

The 1967 Six Day War was the result of the renewed Arab effort to “wipe Israel off the map” – a renewal of the 1948 war. In 1948, there was a temporary cease-fire, with no interest among most Arab leaders in a long-term peace agreement with Israel. This is a myth. There were never any pre-1967 borders between Israel and the west bank of the Jordan River – one of many myths of the international perception of the conflict.

Another myth is the belief that in this war, Israel occupied the “Palestinian east Jerusalem and the West Bank.” In fact, the West Bank had been occupied by Jordan in the 1948 war, and from these positions, Israel was repeatedly attacked. Sacred and historic Jerusalem was systematically closed off and desecrated during this period – and in 1967, the Jewish presence was restored. While the Israeli government adopted a policy of trading land for a long-awaited peace, the Arab League, meeting in Cairo, slammed the door in the face of any negotiations or agreements, forever. This was the unplanned and impromptu basis for the settlements, built on the foundation of Arab rejectionism.

But that was then, and now, 45 years later, the myths are firmly entrenched in university campuses around the world (and in the halls of knowledge on the Middle East), among foreign journalists, diplomats, political leaders and even many Israelis.

Notwithstanding the Oslo agreements, which created a semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority, with a semi-sovereign population of about 1.5 million living in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria in the both the Bible and the British mandate), the Palestinians are seen as living under Israeli occupation, a modern form of colonialism.

In some ways, the victory of 1967 and the stalemate that followed became a trap for Israel, as the Palestinians have exploited it. Beyond falsely appropriating the term “apartheid,” and campaigns for BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions), the unsettled legal status of these territories is a major drain on Israel’s limited resources.

In addition to defending against mass terror, deadly missiles and lethal attacks on the roads, there is a disturbing degree of lawlessness and anarchy among a small percentage of Jews who have set up outposts in these areas.

In 1977, prime minister Menachem Begin, a committed democrat who also strongly affirmed the Jewish right to live in their historical homeland, rejected calls for annexation. He understood that Israel could not include this territory without a population full democratic rights, which would jeopardize the Jewish cultural, political and societal framework of the state. The fundamental reality has not changed.

Since then, Israeli efforts to extricate itself from this trap have failed. Begin’s autonomy plan for the “Arab residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip” – developed in the context of the peace negotiations with Egypt – which was meant to counter Jimmy Carter’s “Camp David Accords” – to create a Palestinian homeland to be led by Arafat and the PLO, went nowhere. Later, the façade of peace presented by the Oslo process ended in mass terror, and the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, including of all Israeli military forces, also did not work. Each failure increased the degree to which the accidental framework created by the 1967 war was being set in concrete.

The 2003 Sharon-Bush understandings could have resulted in a fundamental change, with American recognition of Israeli “consensus settlement blocs” along the 1949-1967 “Green Line,” in exchange for Israeli limitations elsewhere. The Obama administration withdrew the US endorsement, in what turned out to be a colossal error.

As a result, the post-1967 status quo continues, without a conscious and carefully weighed examination of the costs of permanent occupation, in the absence of defined borders or an acceptable system of law and democracy. On the one hand, the fringe ideologues on the Right and Left have pressed their mythologies. These myths include voluntary or forced return of Palestinians, and, on the other pole of the political spectrum, naïve “instant peace” based on return to the pre-1967 status quo, with any guarantees to prevent future missile attacks and mass terror.

Forty-five years after the 1967 war, we desperately need a coherent policy, whether based on the negotiation of a permanent peace (an unlikely option, given the Palestinian leadership), an interim agreement that moves in this direction, or a resumption of unilateral settlement, setting our borders unilaterally.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the other 93 members of the coalition government have the responsibility

overall policy, rather than continuing to lurch from crisis to crisis.

None of these options are ideal, but doing nothing and letting others impose their distortions and interests on Israel is the worst possible option.

Reliance on post-1967 myths is no way to determine the fate of our nation. The longer we wait, the greater the difficulty and the costs.

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