City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Rodgers, J. (2013). The Roadmap Ripped Up: Lessons from Gaza in the Second Intifada. Mediterranean Quarterly, 24(3), pp. 20-34. doi: 10.1215/10474552-2339444

This is the unspecified version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/2874/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-2339444

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

The Roadmap Ripped Up: Lessons from Gaza in the Second Intifada

James Rodgers

It was a time of war, and a time of diplomacy. A decade later, the diplomacy is all but spent—bereft of ideas, at least. The fighting continues to flare up in Gaza like the eruptions of a volcano that is sometimes quiet, but never extinct. The causes behind it are not as old as the prehistoric faults that shoot molten rock skyward, although they too are ancient. Like the lava flow, they have defied any attempt to render them harmless—in this case, to make them an inspiration for peace rather than grounds for fighting.

From 2002 to 2004, I was the BBC's correspondent in the Gaza Strip. At the time, I was the only international journalist permanently based in the territory. Relations between Israel and the Palestinians were different then. Not that they were less hostile: this was the time of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising against Israel, and of frequent Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank. They were different in that different factors influenced and defined them. The main political power in Gaza then was the Palestinian Authority, dominated by members of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement. Jewish settlers, in defiance of most interpretations of international law save that of the Israeli government and its closest allies, still lived at strategic intervals throughout the desert and scrubland of the stiflingly crowded seaside territory. There was, in the shape of the Roadmap, a continuing political process that, extending its diplomatic travel metaphor, brightly claimed in its opening paragraph, "The destination is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict by 2005."[1] A different Gaza in a different phase of Israeli-Palestinian relations, yet one that, for less frequently recognized reasons, which this article will discuss, was the departure point for the diplomacy, which never reached its ambitious destination.

The Roadmap was formally presented on 30 April 2003 at a ceremony in Ramallah. Some five weeks later, on 4 June, a meeting held at the Jordan Red Sea resort of Aqaba brought the then Israeli and Palestinian prime ministers, Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, together with President George W. Bush. Arafat was then still the president of the Palestinian Authority, but the Israelis would no longer negotiate with him, so he was not invited. It was also not clear whether, if he were to leave his compound in Ramallah, Israel would allow him to return. The summit was designed to give the leaders an opportunity to publicly pledge support for the new plan. This they duly did. In statements that were presumably discussed with (if not actually drafted by) the Bush administration, Sharon spoke of "two states—Israel and a Palestinian state—living side by side in peace and security."[2] Abbas spoke of "two states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side, in peace and security."[3] Can we, at this distance, read something into Sharon's choice of the phrase "Palestinian state" as opposed to Abbas's less equivocal "Palestine?" It matters little. For nothing so far has come of these fine words, and today there seems little prospect of the situation changing. In those weeks between the formal presentation of the plan and the summit, there was an incident at the northern edge of the Gaza Strip that received little attention at the time but which gave a clearer picture of the real state of relations between the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships than any amount of expertly written and edited statements for the international news media. It is worth mentioning now because it served to humiliate Abbas and belittle him in the eyes of many in Gaza. It happened on Wednesday morning, 21 May 2003. Abbas was due to visit the Gaza Strip. Most of the journalists in Gaza—I was among them—travelled toward the Erez crossing point between the territory and Israel in anticipation of his arrival.

A reporter covering conflict quickly acquires the ability to sense at a distance when something dangerous lies ahead. That sense, however, is not always reliable. It is unsettling when suddenly it becomes active. Where, in rural areas of a peaceful country, the sight of empty roads and open spaces brings a sense of calm, in a conflict zone the absence of people and traffic has the opposite effect. They are signs of danger. The pulse quickens; the senses seem to become more acute. So it was that morning. A small crowd of journalists and officials had gathered on the forecourt of a petrol station a few hundred meters short of where they might have been expected to wait. They were not milling around as such a group might have been in normal circumstances. Rather, they seemed to have taken the trouble to put the concrete walls of the petrol station between them and the road ahead. While not exactly taking cover, they seemed aware that the moment might come when suddenly they needed to. A short distance along the road, among the stumps of an old orange orchard, recently ripped up on the grounds that the trees had been used as cover from which Palestinian fighters had launched mortars and crude rockets against Israeli targets, there were two Israeli tanks. It would have been foolhardy to go further down the road. It became apparent that Abbas would not be able to travel in from the opposite direction, either—a fact soon confirmed by a slightly nervous Palestinian official. The journalists dispersed, delaying their departure only to take a few pictures of teenage boys throwing rocks in the general direction of the tanks. Israel's preventing Abbas from entering the territory that day received little attention. The international headlines were dominated by a reported al Qaeda threat to transatlantic passenger aircraft. But the incident may well still have been in Abbas's thoughts when he spoke at the summit a couple of weeks afterward. Its significance certainly was not lost on the people of Gaza. A leader can only suffer so many of these personal setbacks before his authority is diminished. Later that summer, as a short ceasefire collapsed and violence erupted once more, a grubby street kid suggested that the second of two Israeli military

helicopters in the air over Gaza City was carrying Abu Mazen, the honorific by which Abbas was popularly known. Implying in Gaza then—as now—that someone was collaborating with the Israelis was about as bad as it could get. Abbas and, by extension, much of the Palestinian Authority leadership found themselves in an impossible situation: seen as weak by many parts of their own constituency and their attempts to promote constructive dialogue undermined by their supposed negotiating partners' attempts to make them appear powerless. Five months later, and only a few hundred meters from where the shamefaced official had confirmed what everyone around suspected, that Abbas would not be visiting Gaza that day, a second incident served to underline the gap between what happened on the ground and what was indicated by the Roadmap.

A roadside bomb ripped into a small convoy carrying several US officials toward Gaza City from the crossing point at Erez. Violent death was nothing new along this stretch of road, but US officials had never before been targeted, let alone killed. The attack seemed all the more shocking because the officials were said to have been on their way to interview candidates for scholarships to the United States. Their journeys into the territory seemed fairly frequent. Their gray, four-wheel drive vehicles were a fairly common sight at the crossing point—memorable to frequent travelers for the fact that not all of the delegation were required to present their documents in person. In the face of security measures that drew occasional verbal complaints from European Union diplomats that the Israeli soldiers on duty did not respect their rights under the Vienna Convention, this was a privilege indeed. Where other vehicles were required to stop over an inspection pit, the US diplomatic cars came to a brief halt, engines still running. One of the car's occupants would then leap out, sunglasses shading his eyes from the blinding Middle Eastern sun, and present the passes of all the people inside. They were invariably waved through with a smile. There was no such safe passage in the aftermath of the attack. When US investigators arrived on the scene later that

day, they were forced to withdraw as a crowd that had gathered to look at the debris first jeered and then threw rocks. The Palestinian police—no experts in crowd control, the bomb site had not even been cordoned off—opened fire into the air with live ammunition. The investigators were able to make good their escape. The deaths that day were sufficiently shocking not only to be widely reported, but also to be fictionalized a matter of months later. In an episode of season five of television show West Wing, titled simply "Gaza," first broadcast the following year, the attack was used as the basis for a bombing in which a number of members of fictional President Bartlet's administration were killed. Aside from being shocking, the attack was significant in that it reminded the rest of the world that there was an element of Palestinian society for whom "cooperation" and "collaboration" were synonymous: no matter that one of the US mission's aims was to provide Gazans with opportunity for study.

That stretch of road, the last few hundred meters before the Erez crossing point, was the scene of countless acts of violence in the summer of 2003. So frequently was it closed, or, when it was open, dangerous, that it came almost to symbolize the folly of having chosen the term roadmap to describe the peace plan. Frequent road closures, and disputes over who had the right to use which roads, were a gift to cynics and reporters looking for a headline to undermine official optimism. Palestinians were not oblivious to the irony. A teenaged student, who had just picked her wary way across a fractured road surface as she made her way home from school, found the term too bitter to say. No sooner had she uttered it than she burst into tears and could speak on the prospects for peace no more. This was the kind of despair that reinforced, and deepened, hatred. It led too to the diplomatic dead end that exists today. Intelligent, realistic, determined voices from those days have been silenced. Yossi Alpher and Ghassan Khatib coedited the bitterlemons website for more than a decade. In August 2012, Alpher posted a piece called, "Why We Are Closing.'"[4] "There is no peace

process and no prospect of one," he wrote. A blunter, less optimistic assessment from a well-informed observer is difficult to imagine.

The seeds of such nihilism predate the second intifada, and it should perhaps have been obvious to more people that they were likely to grow into the impenetrable thicket that stands today. Editors reprimanded reporters in the region for their reluctance to join the chorus of cheers. One experienced correspondent from a major news organization complained that he had been roundly criticized for a piece that suggested the optimism that came with the Roadmap was less than well founded. I found myself struggling to explain why I could not send a report on the celebrations in Gaza that would follow the official presentation of the peace plan. The reason was simple—there would be none—and yet apparently it was understood only with some difficulty by my colleague in London who had called to commission the story. I was correct in my assessment that there would not be flag waving, dancing, or celebration of any sort. It was based, more than anything, on the gut feeling that reporters are supposed to have for the way things are likely to turn out in their "patch," as British journalistic slang calls the area a correspondent covers. In a way, it was akin to "news sense," that intangible newsroom quality that enables a journalist to know a story when he or she sees one.

Even before I left Gaza in the spring of 2004, though, I was seeking a sounder basis to explain the reasons for my sense that the Roadmap led nowhere. Taking a week away from news reporting to try to consider the conflict in greater depth enabled me to start formulating more detailed interpretations. In February 2004 I recorded for a radio documentary a number of interviews with people living in Gaza. My purpose was to try to step back from the detail of daily news and try to assess deeper issues, issues of how history affected the present. This after all was a place in which, on one of my first outings as a reporter in August 2002, I had been taken to task for something that happened long before I was born. An elderly gentleman,

living in the ruins of a refugee camp blasted by the latest bout of armed conflict, had offered first a welcome and then a reprimand. Why had the Balfour Declaration ever been made? he demanded to know. Two constant currents seemed to run through the history of the region between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan: land and faith. Land here should not be understood as a purely economic commodity, although of course land here in the sense of somewhere to buy, sell, cultivate or build upon, is extremely important. Instead, land can best be understood as "homeland," which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "a person's home country or native land; the land of one's ancestors," a description that resonates right through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Roadmap, as published then,[5] mentioned "faith" only in the sense of negotiating "in good faith"(page 1).[6] The text does mention "religious concerns" and "religious interests" (page 7), but only in the penultimate paragraph of a seven-page document. "Land" appeared in the phrase "land for peace" (page 1); "homeland" was absent. Did the document's authors, perhaps hearing the anger, undiminished by passing decades, of the refugee prefer the more sterile word "state" instead? Did a state, the word having no connotations of ancestral entitlement or divine gift, somehow seem easier to create than a homeland?

These issues of land and faith seemed everywhere once questions were asked that went beyond the accounts of daily news reporting. I began gathering material for the radio program, Middle East and Home,[7] with the group in Gaza that was then the most newsworthy: the Jewish settlers. The settlers had started coming to Gaza after Israel had taken the territory from Egypt in the 1967 War. They were stunned when, on 2 February 2004, Ariel Sharon announced that they would be moved out. At that time, the settlers refused to believe that Sharon's intention would become reality. It was he, after all, who had decided where their homes, hothouses, and fortifications should be built in order to maximize Israel's dominance of the territory. In his autobiography, Warrior, he describes the

settlements as "fingers,"[8] as if they reached out to grip the people living there. The most contentious of them was Netzarim, south of Gaza City. Its presence caused untold inconvenience to Gaza's Palestinian residents. It led to road closures, which were designed to protect the neat white houses and their residents from attack, but which also meant that travel south of Gaza City was usually difficult and circuitous—and sometimes dangerous and all but impossible. Even some Israelis saw its presence as provocative. Yossi Sarid, a minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, once called it a "bone in the throat"[9]—a description that was frequently repeated by Palestinians. As the intifada wore on, the surrounding area became a free-fire zone too dangerous to enter. Shepherds and farm workers were likely to be treated in the same way as attackers, and shot on sight. The Israeli Army, however, did not necessarily relish defending Netzarim. One officer to whom I occasionally spoke said, on learning of my plans to visit, that he could never understand why anyone would want to live there.

It was a question that Netzarim's residents were not always keen to answer. For eighteen months, I had been asking the settlers' spokesman, Eran Sternberg, for permission to go there. Each time, the answer had been "no." The BBC was not popular with the settlers—nor, indeed, was anyone who chose not to share their unshakeable vision that they were doing the right thing. However, Sharon's announcement that they were to be moved—although they professed not to believe that it would or could come to pass—had led them to start something of a public relations offensive, and I was given the chance to visit. To go there in normal times would have been a matter of a short drive or taxi ride. Getting there in the middle of the intifada was far more complicated. I had to leave my apartment in Gaza City and travel to the Erez crossing point at the territory's northern edge. From there I drove south (I could go by car, as my vehicle had German number plates—either Israeli or Palestinian plates would have made my journey impossible), roughly parallel with the fence that marked Gaza's eastern

extent. I left my car in a parking lot at the edge of Israeli territory. It was controlled by the Israeli Army, which carefully checked all who came there. No civilian vehicle was allowed to go any further. Anyone given permission to travel on to Netzarim had to board a bus to do so.

My main memory of the journey was being warned to slouch down in my seat once the bus got out into open land and, therefore, potentially hostile areas. While the bus, it seemed, was armored, the reinforced glass only extended so high up the window. An adult sitting up straight risked exposing head and neck to bullets. The land here was empty; cleared in a way that gave a sense of extreme danger, of absences imposed at gunpoint. There was a mosque, the continuing presence of which Sternberg, who accompanied me, pointed out as evidence that the army would never demolish a sacred building. This hardly seemed the point, however, when any would-be worshippers had long been driven far away. The terrain around the settlement had been razed to remove any cover for potential attackers. The only shapes which stood out as the eye scanned the land were those of tank turrets, half hidden. Hazard and hostility may have filled the land beyond Netzarim's borders; inside there was orderly calm. Well-watered lawns lay before whitewashed, red-roofed, houses. The road surfaces leading up to those neat dwellings were of smooth asphalt—none of the sand and potholes that were more typical of the roads in most of the rest of Gaza. The quiet could not have provided a greater contrast with the noise, dust, and chaos that characterized the crowded streets and back alleys of the territory's cramped towns and refugee camps. There was a school. Primary-age pupils sat quietly listening to their lesson—so quietly that music could be heard drifting in from a next-door classroom. The notes, thin, played by some kind of electronic toy or other device, were distant, but the tune was unmistakable: "No Place Like Home." It was hard to say what kind of a home this could be. The classroom was clean and bright. Children's drawings cheered up the walls. The playground to which the children ran after their classes seem typical too—until your eye caught the soldier under the tree a few

meters from the swings, or looked out again over the land cleared of cover for attackers, and settled once more on tank turret semiobscured in the scrubland.

Yet this was home. Home to, among others, Tammy Silberschein, whose flawless English was that of a native speaker. Silberschein had come from the United States eight years earlier. When we met, she held Shmuel, the youngest of her five children, in her arms. Suggestions that living in Netzarim was dangerous were dismissed with comparisons with the threat of suicide bombers in cafes and buses across Israel; suggestions that the settlers' presence was provocative received an even blunter response: "When they say that we don't have a right to be here, they don't mean here Gaza, they mean here in the entire state of Israel. They don't think that the Jews have a right to be in Israel at all," Silberschein said of those who would have shared the "bone in the throat" view of the settlement. For her, this too was Israel. Internationally recognized borders had no meaning. "Being a Torah observant Jew, we are taught that this is the Jewish homeland, we have to be sovereign here, and we have to settle all parts of it, but any non-Jews who would like to join us peacefully and live with us certainly can, and they're welcome. That's part of the," she hesitated, pausing to choose words, "that certainly can fit in with the ultimate plan." I asked if she could ever see that happening in reality. "I have a strong belief in the prophecies," she replied. "And the prophecies talk about non-Jews coming to our temple, and bringing sacrifices, and we're going to be one big family, and there's going to be peace, and absolutely I believe in peace. It's very hard to see it now, but if I didn't have a vision, then I wouldn't be able to live here."

The people of Netzarim, of course, no longer do. The evacuation of the settlements in Gaza did go ahead the following year, incredulous as their residents were then, in early spring 2004. Their ideas, though, seem as enduring as the prophecies they claim as their basis. For while the Jewish settlements of Gaza may have gone, their counterparts on the West Bank have grown incessantly to the extent that the "fingers" that Sharon once foresaw seem feeble

by comparison. In a document published in late 2012 by its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations said that, in 2011, the settler population was estimated at over 520,000.[10] The document also said that the annual average rate of growth during the preceding decade was 5.3 percent (excluding East Jerusalem), compared to 1.8 percent for the Israeli population as a whole. The same month, December 2012, the European Union reiterated its view that Israeli plans to expand settlements "would seriously undermine the prospects of a negotiated resolution of the conflict by jeopardizing the possibility of a contiguous and viable Palestinian state and of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states."[11] That would suit Silberschein and her fellow settlers just fine, of course, and not just them. The support that Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu first expressed for the two-state solution in 2009, and has repeated since, does not convince his critics—especially while he has overseen the expansion in West Bank settlement, which undermines the prospects of the solution ever coming to pass.

In Gaza, then, it was not just the settlers and their Israeli supporters who shunned the idea of two states. Even in the summer of 2003 and afterward, while the Roadmap lay on the table apparently being taken seriously, there seemed little prospect of its success. Scratch the surface, dig a little deeper, and you soon found Palestinian views that were equally uncompromising. Add to this the massive military and diplomatic support that Israel enjoyed from the United States, and one sees that there was little incentive for Israel to move forward. The status quo would be just fine—and that seems to have been the predominant view of Israeli administrations in the intervening decade. For the Palestinians of Gaza, jobless and trapped, the same could not be said, and, while they perhaps would have welcomed a small state as a kind of breathing space, there were many whose words suggested they did not see that as a final, acceptable situation. I stress words here. It may be that, should the opportunity of statehood ever arise in earnest, the rhetoric could be quietly laid to one side—but there

currently is no sign of an opportunity of statehood. I would like next to expand on what I mean by uncompromising views—and would add that the Gaza I describe here is one that was run by the Palestinian Authority. There is no reason to think 2013 opinion in the territory, controlled for years by Hamas, and battered by major Israeli operations in 2009 and 2012, is anything other than more hardened.

Rafah, at the southern edge of the Gaza Strip, has become known for its tunnels, through which goods and people are smuggled in from Egypt. They were there in the days of the Roadmap, too, although their numbers seem to have increased. Pretty much everything seemed to come through them: packets of cigarettes bought in southern Gaza bore warnings from the Egyptian Ministry of Health; an Israeli Army officer once explained to me that they knew when a new supply of ammunition had been smuggled in because their informants told them the price of Kalashnikov bullets had fallen. The presence of the tunnels was the main reason for the launching in October 2003 of Operation Root Canal. Some tunnel entrances were apparently concealed inside houses close to the border. Where that was the case, the houses were demolished, as were properties from which Palestinian fighters were said to have fired upon the Israeli Army positions that stood between Rafah and the Egyptian border.

According to the United Nations, the initial phase of the Israeli military operation destroyed 148 "shelters" (houses or other dwellings), and between October and the end of 2003, more than three thousand people lost their homes.[12] I spoke to some of them then, in the heat of what passed for autumn in Gaza, as they sought to salvage what they could from the rubble that had been their homes. Odd shoes and torn schoolbooks poked out from the ruins, turning up as more valuable possessions were sought (in some cases, these included title deeds to long-lost but not forgotten properties in British Mandate–era Palestine). When it prepared to demolish a house, the Israeli Army did give warnings to the inhabitants to leave, but, judging by the accounts of those forced to flee, the time was sufficient only for the able

bodied to escape—often without belongings. The death while I was there of a woman said to be eight months pregnant seemed to support this claim, as did the number of people who said they were looking through the rubble to find jewelry or cash. It was a heated, hectic time in the most dangerous part of the Palestinian territories. Rafah would probably have been in the news more had it been closer to Jerusalem, where most of the international news media were based. The scale of the house demolitions attracted activists from Europe and the United States. Two of them, Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall, paid for their protests with their lives.[13] For the most part, though, house demolitions during the intifada were just part of life as usual in Rafah. That did not mean that people came to accept them. In fact, the opposite was true. When I returned to Rafah for my radio documentary, the warm sun of October had been replaced by the cool, wet, weather of February. The passage of time seemed to have made tempers even hotter.

The Yibna area of the Rafah refugee camp took its name from the village in Mandate-era Palestine from which its residents, or their ancestors, had fled in 1948. In the winter of 2003–2004 following Operation Root Canal, it was especially grim. The United Nations, which took responsibility for housing the refugees and their descendants, was reluctant to rebuild in the area where houses had been destroyed, reasoning that the new buildings might one day be flattened as the old ones had been. So some of those made newly homeless lived where they could on the land. If they had managed to rent a room somewhere safer in the town, it did not necessarily guarantee space for the whole family to sleep, and it could have been intolerably crowded during the day. Naji Abu Hashem and his family fell into that category. I met them cooking on a fire in the wasteland, clothes hanging nearby in air that, unusual for Gaza, was too wet to dry them. Abu Hashem's house had been demolished some months earlier. He and his family now spent their days in the open air. The jacket he wore seemed too thin to keep out the bone-chilling damp. He lifted his round, unshaven, and

mustachioed face from the pot on the fire to talk. The United Nations had offered him a new house, but in Khan Younis, the Gaza Strip's second city, north of Yibna. He did not wish to go. Abu Hashem and many of his fellow refugees, here made newly homeless, feared that to leave the land now was to give it up forever. They did not particularly appreciate the United Nations' reluctance to rebuild here, understandable as it may have seemed to an outsider. Abu Hashem's logic drew on his people's recent history. Everyone here, he argued, was a refugee, either from 1948 or 1967. Where he asked, were they supposed to go a third time? "This is my religion [which] tell[s] me to stay here," he said. "This is my Palestinian land. This is our land." His sentiments were echoed by Emad Abu Matr, whom I had met in the autumn, rummaging through the broken cinder blocks that had once been his walls. Abu Matr was not to be found in Yibna day we later spoke, but in his office in Rafah itself, further from the front line. He seemed to remember our earlier conversation, and, for a man who had lost so much in the last few months, seemed calm and composed. As our conversation continued, however, he became agitated. The anger he must have felt at having his house destroyed seemed to return. "For the time being they are the stronger," he conceded of the Israelis. "They can make what they want. But the future is coming." In the end, he offered an interpretation of a sacred text to justify his bitter optimism, even suggesting that "in [the] Quran it says the Israeli state will finish. We have to believe that the Israeli state will finish one day and we will go back to our homeland. The time is not known. But we believe this."

What kind of compromise can be possible, what kind of progress toward peace, when such views are so deeply and devoutly held? What struck me in my conversations with Abu Matr and Silberschein was that both expressed a willingness to share the land, the physical land, but not sovereignty thereon. Both, like Abu Hashem, gave religion as a reason for their insistence. It could be argued that such views are not representative. Later that year, back in Europe, I met a Palestinian diplomat whom I had known in Gaza. He gently chided me for

my bleak view of the prospects for peace, saying that as I had been in Gaza during the intifada, a terrible time, I had formed too pessimistic a view of the situation. I wonder what he would say now. Still, yes, it may be that the views which I have chosen to consider here are not representative. My contact in the Israeli Army who expressed incomprehension that anyone would want to live in Netzarim probably had a view much more widely held than that of Silberschein; Palestinians who have had their houses demolished are naturally less likely to be among the most outspoken voices for peace. Yet the views are there, and nothing that I have seen in recent years has persuaded me that they have become less influential: on the contrary. On my last visit to the region, in September 2011, faith seemed rather to have come even more to the fore. By that time, Hamas was running the Gaza Strip. The secular Palestinian nationalism of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) seemed already to belong to an earlier age, an idea which had failed to deliver. It had failed and its time had passed. The house where I was staying in East Jerusalem was a couple of streets away from one that had been taken over by settlers. The Israeli flag fluttered defiantly in an area of the Holy City that the Palestinians have long hoped would be their future capital. Perhaps the conclusions about faith, land, and sovereignty that had presented themselves in 2004 were not the overly pessimistic views of one seeing a place at a particularly bad time. The words of those to whom I spoke then echo now, and indeed have been amplified. Before the elections in 2012, David Remnick travelled to Israel to report on what the New Yorker, for which he wrote a long and compelling account of his trip, called on its cover "the emerging religious right." Remnick's principle interviewee was Naftali Bennett, of the Jewish Home Party. Bennett is considered by some—probably himself included—as a possible future Israeli prime minister. Although this was the first time I had read such a lengthy interview with Bennett, his words and sentiments seemed familiar. His assertion that "the land is ours"[14] and that there is no distinction between land within Israel's internationally recognized borders and

land in Gaza or on the West Bank, could just as well have come from Silberschein or Sternberg.[15] Bennett and his party may not have done as well in the election as some had expected, but they have established a presence in the Knesset that provides a basis for further advances. The sentiments that he shared with the Gaza settlers of a decade earlier were no longer beyond Israel's political and geographical boundaries but on the edge of the mainstream.

Moves for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, if indeed there are going to be any, need to take account of the way that things have changed. Looking at the situation now, though, it seems that if there might just have been, at some point, the possibility of peace being agreed between the generations of Israeli politicians for whom the Labor Party was the natural home and the secular Palestinian nationalists of the PLO, that time has gone. In addition, the recent elections not only in Israel but also in the United States have returned to office two leaders who have struggled to find a successful personal relationship or common ground in their political vision. Increasingly, it seems the agenda on both sides of the conflict is being set, or at least influenced, by people to whom compromise is anathema, people who are guided by religion more than any Roadmap.

This phenomenon is not confined to Israel and the Palestinian territories. The Arab uprisings that began in 2011 have given religion a bigger role in politics in the surrounding region, too. The argument I advance here is not intended as some inspirational revelation that will set the course for a new round of fruitful peace negotiations. It is a request for those who have sought to advance conventional diplomatic solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to recognize that ideas of faith and homeland lie at its core, and that these need to be taken into account. They are not addressed as simply as material loss or damage might be. The reprimand I received over the Balfour Declaration, and the words I heard then in Gaza, and their echoes today, persuade me of that. "War, that is the animosity and the reciprocal effects

of hostile elements, cannot be considered to have ended so long as the enemy's will has not been broken: in other words, so long as the enemy government and its allies have not been driven to ask for peace, or the population made to submit," wrote von Clausewitz (italics in the original).[16] Faith can make that will stronger than the threat of blood or the promise of treasure alone can. It may be that a way can be found to allow the conflicting faiths to emphasize peace. If so, perhaps faith can assist in finding a way forward. There would certainly seem to be none that does not take faith into account.

James Rodgers is lecturer in journalism at City University, London, and a former BBC correspondent in Moscow, Brussels, and Gaza. He is the author of Reporting Conflict and No Road Home: Fighting for Land and Faith in Gaza.

---

1. United Nations (UN), A Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, April 2003, www.un.org/news/dh/mideast/roadmap122002.pdf, accessed 15 February 2013.

2. "Statement by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel after the Aqaba Summit Meeting, Jordan, 4 June 2003," unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/bd3ae3561692f9e685256d3d006731f3?OpenDocument, accessed 9 February 2013.

3. "Statement by Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority after the Aqaba Summit Meeting**,** Jordan, 4 June 2003," unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/25140e481b272e5685256d3d00662f31?OpenDocument, accessed 9 February 2013.

4. See Alpher's statement at bitterlemons-international.org, 27 August 2012, www.bitterlemons-international.org/inside.php?id=1552, accessed 11 February 2013.

5. UN, A Performance-Based Roadmap.

6. Ibid.

7. James Rodgers, "Middle East and Home," BBC, March 2004.

8. Ariel Sharon, Warrior (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 258.

9. Clyde Haberman, "Besieged Settlements: Are They Worth Keeping?" New York Times,10 April 1995, www.nytimes.com/1995/04/10/world/besieged-settlements-are-they-worth-keeping.html, accessed 15 February 2013.

10. UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs, The Humanitarian Impact of Israeli Settlement Policies, December 2012, unispal.un.org/pdfs/OCHA_HumImpact-Settlements.pdf, accessed 22 February 2012.

11. Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process, 10 December 2012, www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/134140.pdf, accessed 12 February 2013.

12. UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Twenty-third Progress Report: October–December 2003, 31 December 2003. unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/910E3D4DBE19CB0C85256E40005199B4, accessed 4 March 2013.

13. Rachel Corrie died after being hit by an Israeli Army bulldozer on 16 March 2003. Tom Hurndall was shot by an Israeli soldier on 11 April 2003. He died of his wounds on 6 January 2004.

14. David Remnick, "The Party Faithful ," New Yorker, 21 January 2013, 40.

15. Ibid., 38.

16. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.