

[Although this can be read independently, it would be good to view it as The third part in a series: (1) my open letter to Mr Khamenei (2) my open letter to Senator Schumer (3) this document!]

The Israel-Palestine conflict as a microcosm of our world

These are some thoughts about resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by looking at the larger picture of our world.

Needless to say, the subject seems rather complex and the conflict has not been solved after 75 years.

Passions in this conflict run very high, and both sides, to some extent, strongly feel that their point of view is correct. By far, one of the best arguments for the Jewish side has been well summarized by one woman in a YouTube video, which basically says that Jews have been “ethnically cleansed” from every single country in the world, so, where exactly is it that you expected them to go? This is an important point because it recognizes the global nature of this conflict. One cannot truly understand the roots of this conflict by solely focusing on Israel and Palestine.

A lot of cultures and ethnicities, either through the process of natural evolution, willing gradual conversion, or through war and conflict disappear over time. This is how human history works over long time periods. If it happens, usually it's the more powerful and dominant civilization that dissolves and absorbs a less dominant civilization. The case of Jews is an exception to this. Throughout history, they've been accused of a kind of deceptive nature that would suggest a kind of success, endurance and resilience within the group – and this is how philosemetic writers such as Mark Twain have often aimed to characterize them. In his essay, “Why do they hate the Jews,” Einstein says that Jews promote social justice and education, and that's one of the reasons why they've often faced the wrath of the powers that be. Either way, their deportations and ethnic cleansing was never because of their lack of relevance and influence but quite the opposite. These people represent the highest achievements of science and arts in modern human history, and the fact that they've even had to fight so hard to justify themselves and their existence is such a great shame for humanity.

So, they have done the only thing that they could do, which is form their own nation in their ancestral lands and militarize to protect themselves in ways that they've almost never done throughout their history.

On the other side of this conflict, we have Palestinians who very legitimately want their basic human rights to be upheld and their human needs to be met.

Legitimate concerns of both sides aside, this conflict is very complicated because it also has a sectarian component which is perhaps best symbolized by the Temple Mount – the holiest site of Judaism. It is indeed very difficult to imagine anything else similar to this conflict in human history. This conflict has the unique, unbelievable property that a much more powerful force (the Israeli side) has a policy of banning its own people (only the Jews) from praying on their own holy site (Temple Mount) which Israel has (security) control over, while simultaneously permitting the other side (Palestinian Muslims) to pray on this holy site which belongs to Jews.

Muslims do have some sort of “religious” claim to this site, however, it's a very weak claim compared to the Jewish claim. Two Islamic structures on this site, the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque, were constructed by prominent Islamic leaders relatively early on after the death of Mohammed (Islam's prophet). But this story is just made more complicated for several reasons that Prof. Mordechai Kedar explains very well. Interestingly, “Al-Aqsa” mosque, as mentioned in the Quran, cannot possibly refer to the Al-Aqsa mosque that is in Jerusalem today because the one in Jerusalem was built decades after the Quranic verse was revealed. We will not discuss these issues in detail here, but we will talk a bit more about this issue later on when we discuss the role of land in all of these arguments because there are some very interesting statistics that might not have been mentioned by professor Mordechai Kedar, and we'll discuss that later on. But the bottom line is that the importance of these structures, for various historical reasons, has been highly exaggerated by Muslims through historical revisionism, and one of the important reasons for that is a kind of “power play” with Jews. Although it's certainly true that Muslims, historically, treated Jews much better than Christians did, they've also made a point of always asserting their dominance over Jews. This is a huge part of the sectarian portion of today's conflict (perhaps the only part).

To address the legitimate (rather than sectarian) component of this conflict, we must look at two things: how land affects this conflict, and how children's rights affect this conflict. For now, for children's rights, I defer to my open letter to Senator Schumer, and the one to Elon Musk. In the remainder, we shall discuss the issue of land.

In that letter I have also pointed out that in many ways this conflict is a microcosm of other issues in our world that we have been struggling with, for example, gentrification, people feeling that they are being displaced because high tech companies and their employees are taking over cities such as San Francisco, colonialism, indigenous land issues, reparations for slavery, etc. Many countries around the world are struggling with these issues, and solving them generally proves to be fairly difficult.

In my open letter to Senator Schumer, I emphasized that the rights of children, and human rights in general, are of paramount importance and one part of the solution.

In the remainder, we shall discuss the issue of land.

Land

The distribution of land between Jews and Muslims is a central question in this conflict. Usually the two sides in this conflict pick and choose the facts that are more suitable to their argument. The problem is that – unlike the Big Bang – this conflict has no clear beginning! You can play this history game where both sides try to push the boundary and go back in time to claim that the other side started the conflict first. But in my letter to Mr Khamenei, I proved that this conflict really started more than a thousand years ago.

Here are some interesting dimensions to this conflict:

For example, in the beginning, Jewish immigrants had various programs for purchasing land in a very straightforward way. However, the Arab population working in these lands were not necessarily the owners and the beneficiaries of these sales. So this caused some unemployment and problems for the local population. Those who bought the lands were completely within their rights to do so, but for those who lost jobs and employment opportunities, their concerns were also legitimate in their minds.

On the other hand, long before 1948 and the formation of the state of Israel, there were numerous occasions when violent revolts and pogroms against Jews occurred. An example of this was the (Arab) revolt of 1936. The bloodshed was massive compared to the local population. Thousands died.

Arabs basically tried to restrict Jewish immigration into the land, and they were trying to prevent the formation of any kind of Jewish majority resulting in the formation of a Jewish state. The British were caught in between all of this. They restricted Jewish immigration to please the Arabs. Of course, that upset the Jewish population. And when they allowed Jewish immigration, The Arabs got upset. Eventually all of this resulted in the Jewish population becoming more militant, and also forming groups such as Irgun which has been considered a terrorist organization.

It's no wonder that various historians have interpreted these events in different ways.

I would like to address this question by looking at the meaning of nationhood and the cultural value of land particularly in relation to nationhood. After that, we will look at the economic significance of land to human beings.

Land and culture

First of all, I am personally an atheist. I am also a humanist and consider myself a disciple of the likes of Einstein. I would like to see world peace and equality such that people's rights are independent from their religion, speech, or personal beliefs. I also would like to see a world in which places like Jerusalem or the tomb of Cyrus or Pasargadae or Taj Mahal or “Shrine of Our

Lady of Las Lajas” or the Shah Mosque or The palace of Versailles or Windsor Castle are treated as world heritage sites and treasures for all of humanity, not belonging to any one particular group or religion, But a tribute to human passion for all of humanity to experience and enjoy.

However, we live in a world of antisemitism and Holocaust. We live in a world of national pride (not necessarily such a bad thing if it's not divisive) where, for example, extremely proud Persians (my countrymen) feel a tremendous and deep sense of attachment to Cyrus and they feel that it is their heritage and that it belongs to them – never mind the fact that genetically speaking, we are more likely to be carriers of Genghis Khan's y-chromosome than that of Cyrus! And never mind the fact that everything we know about Cyrus the Great comes from either Jewish literature or Greek historians like Herodotus or archaeological excavations by Westerners in the 19th century. We basically don't know Cyrus otherwise and have virtually no connection to him other than a mental and spiritual one for many Iranians. And yet, we love Cyrus the Great.

Therefore, if we are to judge a people, we must judge them by the common standards by which all people are judged.

Therefore, the question becomes, what makes a people qualified for the status of “nationhood” and deep emotional, spiritual, and historical attachment to a land?

In this light, we must view the situation in Israel not in terms of “international law” (often written by people who have been discriminating against Jews for centuries) but rather, by asking a very different question: what defines a nation? The question of international law and what to do about it comes in the next section when we discuss the economic importance of land to the well-being of human beings worldwide. But here, we are focusing on the meaning of “nationhood.”

One fascinating issue in this conflict that has not been discussed nearly enough is the population of Jerusalem and the official census of Palestine 1922 (for example). There is a great deal of talk about the fact that around 1922, Arab Muslims had a significant majority. Indeed, If you look at the census, it is completely clear that Muslims had a clear majority in the region. But the census document breaks that down region by region. And you will notice an extraordinary fact. When you look at Jerusalem, despite such a large majority of Muslims in the Palestine region, you will see that Jerusalem, oddly, has a very significant (almost 3 fold) majority population of Jews! In other words, compared to their actual number, Jews are very highly concentrated in Jerusalem. Then, if you look at historical records and estimates of populations, you will see that this phenomenon goes back centuries to the time of the Ottoman Empire. At that time, Jews represented a very tiny portion of the Ottoman Empire. Even though inside Jerusalem they might have been a minority back then, their relative proportion was much higher than it was within the Ottoman Empire. In other words, statistically, they were highly overrepresented in Jerusalem. This basically means that they didn't just live in Palestine (which they often use as justification that they belong there) but they truly had a very deep emotional

and cultural attachment to Jerusalem that was not shared by the larger Muslim population to nearly the same degree.

Moreover, this clearly demonstrates that despite repeated claims that Jerusalem is extremely holy to Muslims, it is in fact not at all even nearly as important to Muslims as it is to Jews. It never was. And so, here, in the census of Palestine 1922, we basically have numerical proof that professor Mordechai Kedar is right about the popular/mainstream record highly exaggerating the importance of Jerusalem to Muslims.

It is undoubtedly obvious that Jews have at the very least the same level of emotional attachment to Jerusalem that Persians have towards the tomb of Cyrus or Pasargadae, or that Christians have towards the Vatican.

But there is even something else that is extremely unusual about Israel and the Jewish people, and that is their language, Hebrew. As an Iranian, I know for a fact that people develop an extremely deep attachment to their native tongue, or they simply become habituated to it. One of the things that Iranians are often proud of is the fact that they haven't allowed Arabic to override their Persian language after the "Muslim conquest of Persia." Of course, in many other countries, Arabic wiped out the original language after Islam's expansion in the region. This happens, as I said before, when a more powerful group takes over a less powerful group and wipes out the original customs and languages.

The case of Israel is absolutely extraordinary, and I cannot imagine anything else like this having ever happened in the history of humanity (but I wouldn't know for sure because I'm not a historian).

What you have here is a group of "dominant" Jews from European countries who speak the most useful dominant languages of the world such as French or German or English. These are the languages of (modern) science, art, economy, and commerce. Many of these people were the most educated people of Europe. Times Of Israel has reported that Israel, at its founding, in 1948, had a GDP of \$5000 per capita, which is extremely high for that year, taking into account inflation.

And what do these immigrants do when they get to Israel? Instead of using a language like English – knowing full well the huge international importance of the English language – they collectively agree to use a language that is basically dead at the time. They revive the Hebrew language, and it, in turn, revives the Jewish nation.

They literally told their wives that the children should start speaking in a different language than their mother tongue, when that different language, namely Hebrew, did not even exist in common practice and nobody spoke it! This is an extraordinary miracle of the Jewish people that proves their determination was beyond anything that is common to most people.

They didn't do that for any kind of economic benefit whatsoever. The most important and critical intention behind it was to unify the Jewish people and truly make them feel at home and make them feel that they belong together. For those people who gave up languages like French and English, it was a selfless act of nation building.

Those affluent/educated Jews from Europe and elsewhere didn't need to do this, but by doing so, they sent an extremely strong signal to other Jews (for example African Jews, Jews in Yemen, and elsewhere) that "this is your land and your country as well, and we are not playing favorites, and English speaking Jews are equal to everyone else." By doing this, they are paying an extremely heavy cost for their nation that is very hard to imagine any other peoples being willing to so easily pay.

But it's not just one thing. It's everything put together. I'm sure that if you define a bunch of rules for who should qualify for nationhood, some impostors would be willing to adopt a new language to claim nationhood in exchange for land!

In the case of the Jewish people, this same mentality turns deserts to farmland, it builds civilization, It builds the best technical and scientific universities in the Middle East, and the best water management systems, and cutting edge industry.

It's very hard to imagine a stronger case for nationhood. I am certain that if this sense of cultural and emotional attachment of the Jewish people to their land is not recognized then it will be impossible to improve the situation and make peace.

My view about the Temple Mount comes from a secular position. As I have stated previously in my letter to Senator Schumer, It is a fundamental matter of basic human rights that Jews must have access to their holy site just like any other people. Muslims have countless absolutely gorgeous mosques and monuments devoted to their religion throughout the vast empire that they have conquered. The Chief Rabbinate's position on this matter (Jewish access to Temple Mount) is entirely their business and prerogative. But I consider the implied Muslim position that Jews shouldn't be on Temple Mount an egregiously offensive antisemitic view which basically only expresses Muslim dominion and superiority over Jews. Humanity cannot accept that kind of thinking in the 21st century. I have said more about this subject in my letter to Senator Schumer, and also, in my open letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, I've extensively discussed why antisemitism is a fundamental, integral part of Islam that is completely undeniable and has existed many centuries before modern day Israel was established, and that Muslims must acknowledge this and amend it.

This view of land, as a cultural and emotional attachment, falls into the category of the sectarian component of this conflict.

Now, let's turn our attention to the other matter of land, in general, as an economic necessity for human existence, and what that should mean for Palestinian rights in particular.

Land as communal property, human right, and economic necessity

Here's a brief history of how land ownership is viewed in different religions and cultures

There is a long tradition in various different religions and cultures to view land as "collective" property that should be used for the common good to benefit everyone in society. Even in modern law, in Western societies, this idea is encoded in the form of laws which give to the government the ultimate right to decide whether or not a citizen is permitted to cut a tree in "his own" backyard.

Here are some examples:

Islam:

"The basic principle envisaged in Islam relating to land ownership is the concept that land vests solely in Allah S.W.t. That is, land, as a free and universal gift from Allah must be utilized to the fullest. It was also given to men for their common use as well as for the general welfare of the society."[5]

Judaism:

"As Jews, we must express our religious imperative to ensure equal access to land."[6]

"The land distribution methods outlined in this section of the Torah represent a radical departure from what we see today. The fact that land is apportioned based on population size underscores the fundamental equality of every person."[6]

"The story of the daughters of Zelophehad comes to remind us that, once we recognize the consequences of structural and systemic injustice, once our consciences are pricked, we must change those structures and systems in order to meet the needs of those who occupy the periphery of any society."[6]

Native American cultures:

"The idea of 'owning' land is a foreign concept for Native peoples. The land is sentient. It encompasses many life forms and spaces. It holds immense energy. From a Native perspective one cannot 'own' land, yet one may live with the land."[7]

Milton Friedman – libertarian economist who strongly believed in free markets – apparently considered a land value tax to be "least bad," and voiced his agreement with the Henry George

argument on the matter.[9] other leading economists including Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz have also voiced strong support for LVT. [9]

It is very difficult to find a concept which receives so much agreement across widely varying and often contradictory traditions, cultures, and philosophies that span all of recorded human history! The main point here is not whether we should have a land value tax or not at this point in time. This essay is not intended to settle the specific details of questions about economics. But The main point here is to take away, from this vast array of human cultural, religious, and philosophical doctrines, the basic principle that they are trying to convey, and that is the principle that “land” – which in a modern economy translates to basic natural and physical resources of the universe – has a kind of communal property to it, and each individual human being has a right to access it for life, existence, and fulfillment of a dignified life.

This basic principle should be the second guide to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Let's remember that the first one was emphatically and honestly recognizing the truth that the Jewish people have a very deep and historic attachment to the land of Israel.

In other words, every human being, Palestinian or not, globally, should have a basic right to the essential resources that they need to flourish. Often this includes healthy, nutritional food, reasonable, adequate shelter, healthcare, and information technologies, and physical activity.

What kind of world can we envision?

Here's what you already know: the Taj Mahal is the most beautiful structure in the world that symbolizes love. But did you know that Taj Mahal is also located in Uttar Pradesh, a state with a GDP per capita of \$962 as of 2022 (half of India as a whole).

So, we have a fact: the most beautiful building in the world is located in the “poorest” state in the world! Is that not truly extraordinary?!

Now, Taj Mahal was commissioned and designed by rulers and architects of Mughal/Persian/Islamic origin. But a staggering 6 centuries before that, people in India were building magnificent and breathtaking temples like the Brihadeeswarar Temple, dedicated to their deities.

Iran (my country of origin) is also full of people with tremendous knowledge and appreciation of art. But interestingly, despite hearing a lot about art and travels in Europe, America, and Arab countries, I never heard much about India, and when I did, it was usually something negative like how overcrowded it was. Everybody knows Gandhi of course and we appreciate him, but

there has always been very little talk in terms of India as a beautiful country to visit with an extremely deep and captivating cultural heritage, myth, mythology, and art that is easily as rich as what you get in Europe. It's also true that some of the amazing things in India have fallen into a certain level of disrepair after years of invasions, cultural erasers, neglect and sometimes because of colonialism. Of course, you have to keep in mind that colonialism was not just a white man's thing but it also involved Mughals, Muslims, and others.

As humans, and this is not only specific to Iran but very much true in the West as well, we are instinctively conditioned to think that economic problems or poverty equates to lack of culture, beauty, or sophistication in a people. In reality however, the evidence makes it abundantly clear that if we work together with countries such as India, their progress is also our progress, and it is only our own world that will be much more intriguing, exciting, and beautiful. Making such a realization will also strengthen our democracy and governance globally.

It would be a big mistake to think that India has nothing to offer that the West badly needs, even aside from the fact that the tech sector in the West heavily relies on their scientists and engineers. For example, India has the world's largest standing volunteer army. A shortage of soldiers is right now Ukraine's biggest problem in its war against Russia. And yet, we don't have any mechanism whatsoever to even ask Indian soldiers to voluntarily help out with Ukraine. This is a tremendous deficit of governance and management in "the West" (including the world's most vibrant democracies like India and Israel) that exemplifies numerous other problems that we have today. In other words, "Western liberal democracies" (including even eastern countries like Israel, India, and Taiwan) lack the ability to use the world's resources effectively to solve their problems, and many of these restrictions are due to a lack of efficient cooperation between our nations.

Another question that is very often being asked today is how the West should handle countries like China and Iran? For example, representative Mitt Romney asks this question, what is our China strategy?

China is a remarkable nation with its own rich history and extraordinary progress in recent years. They are producing some of the best science and technology in the world today. We obviously must do everything we can to bring China over to our side! It's important to remember that China made its greatest progress towards capitalism and liberal economics under a visionary leader like Deng Xiaoping. He visited Japan, and basically told the Chinese people that they are really behind and must learn from the developed world.

What China has been telling us, in practice, through its behavior, is that they happily adopt elements of our economic capitalist system because it works, but they don't want to adopt our political system because they think it doesn't work, at least not for them. In fact, Deng Xiaoping said, "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice." so, they've been happily using our capitalist system but with Chinese politics and governance.

Over the years, Eric Li has been telling us something in more or less two different forms: a light version and a much stronger version. The light version is, Western liberal democracy is not a good system for China because China is too large and too complex. The more strong form of that message is that the Communist Party of China is a meritocracy that selects excellent people and Western democracy is failing because it doesn't have that element (basically, that our political system cannot elect competent politicians).

Therefore, the best way to lead is by demonstrating that we really are capable of building much more effective, efficient, and resilient political systems which can solve the world's problems and our own problems by combining the values of democracy, meritocracy, and international cooperation, particularly with allies like India, Israel, and EU which have already successfully made the transition to strong democracy.

We must never allow our allies, be it India or any other nation, despite the enormous effort and progress that they have made over the years, to slowly shift into autocracy due to economic or social problems that are completely solvable and preventable.

China, in effect, has been telling us and teaching us this: a well functioning, well managed, meritocratic, communist dictatorship works a lot better than a (Western liberal) democratic system which hasn't been upgraded for decades and simply can't keep up with modern times and the complex nature of the problems that we are dealing with today.

We replace our cell phones every 2 years, we upgrade our system of governance by adding "one amendment to the constitution every 50 years!" This can be very stabilizing and comforting. For example, Japan is still using the same constitution that was written by General MacArthur and his team, and that is a remarkable testament to the Japanese people's humility, wisdom, culture of respect, and appreciation for friendship. Japan gave the highest honor of their country to General MacArthur, and they did that after a horrible world war in which they were enemies.

Having said that, in general, the West must recognize that we should care about our systems of governance and democracy as much as we care about upgrading our computers and mobile phones. We live in an extraordinarily complex world of science and technology. As well intentioned as our politicians are, because of fundamental limitations in our political system and the way in which we elect our politicians, they simply cannot have all the knowledge and insight that is necessary to respond to our complex problems quickly.

Thanks to Xi Jinping, China has been tilting towards more authoritarianism!!! But impediments to a great nation's progress are nothing to celebrate. China falling behind benefits no one and only increases the dangers of all-out war, which we are now facing in the South China Sea, Philippines, and Taiwan.

The world is too small. These problems affect all of us. They are not going to be restricted to only Ukraine and Taiwan. Today, one of the major problems that Canada doesn't know how to solve is the security of its rich and economically valuable arctic region.

We have “too many people” in India and Egypt (both of which face dangerous water scarcities), and we have “too many resources” and “too much land” to protect in Canada, and we have no mechanisms to link these problems together and solve them.

We have an excess of vaccines and vaccine patents in the West, but we are still catching covid because so long as the rest of the world doesn't have these vaccines, it keeps spreading.

We have the US banning bomb shipments to Israel, but the reason that Israel is using them in the first place is because it doesn't have enough of the “advanced targeting and reconnaissance mechanisms” that the US has been researching and building for years.

We have children dying in the middle of a horrible war in Gaza in part because Egypt lacks the economic ability to absorb them and give them refuge and it is worried that it will have to do so on a permanent basis, and we have no mechanisms in the international community and framework to ensure Egypt that this will not become its problem.

We need self-driving cars and flying taxis, both of which are technologies that already exist today, but we lack the mechanisms to define and efficiently implement the regulatory requirements to make these technologies work safely and to make them widely available. And these are only a couple of the most obvious examples of technologies that already exist but we are not benefiting from. We desperately need much more efficient mechanisms to connect government, corporations, science, technology, and society.

We have farmers who suffer from high levels of depression because it's a high risk business. They live on the margins, and one disaster can wipe out their profits. And yet, despite all that, food prices in certain retail sectors are getting less and less affordable. Farmers in Europe are targeted with necessary but complex environmental regulations and we don't have any mechanisms to help them cope with that.

Workers in The West cannot compete because they do have human rights, labor rights, and a decent standard of living, while workers in the rest of the world are too exhausted to compete because they don't.

Imagine a world...

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Israel GDP per capita 1948

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