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[Opinion](#) - Letters to the Editor

Israel & Palestine

This refers to the articles “The Middle East: the way forward” by Mohamed Higazy (Aug. 23) and the response “Two hands for a clap” by Daniel Zohar Zonshine (Sept. 4). The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a long and complex one. Suffering and distrust of the other side are experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians. In his presentation of ‘land for peace’ as the cure-all of this conflict, the Egyptian ambassador to India fails to mention that many Israeli children have died in suicide attacks. Only the building of a wall managed to put a stop to this wave of attacks.

The Consul General of Israel, in turn, does not mention that the positioning of the wall directly amounts to land grab. He also does not mention the hardship brought on the Palestinians by decades of economic strangulation. Thus, Israel for its own sake, should find ways to lessen the hardships of ordinary Palestinians. And at one point in the future, the Egyptian ambassador’s goal will be reached: Israel will have to give ‘land,’ something concrete, to Palestinians. But this will not happen until the Palestinians can prove that ‘peace’ given in return will be more than an abstract concept.

Horst Vaeth,

Bangalore

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Mr. Zonshine’s article fails to mention that Israel retained control of land, air and sea access to the Gaza Strip in the wake of the highly publicised withdrawal of August 2005. Existing constraints were intensified when a U.S.-Israeli led, E.U.-abetted foreign aid boycott was imposed on Palestine after the democratically elected Hamas government assumed power in 2006. In addition, Israel withheld the Palestinian Authority’s tax revenues. Given this economic blockade, it is difficult to see how the Palestinians could have built industrial plants and initiated economic projects.

Radha Surya,

Bloomington, Indiana

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Mr. Zonshine’s piece is a rehash of familiar arguments tailored to the new context: Hamas in power. The essence of his arguments appears to be the land-for-security theme with the demarcation of borders post-1967 as the bargaining chip for Israel. If this is a negotiating

tactic employed by Israel, why can't it see the Palestinian demands along the same lines?

Mr. Zonshine claims that the current impasse in Palestinian politics makes Israel wary of its security. The impasse accruing from the power struggle between the Palestinian factions in reality works in Israel's favour. It enables Israel to claim that it has no credible partner to negotiate with — a claim it made during Yasser Arafat's lifetime too. The consul should be wary of touting the Gaza withdrawal (and its aftermath) as an Israeli gift to the Palestinians and an example of Palestinians' 'perfidy'. A cursory perusal of the unilateral withdrawal reveals its flawed premises.

Last but not the least, his claims about lack of economic activity by Palestinians is nothing but bizarre. How can economic activity bloom when the state or a quasi state-like entity is starved of funds? The essence of the arguments is that Israel wants to have the cake and eat it too.

Wajahat Qazi,

Srinagar

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What Israel wants is not to be asked to vacate the occupied lands. But all other problems are only consequences of the occupation. By saying the other problems should be solved first, Israel is putting the cart before the horse.

Jawaharlal Jasthi,

Hyderabad

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Hamas came to power after a free and fair democratic election which was vehemently opposed by Israel. The Israeli government under Ariel Sharon did everything possible to discredit Fatah and its leader, Arafat. Now it is supporting Fatah. Instead of assuming a high moral ground, Israel should go back to its pre-1967 border, provide the right of return to Palestinian refugees before blaming the Palestinians for fighting Israeli occupation. It is surprising that a people who underwent the worst form of persecution cannot understand the sufferings of Palestinians who have lived and died in refugee camps for six decades.

Sampath Kumar Swaminathan,

New York

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