

Churchill, Netanyahu & Fifty Shades of Grey

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1 The Takeaways

1. If Israel refuses to accept the Palestinian Authority as a part of civilian authority after the current war, the IDF will have to stay in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for an extended period of time and would make the latest case of regime change under military occupation, like the Iraq case in 2003.
2. Mindset problems require mindset solutions, more than guns and bullets. Winston Churchill said it well: **“Those who never change their minds, never change anything.”** Ultimately, the Israelis must prove to their neighbors and to the world that they possess superior, nobility, loftiness and dignity values that match their technology and military strengths. This requires a change of mindsets from killing to co-existence; from warfare to peace & business; from violence to tranquility, and mostly from “Using all the power when we have it” to “Putting justice before power.” Only power that goes with justice becomes insurmountable, otherwise like a soldier fought in the Six-Day war puts it, “to live by the sword is to die by the sword.”
3. One example of mindset change is in the movies “Fifty Shades,” where the male character Christian Grey changed his sadist behaviors — thought to

define who he was but later overcame by his love of Anastacia Steele. I wish Netanyahu would act like Grey to add another window of life changes, putting whatever happened before as “sunken,” and focus on the better future for both Israelis and Palestinians.

4. But the biggest difference between the movies and reality in the Middle East is that **there is little love between the two peoples**. According to the polling of Washington Institute, more than 80% of both Israelis and Palestinians do not trust each other, almost 60% Palestinians believed it good to attack Israeli, including civilian targets. Meanwhile, poll also found that 53% support extrajudicial killing of Palestinian terrorists even if he or she has been caught by security officials and no longer pose a threat.
5. **There is still light at the end of tunnel**, as Palestinians’ opinions toward the two state solution and toward Israelis *remained dynamic rather than static* over time and are milder among East Jerusalemites.
6. Polling data also show that military or security incursions in area A cities (26%) or **settler violence (29%)** are the top concerns for Palestinians, more than anything else.
7. Israel settler violence may have been treated with leniency similar to that received by American servicemen overseas: In Japan, American servicemen have been far less likely to be convicted, even though the treaty says Americans should be subjected to the same laws as Japanese citizens for crimes committed off base and off duty. The same legal leniency may have encouraged rampant abuse of the system by some extremist settlers, pushing the issue to be Palestinians’ top concern.
8. On November 9, 2023 the High Court of Israel ruled that Israeli settlers were

given the land in Jordan Valley illegally and they should return the land to the Palestinian. This makes the control of settlers legally easier. Biden's proposed visa bans would also send a right message to extremist settlers. That said, in the latest poll on what should happen with Gaza at the end of the war, 32% of respondents said "Israel should remain permanently and renew Jewish settlement"; 30% said the enclave should be "given over to international trusteeship"; 14% said Israel should "maintain a permanent military presence"; 10% percent said it should be "handed over for rule by the Palestinian Authority"; and 14% said they did not know. If we add up the 32% and 14%, then near 50% Israelis are willing to see Israelis remaining in Gaza Strip.

9. With so many Israelis still support Jewish settlement or military presence in Gaza, our job is hard and we have a long way to go toward independent governance of Gaza Strip by the Palestinian Authority. Settlers and military may create an opportunity for the ordinary Palestinians to understand Israelis better, but they may also create a threat to regional peace — It all depends on how Israelis treat Palestinians in Gaza Strip and West Bank
10. If past behaviors are an indicator of the future, we may not be able to depend on this generation of Israelis to solve the conflict and must promote connections especially for the future generations, starting from American volunteers sent to Israel, West Bank and Gaza Strip. Connecting people means making them better understand each other better, communicate more frequently and friendly, and take solid steps toward improving trust. Right now there is a profound lack of information especially among Palestinians to Israel and Israelis. We need to send more American volunteers as paid and trained missionaries to promote mutual understanding across generations.

11. With the right volunteers in between, we trust the “Magic of Ordinary Days” like the 2005 movie, in which two strangers who were totally different ended up loving each other.

2 Netanyahu’s Concern & Regime Change

According to Axios.com on November 11, "Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that he opposes the idea of the Palestinian Authority retaking control of the Gaza Strip on the day after the war."

Netanyahu had a legitimate reason and even a high moral ground: "There isn't going to be in Gaza a civilian authority that teaches its children to hate Israel and to destroy Israel."

The problem is the lack of alternatives. Without Palestinian Authority or PA, IDF (Israel Defense Forces) would have to stay in Gaza until Israel is happy with the new regime, which may not come out easy, as the PA was voted by Palestinians as the governing body of the Palestinians territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Leaving the PA completely out of the future Gaza civilian authority would make a most recent case of regime change under military occupation. It happened before (like Japan under General MacArthur and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003) but has slipped out of favor today, partly because even though the US-led invasion resulted in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, it faced challenges and resistance, leading to difficulties in restoring stability and achieving the intended objectives. As this 2020 CATO essay stated, “there has been a growing scholarly consensus that these foreign regime-change operations are often ineffective and produce deleterious side effects.”

3 Mindset Solutions for Mindset Problems

I'd propose a different thinking path: Solving mindset problems through mindset solutions, which can potentially make Netanyahu one of the greatest game-changing leaders in the Middle East.

I would suggest that he watch the 2015 "Fifty Shades" film trilogy series, featuring Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan as the lead roles "Anastasia Steele" and "Christian Grey," respectively.

I watched them all in one shot. There were places I clicked to skip forward, and there were many viewers who considered the story and the characters "pathetic." But I still find the movies thought provoking and inspiring, not because of its predictable plots but more by the rare story of Christian Grey, who managed to change himself from a pathetic sadist to someone who loves and cares about his romantic partner whom he finally married.

4 "One Windowers" vs. "Two Windowers"

Most human beings have only one "window of change" that came during early childhood, after which their lives became highly predictable as they became whom they were and that would be it. I call them "One Windowers." Many of them don't fathom to live a different life or to become a different person later on.

Some people however do manage to have a second window of changes, perhaps triggered by marriage, college or career related events (or people). These are the "Two Windowers." Grey is definitely one of them. Their rarity or scarcity makes them unique because they possess the flexibility and the will power to change their course of lives in midstream that some "One Windowers" could not — and will not — dream of.

There are even fewer people (perhaps one in a million?) whose window of self-

improvement is never closed throughout life. They are the exceptional heroes and deserve the highest admiration.

I know it's unrealistic or even ridiculous to ask real people to be like movie characters, but how wonderful it would be if Netanyahu's love of Israelis (or love of himself, his own legacy in the Middle East history), similar to Grey's love of Steele, drives him to become a "Two Windower" with a higher wisdom that brings peace to two peoples, takes what happened in the past as "sunken" and focuses on the future where resources will be spent not on preparing wars but on making human lives better?

The savings of human lives, especially those of innocent ones, make it entirely worthwhile for Netanyahu to at least attempt to be a "Two Windower."

All changes carry some risk from both inside Israel and outside — especially when survey data show that the majority of Israelis are not known for forgiveness or clemency but prefer retribution or “tit for tat.” However, this is where true leadership matters: Lead the crowd, not follow or being kidnapped by the crowd.

5 But Palestinians Are Not Steele?

Let's look at Grey and Netanyahu in more details. They both are in a stronger or more powerful position relative to the other party (Steele for Grey and Palestinians for Netanyahu).

Perhaps the biggest difference between Grey and Netanyahu is that for the lucky Grey, Steele has feelings toward him and is willing to adapt herself somewhat to his kinky (or “pathetic” as some would call it) habit of taking pleasure in the suffering of others, especially of sex partners (a condition known as Sadistic Personality Disorder (SPD) as discussed in this article).

So in the movies or more accurately in the second movie “Fifty Shades of

Darker” Steele asked Grey to spank her after getting back together with Grey.

Netanyahu faces a much direr situation: This informative survey or surveys by Washington Institute published on September 14, 2023 shows a deep seated distrust from both sides such that **“88% of West Bank and 81% of Gazans disagree that it is possible to trust Israeli Jews, with 85% of Israeli Jews saying the same about Palestinians.”** (Emphasis added).

Even worse, the same report of survey data from Washington Institute, which deserves a complete reading from cover to cover, revealed a majority of Palestinians support attacks against Israelis — including civilian targets — especially when compared with the time when the Oslo Accord II was initiated in 1995: “In August-September 1995, Shikaki measured Palestinian support for attacks on Israeli civilian targets **at just 15 percent**. In contrast, according to current TWI polling a majority of Gazans and West Bank Palestinians (**59% in both locales**) — but not East Jerusalemites — say **it is good for Palestinians to attack Israelis**, with little change in percentages of those who say Palestinian attacks against the IDF, settlers, or **‘all Israeli Jews’** are good.” (Emphasis added).

6 Light At the End of Tunnel

It’s fair and easy to state the obvious fact: The Palestinians are the opposite of Steele in the movies: **There is no love between Palestinians and Israelis like Grey and Steele did**. But I still see the light at the end of the tunnel: With more frequent contacts and closer physical distances, **some degree of mutual trust is still possible** and the survey data proved that: **Half Arab Israelis**, those who lived inside Israel, agreed that it is possible to trust Israeli Jews.

This concurs what a Six-Day war soldier said in an excellent essay: “For thousands of years, hundreds of thousands of Jews had lived in the Arabic, Muslim

countries of the Middle East in relative peace and mutual respect, before migrating to Israel in the 1950s. This I know first hand. Jews and Muslims lived side by side, often working together and befriending each other.”

The real good news is that the needles of public opinions remain *dynamic* rather than *unchanged* over time and in different locales. A static needle would indicate everything is *intrinsic and predetermined* and nothing can be changed from outside, like an intrinsic hatred deep down in the blood, or a sense of entrenched and unalterable negativity.

Instead, we do see the polling numbers moving around not only over time but by locations, bringing to light a contingency of attitudes on contexts, external factors or pattern and outcomes from previous interactions. This is where hopes are because **peace is possible upon efforts to alter human interactions.**

7 Settler Violence: The #1 Culprit

The aforementioned survey data analysis from the Washington Institute also tells us what the top obstacles are for peace and the two state solution: “For many West Bank Palestinians, **putting a halt to military or security incursions in area A cities (26%) or settler violence (29%)** would be key signals of an Israeli desire for a two-state solution.” (Emphasis added).

I don’t know about you but this finding surprised me at first: The issues of incursions and settler violence were bigger concerns for Palestinians than the “holy” religious issue of Israel sharing Jerusalem as capital (10%), or more freedom of movement, (16%) or freeing more Palestinian prisoners (17%).

Then on a second thought, Palestinians are just like other human beings: We all tend to worry more about the most immediate threats to safety and security. “Holy issues” can wait, general freedom can wait, and fellow Palestinians’ well

being can also wait.

But here is another similarity with the “Fifty Shades” movies: Israeli settlers’ violence is similar to Grey’s whipping of Steele. Grey’s apology to Steele for his sadist behaviors proved to be the defining moment of their new relationship in the second and third movies, and that should teach Netanyahu a lesson that Israel, especially Israelis settlers, must first and foremost revamp their behaviors, otherwise we can only expect the Palestinian parents and the PA to continue teaching kids to hate Israel or Israelis.

This is by no means endorsing hatred of any kind from anyone, just an example of the Morphy’s Law: What can go wrong will go wrong. Netanyahu can blame the Palestinians for hating Israel from now on and for the rest of his life but that would have very little impact on changing the reality in the Middle East.

8 Israeli Settlers & American Servicemen Overseas

Speaking of Israeli settlers, it is helpful to think of American servicemen stationed overseas in host countries like Japan and South Korea. This is because it’s an open secret that Israel and Israelis, like the rest of the world, have been watching closely what Americans do (and not do) before setting their own course of actions. I have little doubt that instead of watching the “Fifty Shades” movies, it’s far more likely for Netanyahu to consider how the US responded to 9/11 attack by al Qaeda and then decide what Israel would react to the Hamas attack.

Sure enough, this post tells us that “‘This is our 9/11’ was a message coming out of Israel’s diplomatic circles in the immediate aftermath of the recent large scale kidnappings and killings by the group.”

While the Israelis were quick — and right — to compare their tragedy with 9/11, there is another comparison or point of reference that should help us to

put things into perspective — now that we know how important it is in the mind of Palestinians what Israeli settlers did and will do in their homes.

A meaningful question is this: How would Israel react to the settlers' violence in reference to how the US has reacted to the crimes committed by American servicemen overseas in host countries like Japan?

A quick background info: According to the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement, when U.S. personnel crimes are committed both off-duty and off-base, they should be prosecuted under the Japanese law.

This Wikipedia page tells us what reality looks like: “Between 1972 and 2009, **U.S. servicemen committed 5,634 criminal offenses**, including 25 murders, 385 burglaries, 25 arsons, 127 rapes, 306 assaults, and 2,827 thefts.”

“In 2008 the National Police Agency released its annual criminal statistics that included activity within the Okinawa prefecture. These findings held **American troops were only convicted of 53 crimes per 10,000 U.S. male servicemen**, while Okinawan males were convicted of 366 crimes per 10,000. **The crime rate found a U.S. serviceman on Okinawa to be 86% less likely to be convicted** of a crime by the Japanese government than an Okinawan male.” (Emphasis added).

Apparently, American servicemen were treated with legal leniency. This research article on American in South Korea claims that the Americans “became the social pest rather than the guardian angel for many Koreans because of the ceaseless pattern of their horrendous acts against innocent Koreans.”

Given the open data and discussions, Israelis may have taken a wrong lesson from how the Americans treating their servicemen with extra leniency, and believe they are entitled to the same hypocritical legal standards to their settlers.

Former President Obama was right that “nobody's hand is clean” and I want to add that the US has been a complicity in international crimes by setting a bad

example of granting its overseas soldiers *de facto* extrajudicial privilege in host countries.

That said, the US has more points of self defense than the Israelis. For one thing, the Americans were essentially “invited guests” in their host countries, while the Israeli settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have entered Palestinian land illegally under international law, according to the UN Security Council meeting minute in 2016: “The Security Council reaffirmed this afternoon that Israel’s establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity, constituting a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders.”

Note although the US chose to abstain, its representative said it had been a long-standing position of her country that settlements undermined Israel’s security and eroded prospects for peace and stability.

If “invited guests” have voluntarily given up any extrajudicial privilege on the paper, Israeli settlers who entered others’ land illegally in the first place ought have shown more respect of local people.

Of course, being invited guests does not grant people the right to violate local law so this is only a weak defense. However, at least the US agreed with Japanese government to put it on the paper that American servicemen, when off-duty and off-base, should be prosecuted under the Japanese law just like Japanese citizens.

But at the end of the day, for both Israelis and American servicemen: Extrajudicial privilege ferments a sense of entitlement among the privileged people, which always gets in the way of achieving international justice.

I can picture the following phone conversation between an American service-

man stationed in Japan named “John” and someone named “Ed” who is thinking of joining the Us army overseas.

Ed: Hey John! You have been in Japan for one year, right?

John: Yeah, one year and 3 days to be accurate. Are you in Japan as well?

Ed: No, I’m just thinking of joining the army and ask to be stationed in Japan. How do you like it there?

John: I like it a lot! People are nice and we Americans are treated differently from the local people.

Ed: What do you mean “differently?”

John: I mean sometimes even if you got yourself into legal trouble, you are likely excused and not being charged or convicted.

Ed: Oh really? You mean you can buy and sell drugs and get away from that?

John: A friend of mine did just that and that’s what happened to him last year.

Now, what do you think Ed will do if he happens to be a drug user/dealer at home? Chances are that he would have found an extra reason to join the Army and request to go to Japan! Once there, he will use and sell drugs to the Japanese civilians — off base and off duty — and chances are that he will get away from doing that even though he would have been charged and convicted at home from committing the same crime. It’s the Morphy’s law once again: Anything can go wrong will go wrong! Anything that goes wrong in one place will go wrong in other places.

9 A New Legal Weapon for Controlling the Settlers

The most recent news came out on November 9, 2023, The High Court of Israel has ordered settlers to clear out of private Palestinian land in the Jordan

Valley, which was illegally handed over to Israeli settlers. The impressive court ruling says Israeli settlers have been growing dates on the land, which the court ruled was illegally handed over to them. The cultivation was “not only done in violation of international law and the government’s declared policy, [but] even contrary to halakhic law.”

I applaud this language and sincerely hope that it is taken seriously by all Israelis, including Netanyahu, perhaps at least think of it before accusing the Palestinian Authority for teaching children to hate Israel. If Israel is a country of rule of law, we would have the #1 culprit identified and defeated by simply following the court ruling.

What Winston Churchill famously said during WWII still holds today: “Those who never change their minds, never change anything.”

Common sense tells us to expect the weaker or the losing side to be more ready to enter peace negotiation. But this blog post from Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law says differently: “(P)ower leads negotiators to behave more proactively throughout the negotiation process.” Furthermore, “The negotiation research also showed that powerful negotiators are more inclined than less powerful negotiators to make the first offer.”

10 The Disconnected Peoples

So far we have been talking about immediately tangible events but we can cut deeper.

The international peace efforts have been focusing on treaties, negotiations and ceasefires between nations and their leaders. What has been left out is the people connections at the grass roots. This is a better way to handle deep differences and distance between two peoples than military conflict and even interna-

tional treaties. Connecting peoples means making them understand each other better, communicate better, and taking solid steps toward trust and empathy.

Judging by that criterion, the Oslo Accord has failed to guide the two sides towards an understanding or even basic knowledge of the other. I was surprised to read the survey results of Washington Institute that showed “**a profound lack of information** among a significant proportion of Palestinians as to some of the basic realities of neighboring Israel, as demonstrated in Palestinians’ responses to questions on population estimates. When asked to give their best estimation of the population size of Israeli Jews, most East Jerusalemites had a sense of the correct number (latest census estimates from 2021 are approximately 7.4 million). In contrast, 45% of West Bank and approximately half of Gazan Palestinians believed that there were fewer than a million Jews in Israel today.” (Emphasis added)

“For many West Bank Palestinians — especially those living in the north rather than the relatively connected locales near Jerusalem — **their only exposure to Israeli Jews is through settlements and military incursions.**” (Emphasis added)

“The accompanying violence is a pervasive part of West Bank society; 56% of West Bank Palestinians report in PCPSR polling to have personally witnessed a killed or injured Palestinian as the result of an Israeli attack.”

But understanding each other better has a direct bearing in conflict: “(T)here is a twenty two percentage point increase in those who say that attacking ‘all Israeli Jews’ is a bad thing among those West Bank residents who have a more realistic perception of Israeli Jewish demographics.”

We also have a bright spot in the overall dark picture of relationships between Palestinians and Israelis: “(T)he sub-sample of East Jerusalem Palestinians in TWI polling provides an instructive window into the difference that **actual**

contact outside of conflict can have on popular opinion. This Palestinian community — living with a much deeper connection to Israeli society while still navigating significant challenges within it — has in many ways a much different approach to the conflict and relations with Israel than those in the West Bank and Gaza.”

The evidence is tangible because polling showed it repeatedly: “In contrast to a plurality of other Palestinians who support a Palestinian national priority to ‘escalate the resistance against Israel, even if that makes life harder right now’ (41% in WB and 47% in Gaza), the plurality of East Jerusalem Palestinians - 46% believe the focus should instead be on negotiations. And when asked whether they agree that ‘I hope someday we can be friends with Israelis, since we are all human beings after all,’ **about two thirds of East Jerusalemites (63%) say that they do**, as compared to 42% of Gazans and just 29% of the West Bank. When it comes to accepting the core belief underlying a two state solution ‘two states for two peoples’ if it might help end the occupation, **a similar 64% of East Jerusalemites would do so.**” (Emphasis added).

”And there is an openness to increased contact with Israelis among many Palestinians alongside the popular support for armed conflict. When presented with the suggestion that ‘Palestinians should encourage direct personal contacts and dialogue with Israelis, in order to help the Israeli advocates for peace support a just solution,’ **55% of West Bank Palestinians, 64% of Gazans, and 74% of East Jerusalem Palestinians agree.**” (Emphasis added).

“And while the majority of Palestinians (and Israelis) may now reject a two state solution, significant numbers of Palestinians (47% in Gaza and 42% in the West Bank) agree like most East Jerusalemites that **Palestinians should ‘accept the principle of two states—for the Palestinian people and the Jewish people’ to help end the occupation.**” (Emphasis added).

The above paragraphs from the Washington Institute's report of survey should send us a clear picture: **There is little evidence supporting the notion of an intrinsic Palestinians' hatred** set in stone against Israel and Israelis. We have seen variations in public opinions **even after decades of violence and Israel violation of international laws**. We also have much to learn from this variation. For example, we need to understand why the East Jerusalemites generally hold a more mild opinions toward Israel and Israelis. Is it because more frequent contact, fewer extremist settlers or both?

11 The Magic of Ordinary Days

The complicated story of two peoples involved in the conflict in the Middle East reminds me of the 2005 movie I watched this week called "The Magic of Ordinary Days" featuring Keri Russel & Skeet Ulrich. This Wikipedia page introduces the TV movie to us: "Set during WWII, Olivia Dunne 'Livy' is a young Denver minister's daughter who has become pregnant by a United States Navy flight instructor on furlough. Embarrassed by his daughter's out of wedlock pregnancy, her father quietly arranges for her to marry" Ray Singleton, who operates his family farm in a rural southeastern Colorado town.

There is little doubt that Ray Singleton, played by Skeet Ulrich, has a big heart: After hearing Livy (played by Keri Russel)'s dilemma from his pastor, Ray agreed to marry Livy without even having met her.

But the two could not have been more different. Livy is well educated and was studying Archaeology in graduate school. She knows nothing of cooking or farming and is not particularly religious. Ray on the other hand is a man of few words, hard working, kind, honest and patient. Family life and faith in God have been the centers of his life.

In the end however Livy decides to stay with Ray in a truly romantic life, even though she had no such intent when she first arrived in Ray's farm. What makes this movie unique is that there is no "magic moment," no usual Hollywood verbal fight or argument to turn things around. All we see is Ray's gentle loving caring of Livy — without touching her once before Livy is ready for him. The story is true to the movie title.

The same Wikipedia page also tells us that the premiere broadcast on CBS in 2005 attracted 18.7 million viewers, making it the highest-rated television film since the 2001-02 season.

The point I want to make here is that there is indeed magic power in the ordinary life of everyday. All we need is to live close to each other — with an open mind to learn and to adapt each other. Love will grow in the most magic and unexpected way — if we do things right.

12 Send American Volunteers to the Middle East

If Netanyahu did not have the gut to take the first step of change, which is more likely than otherwise given his political track record from the past, another long term solution is to use the Jewish Americans who have a big heart and would be willing to serve as the cultural bridge across peoples.

Many Jewish Americans are sympathetic to Palestinians and their sufferings. Without assigning them to a mission all they could do is to march on the streets showing their support to any civilian victims of the war. All we need is to organize these people as volunteers paid by the US, other governments and United Nations. Their job is simple and clear: acting as a peace ambassadors in teams to connect Palestinians and Jewish Israelis.

Since there is little love right now between Israelis and Palestinians, we need

someone else to bring these two peoples together. Sending American volunteers to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip with one mission: promoting mutual understanding of two peoples.

They should be paid missionaries (by governmental funds, foundations and donations) to turn themselves into full time workers and cultural ambassadors to increase the sense of duties, responsibilities and accountability. They should be trained before leaving the country so they are not allowed to promote their own personal views on the conflict but only pro-peace, pro-exchanges, pro-coexistence and pro-friendship messages. They must also monitor and report any violence and violations of international laws anywhere in the regions of Israel, West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The biggest function is ante hoc risk prevention at the grass root rather than at the state level. To qualify for volunteer one must have big heart — and must use the heart in the right place: Instead of spending time shouting pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian slogans against each other in this country, they will join the constructive peace movement in the front line where big hearts are appreciated the most.