrians bombarded the kibbutzim along the Jordan--and on truculent statements by Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin and Prime Minister Levi Eshkol against the Baath regime in Damascus. Yet he fails to make any mention of the role played by Moscow in inciting Nasser to send his army into Sinai by supplying the disinformation that Israel was concentrating "huge armed forces" near the Syrian border.

The Six-Day War is correctly portrayed by Shlaim as a defensive war; but he does not permit Israel to enjoy the laurels of a just victory for very long. From the outset, Shlaim is skeptical about Israel's readiness to relinquish land in return for peace. Thus, in his calendar of red-letter dates, he does not bother to note the Israeli government decision of June 19, 1967 declaring its willingness to pull back from conquered territory in return for peace. In marked contrast, Shlaim's presentation of the resolutions at the Arab summit conference at Khartoum in September, 1967--"no to recognition, no to negotiations, no to peace"--suggests that this thundering rejection actually disguised Nasser's readiness to reach a de facto agreement with Israel. Shlaim musters no real evidence for such a claim, aside from King Hussein's statement in his interview with Shlaim that Nasser had authorized him to seek a comprehensive peace; but the king's remark can be read differently--namely, that Nasser was cautioning Hussein in this way about daring to go it alone in attempting to conclude a separate peace with Israel. And even if we assume that Shlaim's reading of Hussein's remark is right, this is excellent evidence that nothing clears the mind like defeat: what Nasser was unprepared even to think about before the war, he was now ready to act on.

Beginning in 1967, Israeli-American relations passed through a dramatic transformation. The poor relative whom everyone wished to disclaim now became the recognized ally of Washington in the Middle East. Shlaim tells the story of this strategic transformation, but he does not ask the obvious question. What was the cause of this striking shift? How was it that Eisenhower and Dulles treated Israel with such contempt, while Nixon and Kissinger provided it with a huge arsenal and a deterrent against the Soviet Union, bolstered by financial aid, as did all the American presidents who followed? Was Israel led with greater wisdom in the 1970s and 1980s than in the 1950s and 1960s?

Probably not. The war of attrition, the massive bombing in Egypt, the fumble of chances for reaching an interim agreement with Egypt in 1971, the Yom Kippur War, the war in Lebanon: in all these episodes, Israel made mistakes and Israel botched opportunities. It proved fully as obstinate as in the 1950s, maybe more so. And yet,

wondrously, those errors did not lead to a worsening of the conflict and to greater Israeli isolation, as might have been expected from Shlaim's moralistic interpretations.

Indeed, the outcome was the opposite. Starting in the 1970s, and increasingly so after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, President Sadat of Egypt demonstrated it was possible to recognize the state of Israel, and to enter into direct negotiations with Israel, and even to discuss a final peace agreement with Israel. Shlaim had presented all those possibilities as impossibilities, as unshakable Arab taboos. Every time Israel came forward with such a condition, Shlaim depicted it as a mere tactic designed to blame the other side for the failure of negotiations. And then, all of a sudden, Israel and Egypt were prepared to act on what they had not even dreamed of a few short years before. The Israelis were ready to withdraw from all of Sinai, and the Egyptians were ready to reach a separate peace accord with Israel.

Shlaim does not ask how this extraordinary turn came about, because the answer is self-evident. The answer is that power did its sobering work, and realism came to be preferred to moralism. Initially, the military might that Israel demonstrated in the Six-Day War had opened Washington's eyes to the importance of this potential ally for stability in the Middle East, not least as a brake on Soviet influence in the region. After the Six-Day War, Israel became somewhat intoxicated with its own strength; but six years later the Yom Kippur War returned Israel to its senses, and put a stop to the triumphalist flights of fancy following the triumph of 1967. Concomitantly, the war in 1973 provided Sadat with the legitimacy to reach a separate peace with Israel, even as it demonstrated that Israel could not be coerced into an agreement. It seems that all sides involved in the Middle East conflict had recognized the validity of a realistic approach.

The realism of the "iron wall" also applied to the Palestinians. After all the terror acts perpetrated by Palestinian organizations in the 1970s and '80s, which Shlaim skips over nonchalantly, the Intifada erupted in December 1987. It demonstrated to Israelis and Palestinians alike that force was not the answer. The uprising led to a moderating of the PLO's hard-line positions: the Palestinians were now prepared to recognize Israel's right to exist and even to accept the U.N. decision of 1947 on partition--to accept the principle of two states and thus to renounce terror. Once again, then, what Shlaim believed was non-negotiable for the Palestinians became negotiable. It took four decades, to be sure; but four decades is not an unreasonably long time in the context of ethnic and religious and national conflicts.

Shlaim's fitful oscillation between ideological judgment

and Realpolitik is manifest also in his account of the Gulf War. Israel acted with admirable restraint in that war, in not responding to the Scud attacks by Saddam Hussein. We would have expected Shlaim to give Israel a medal for good conduct. Instead he instructs that Israel's failure to act dented its reputation as a military great power in the eyes of its adversaries! In the event, Shlaim further observes, the United States shifted closer to the Arab states. When Israel pursues the moderate policies lauded by Shlaim, it forfeits its deterrent ability and its status as Washington's main ally in the region; and when it acts immoderately, it is simply villainous. Israel is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't.

Shlaim has his loves and his hates, and he sticks to them. His profound contempt for David Ben-Gurion infuses his account of the man and his politics with a diabolical dimension. As a rule, the "new historians" like to associate everything evil with the figure of Ben-Gurion. He is identified more than anyone else with the establishment of the state and the policies that it has pursued.

Ben-Gurion created the self-image of a strong personality, a leader not afraid to defy the entire world. I would even conjecture that he regarded his image as one of the weapons in Israel's deterrent arsenal. But the truth about Ben-Gurion was more complicated and more humane. Behind the bravura was a man who feared for the fate of the young state. Not everything that Ben-Gurion did or said was worthy of praise; he sometimes made mistakes and he sometimes talked folly. But ultimately he was the man of the status quo of 1949, not the pugnacious ruffian of territorial conquest that Shlaim portrays.

Ben-Gurion was able to foresee--in the spirit of the "iron wall," though without any link to Jabotinsky--that the Arabs would try again and again to destroy Israel, until they finally despaired of a military solution and came to terms with Israel's existence. (The Revisionists were not the only Zionists who grasped the realities of power.) In the meantime, Israel had to remain strong, and build a solid and stable society, and grow demographically, and seek out allies among the great Western powers.

Despite pressure from the military, Ben-Gurion did not launch an operation to capture Mt. Hebron at the end of the War of Independence. A long process of persuasion was necessary before Moshe Dayan convinced him to embark on the Sinai Campaign, and even then he agreed to act only after he had been promised air cover by the French. He feared Soviet involvement, and Bulganin's threat in 1956 to dispatch "volunteers" to the Middle East was reason enough to order a pullback from the Sinai Peninsula. If ever Ben-Gurion entertained dreams of territorial expansion, they dissolved with the withdrawal

from Sinai.

When Yitzhak Rabin, then chief of staff, came to seek Ben-Gurion's advice on the eve of the Six-Day War, Rabin was rebuked for having placed Israel in danger of possible war while the country lacked a great power ally. Ben-Gurion demanded that the army dig in, stay put, and not launch an attack on Egypt. After the war, he declared that all the land won in the war would be exchanged for peace, except for Jerusalem. He was very far from being the terror of the neighborhood that the "new historians" depict.

In contrast with Shlaim's enmity for Ben-Gurion, he is strangely enamored of the leaders of the right, Jabotinsky and Begin. Jabotinsky is presented as Ben-Gurion's veritable mentor and guide, which is a truly bizarre notion. Shlaim even has Jabotinsky exerting an influence on Rabin, though there is no doubt Rabin never read a page that Jabotinsky wrote. It is true that Jabotinsky was a liberal, and ready to guarantee the Arabs minority rights within the Jewish state; but in this respect he was no different from the other Zionist leaders. All of them, Ben-Gurion included, spoke in the same conciliatory spirit. There is no reason to believe Jabotinsky and not believe the others.

Shlaim shows a similarly inexplicable admiration for Menachem Begin. While he brushes aside Ben-Gurion's apprehensions about the fate of Israel with cynical skepticism, he musters profound understanding for Begin's fears. Shlaim argues that the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1982 was not carried out for electoral reasons; the timing of the Israeli action, he explains, was owed to Begin's genuine anxiety about Israel's future, to fears rooted in his own experience in the Holocaust. Shlaim accepts uncritically and at face value Begin's flagrant appropriation of images of the Shoah in the war in Lebanon; it is only on rare occasions that Shlaim criticizes Begin for exploiting the great Jewish tragedy for political gain. And many Israelis would be astounded to read about "Begin's Churchillian style of leadership."

Shlaim prefers the Israeli right to the Israeli left. After all, Jabotinsky looked the Arab problem straight in the eye, without flinching, and acknowledged the national character of the Arabs, and even sketched a model that would grant Arabs future rights. But the Israeli left (which includes Labor Zionism) is, in Shlaim's eyes, hypocritical and inauthentic, with all its moral perplexity and its overblown sensitivity, aspiring to a brand of Zionism with humanistic and socialist elements, and attempting to dodge the problem as long as it was not acute. For Shlaim, this camp, which founded the state, is ultimately responsible for the tragedy of the Palestinians.

Shlaim interprets Jabotinsky's "iron wall" as a two-stage scenario: first there would be conflict, when the Jews would curb and beat down the Arabs by military might, and then there would be reconciliation, when the Jews would grant the Arabs a mode of autonomy, including national rights. Now Shlaim has decided that the first stage, the nasty stage, is over. The time has come for reconciliation. But he evades the pivotal question in Israeli politics. When does the hour of peace arrive? For the left and the right do not have the same answers to this question. For the right, peace will come when Israeli sovereignty is guaranteed over the entirety of the Land of Israel, over Greater Israel. (*That* is how Jabotinsky and Begin, Shlaim's favorites, conceived the condition of peace.) For the left, peace will come when the Palestinians are prepared to assent to the principle of partition and to recognize the right of the existence of two peoples in the land west of the Jordan. For this reason, it is the heirs of the pragmatic tradition of Ben-Gurion and Weizmann--and not the heirs of the inflexible tradition of Jabotinsky--who are the genuine peacemakers today.

The old attempts to justify Arab rejectionism over the years, and to blame the frustration of peace initiatives on Israeli inflexibility, now seem outdated: all the things that symbolized Israeli "intransigence," all the things that were supposed to have made peace impossible (recognition of Israel, direct peace negotiations, bilateral agreements as against a comprehensive peace) are now possible, and even actual. Shlaim recognizes that the situation has fundamentally changed; but the older prejudices continue to tug at him. Thus, in the conclusion to his book, he returns to the hoary arguments that present the Israelis as foreign invaders:

The moral case for the establishment of an independent Jewish state was strong, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust. But there is no denying that the establishment of the State of Israel involved a massive injustice to the Palestinians. Half a century on, Israel still had to arrive at the reckoning of its own sins against the Palestinians, a recognition that it owed the Palestinians a debt that must at some point be repaid.

It is not clear what Shlaim exactly has in mind by "sins." If he means the establishment of the state itself, well, he himself states that there was a strong moral case for its creation. If he is referring to the war of 1948, well, he himself notes elsewhere that the Arabs forced it upon Israel. If he is alluding to the fact that the Arab Palestinians did not establish a state in 1948, because they were stymied by Israel, surely he should place the blame for that first and foremost on the Palestinians themselves, and on their Arab brethren. Or was Israel supposed to take the initiative in creating a Palestinian state?

What remains is the refugee issue, a truly festering wound. And in this awful matter, there is a lot of guilt to

go around. As Benny Morris argues, the blame for the misery of the Palestinian refugees must be shared by several parties. But the morally laden concepts mustered by Shlaim lay the guilt in no uncertain terms at one door only--at Israel's door. This passage reads like a remnant of an earlier time, a more inflamed and more brutal time that we should be glad to see gone.

III.

The title of Benny Morris's book is something of a surprise. Who are the "righteous victims"? Is Morris ironically alluding to the tendency of both sides in the conflict to claim a monopoly on truth and justice, and to be deaf to the views of the adversary, as Morris himself says in one of his more incisive passages? Or are both sides right, and victims of the historical situation or their own nationalist aspirations? Morris does not explain.

Indeed, Morris's work is innocent of any attempt at conceptualization. His method is a sort of muddling through. In every chapter he presents the culprits and the casualties of the given moment. In most instances, the result is quite balanced. Thus, while Shlaim accuses Israel of consciously renouncing the various chances for peace after 1949, Morris contends that leaders on both sides failed to utilize the opportunities that presented themselves. Regarding infiltration in the 1950s, Shlaim claims that Arab countries did everything possible to curb the infiltrators; and he relies, for proof, only on King Hussein's comment in his interview with him: "We had done everything that we could to prevent infiltration and to prevent access to Israel." Surely a historian is obliged to find better evidence for his findings than the word of a king. Morris, by contrast, blames the Arab regimes for some of the infiltration activity, especially in the Gaza Strip, noting that Israeli reprisals induced the Egyptians and the Jordanians to take measures to stem infiltration.

While stressing every Israeli attack on ostensibly innocent Arabs, Shlaim avoids any mention of Arab atrocities against Jews. Morris, on the other hand, points to a number of cases of murder and violence perpetrated by Arab infiltrators and fedayeen in the 1950s, and even devotes an entire chapter to the secret war between Israel and the terror organizations. Unlike Shlaim, Morris is uninterested in the development of Arab nationalism. In his view, Nasser was not a hero but a dictator leading his people astray. For this reason, his account of the Sinai Campaign lacks Shlaim's moral fervor. Morris takes Nasser's threats against Israel seriously.

In describing the tense period of waiting in the run-up to the Six-Day War, Morris underscores the national hysteria that engulfed the Arab states, articulated in calls

for Israel's destruction. Shlaim passes over the frenzy in silence. After the war, moreover, Morris does not flow with compassion for Nasser; he views him as a scoundrel and a failed tyrant. Morris's account of Israeli rule in the occupied territories is detailed and critical, and he does not conceal from the reader distressing events that illustrate the invidious influence of the "corruptive occupation"; but here, too, his moral judgements do not overwhelm his historiographical duty. "Though harsh and often brutal," he adds, "Israeli rule in general was never as restrictive or repressive as the Palestinians made out."

There is one topic on which Morris departs from his admirably matter-of-fact attitude: the notorious topic of "transfer." The notion of "transfer" was commonly accepted in the period between the two world wars to designate population exchanges such as occurred between Turkey and Greece in the 1920s. "Transfer" became a code word in contemporary Israeli politics after the emergence of the far right radical party Moledet (Homeland) in the 1980s, led by Rehavam Zeevi. Moledet advanced the idea of transfer, or the removal of the Palestinians from the West Bank, as part of its party platform; and in order to gain legitimacy for himself and his party, Zeevi declared that he was following in the footsteps of the founders of the labor movement from its very inception, that "transfer" was vintage Zionist thinking.

The attempt to attribute the sins of the present to Zionism's founding fathers is a hallmark of the politics of the Israeli right: thus the members of Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) present themselves as the rightful heirs to the pioneer heritage in the pre-state period. Zeevi seized on statements on transfer from the 1930s, articulated in substantially different circumstances, in order to justify such repulsive actions in our own time. And in this matter, it would seem, the interests of the Israeli right and the "new historians" dovetail. It is no coincidence that revisionist ideas were sympathetically received in the ranks of the right. The "new historians" are intent on demonstrating that there was never a golden age of simplicity and innocence in the Zionist movement, and that its founders were full of guilt and guile from the start; and those on the right are keen to show that what is repudiated today as immoral was not an idea that they invented, but rather a part of the Zionist heritage. In both cases, the result is the libeling of Zionism and the undermining of its moral foundations.

Morris addressed the question of transfer after he had published his important study on the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem in 1948. His book's much-cited conclusion states that

[t]he Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or

Arab. It was largely a by-product of Jewish and Arab fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterized the first Arab-Israeli war; in smaller part, it was the deliberate creation of Jewish and Arab military commanders and politicians.

This is a balanced assessment that is corroborated by the evidence. But Morris was attacked by Arab historians, notably Nur Masalha, and even by his colleagues Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé, who argued that his own documentation justified a harsher verdict. Perhaps as a consequence of these criticisms, Morris undertook a partial revision of his findings. What in his earlier book was an ugly but unintended and even unanticipated by-product of war becomes in his new book one of the foundations of Zionism:

The transfer idea goes back to the fathers of modern Zionism and, while rarely given a public airing before 1937, was one of the main currents in Zionist ideology from the movement's inception.

According to Morris's new version, just as the idea of transfer attended Zionism from its inception, so did Arab fears of precisely such a scheme. The inference from this line of reasoning is that the Arabs resisted Jewish settlement not because they regarded themselves as Palestine's rightful owners and did not wish to share the land with a people whom they perceived as a foreign invader; nor because they were opposed to transforming Palestine from a land with a predominantly Muslim culture into a non-Muslim country steeped in Western culture. No, their motive was well-founded fear: they *knew* that the Jews intended in due time to expel them. As Morris writes, "the fear of territorial displacement and dispossession was to be the chief motor of Arab antagonism to Zionism down to 1948 (and indeed after 1967 as well)." In this way history is spun on its head, and the effect is made into the cause, and the result of war is promoted into the paradigm for the entire complex of relations between Arabs and Jews over several decades.

Zionist leaders always believed that the hoped-for Jewish majority in Palestine would materialize by means of massive Jewish immigration. It should not be forgotten that in 1920 the Arab population of Palestine numbered only some 600,000. The Zionist premise--which history has proven right--was that there was land aplenty in western Palestine for millions of Jews and Arabs. All the Zionist plans at the end of the 1930s envisioned the influx of a million Jews to Palestine within a decade. That magical number was geared to guaranteeing a Jewish majority, which is why the Arabs were so hostile to immigration: not because they were afraid of expulsion, but because they wished to prevent a demographic transformation.

Zionism has been one of the best documented and the most talkative of national movements. Its records are not limited to the sphere of political activity and diplomacy, on which Morris and the "new historians" tend to focus;

they include also all the educational and propagandistic work over many years within all the warring factions and currents that comprised the movement. Despite all this documentation, however, all the efforts by Morris and others to dig up actual evidence of the early roots of the "transfer" idea have unearthed only isolated and fragmentary statements--secret thoughts and wishes, but nothing remotely resembling a program.

The idea of transfer was broached in serious discussion for the first time in 1937, when the Peel Commission proposed to transfer the large Arab minority from the territory designated for the tiny Jewish state as part of the package deal that envisioned a partitioning of western Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab. In accordance with the Commission's proposals, the British were to carry out the transfer. Morris declares that "it is reasonable to assume that the Zionist leaders played a role in persuading the Peel Commission to adopt the transfer solution." There is not even a sliver of evidence to support such a claim, which is very far removed from what any credible historian may reasonably assume. It is perfectly legitimate for Morris to surmise that the Zionists did not lament the Peel Commission proposal, and even rejoiced at it. But such gladness is a long way from the unsubstantiated presumption that they were implicated in its formulation.

It is also true that Ben-Gurion and his associates welcomed the British idea to transfer Arabs from the small area set aside for the Jewish state. In Ben-Gurion's efforts at the Twentieth Zionist Congress in 1937 to drum up support for adoption of the partition plan, he made use of the concept of transfer in order to persuade his comrades to accept the tiny state proposed by the Commission, since the Jews would be a large majority there. The idea of transfer was a lure designed to convince Zionists to swallow the bitter pill of partition. In later years, Ben-Gurion warned of the dangers inherent in embracing the idea of transfer as a Zionist program, even after the British Labour Party had chosen to incorporate it in its platform.

Morris recalls that, over a prolonged period, Arab leaders declared that the true aim of Zionism was to uproot and to expel the Arabs, while the Zionists claimed there was ample room in Palestine for both peoples. But, as Morris adds,

the stark realities of the 1930s, with wholesale persecution in Central and Eastern Europe and with Britain closing the gates to Jewish immigration, seems to prove the Arabs right. Palestine would not be transformed into a Jewish state unless all or much of the Arab population was expelled.

Otherwise, Morris explains, a Jewish majority could not be achieved.

This argument boggles the mind. If we are speaking

about the mandatory period, then the British, who did not permit Jewish immigration, most certainly would not have endorsed any plan of Arab transfer. If we are speaking about a future with Palestine under Jewish rule, then the Jewish authorities would have been able to bring in millions of Jews unhindered and thereby to resolve the question of the dominant majority without resorting to expulsion. What had fueled a massive wish to leave Europe was the calamitous situation of the Jews there, the "wholesale persecution" mentioned by Morris.

However you interpret it, in other words, there is not a shred of evidence that Zionist ideology changed in the 1930s; not a shred of evidence that the transfer idea supplanted the idea of immigration as a means to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine. But still Morris claims that, starting with the Peel Commission, the idea of transfer enjoyed a general consensus in virtually all the Zionist bodies. His book lacks any notes indicating which deliberations (and how many deliberations) he is referring to, and it is thus impossible to determine whether the sources corroborate his contention.

In the same manner, Morris links the broaching of transfer within the context of the discussions on partition in 1937 with the creation of the refugee problem in 1948: "The idea was in the air from 1937 onward and without doubt contributed in various ways to the transfer that eventually took place, in 1948." Morris presents the expulsion as if it were the outcome of some Zionist master plan. There is no hard evidence for the existence of such a master plan, but never mind. The idea, "without doubt," was "in the air."

The Israeli-Arab conflict was not born as a consequence of anxieties about expulsion. It was born as a consequence of Arab resistance to the settlement of a foreign element in their land. The feeling of power among the Palestinian Arabs, who believed they were the rightful proprietors of Palestine and were unwilling to enter into any sort of compromise agreement with the Jews, contradicts the argument based on their alleged fears about eviction. The Palestinians did not go to war in 1948 because they were afraid the Jews would oust them; they went to war because they were not prepared to make their peace with the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The Palestinian Arabs also believed that they would emerge the victors. The question of what they intended to do with the Jews in Palestine after a Jewish defeat on the battlefield is, of course, hypothetical. After the defeat, the flight, and the expulsion of the Palestinians, moreover, the subject is unmentionable: such questions are raised only about the victors. When the peace process comes to a conclusion, documents may be disclosed that shed valuable light on this point; but in the meantime the

issue can be examined only in terms of the historical facts that we possess. And those facts, alas, are unequivocal: in all areas where the Jews went down to defeat at the hands of the Arabs, not a single Jew was allowed to return.

On both sides, Arab and Jewish, there was a composite of flight and expulsion. Jews fled in fear from mixed neighborhoods such as the border areas between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, and even from Jaffa itself. There were some 10,000 Jewish refugees in the early stages of the war. Gush Etzion, on the road between Bethlehem and Hebron, was captured by the Arab Legion and local Palestinian forces: the inhabitants were killed or taken prisoner and carried across the Jordan. Their settlements were completely demolished. The settlements Neveh Ya'akov and Atarot north of Jerusalem, also captured, were totally obliterated. All the residents of the Jewish quarter in the Old City in Jerusalem, conquered by local forces with the aid of the Arab Legion, were taken captive. No Jew was allowed to return to settle in the Old City--not even the ultra-Orthodox who detested Zionism and were prepared to live under Arab rule.

With the heightening of the national conflict between the two peoples, the prospect of living together one under the rule of the other became less and less palatable. Propaganda stoked mutual fears. The Jews were convinced that the Arabs were going to throw them into the sea, because that is what the Arabs said that they would do. The Arabs feared what the Israeli army might do to them, since Arab opinion-makers had painted the Israeli army in devilish colors.

The Arab panic led to exodus, and to the collapse of the institutions of Palestinian society. The more the magnitude of the exodus became clear, the more admissible and attractive the idea seemed to Israeli leaders and military commanders--not because the Zionist movement had been planning such an evacuation all along, but because a remote option (even if there were some who harbored such hankering) gained acceptance in the context of the behavior of both sides during the war.

The process of Jewish-Palestinian reconciliation has been bound up with a readiness for mutual recognition, and for mutual assent to the co-existence of two states in western Palestine. Both sides found it difficult to recognize the existence and the legitimacy of the other. And historians also have their difficulties coming to terms with that reality. From the post-Oslo perspective, the question arises whether there could have been shortcuts in that process, as suggested by the allegation of the "new historians" that Israel missed various opportunities for peace in the past.

We must be careful not to view the outcomes of events as inevitable; but we must also not trivialize the conflict. It is doubtful whether a confrontation of such emotional and psychological depth as the Israeli-Arab dispute can be resolved solely by rational means, by appealing to the disadvantages that war entails for both parties. History shows that such conflicts usually have not been ended by reason and good will. They have usually been ended by weariness, as both sides were ground down by the death and the bitterness, and both sides came to realize that victory is unattainable. In a discussion of the development of Zionism since Herzl, the Israeli historian Jacob Talmon once adduced this observation by Friedrich Engels:

History is perhaps the cruelest goddess of all, and she drives her victorious chariot upon heaps and heaps of bodies, not just in time of war, but also during peaceful economic development. And alas, we men and women are such fools that we never dare to venture out for any real progress unless impelled to do so as a result of boundless suffering.

That is exactly the prospect today.

And so the dialogue between history and historiography will continue. If it turns out that the hopes for an Israeli-Arab peace were premature, then the picture of the past will also be soured, and the currents critical of Israel will almost certainly be strengthened. If the peace process is carried forward to a successful conclusion, and Israel is welcomed as a fully recognized polity among the states of the Middle East, then a perspective on the past will be reinforced whose rudiments are already evident, though only intermittently in the writings of Avi Shlaim and Benny Morris: the perspective of realism. When reality comes more closely to approximate our moral ideals, moralism will become redundant. We will see this thick and twisted conflict more accurately and more humanely. And the power of discourse may succeed where the power of arms has failed.

--Translated by William Templer

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