

Review of: "[Commentary] Israel: A Problem the World Created (And Now Appears Unable to Solve)"

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This piece reads well, seems at first well-constructed, and offers a clear, comprehensive, and well-judged overview of the background and context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and in that sense performs (at least until one gets to the conclusion) a valuable educational purpose. It could, in that sense, have been an excellent long-read opinion piece for a broad audience. What it does not do, however, is hit the minimum bar for a scholarly peer-reviewed journal article: in the historical review, however useful, there is nothing new, either empirically or theoretically; and apart from a (very) few references to scholarly work, most sources cited are Wikipedia and the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The voluminous existing literature directly speaking to the themes covered, whether historical or political or beyond, or indeed the extensive and credible policy-oriented studies that have been produced, is ignored altogether.

These would not necessarily be fatal flaws for an opinion piece – even though it would be preferable both to give credit where credit is due and point the interested reader to some of the really worthwhile existing work. I'm afraid it also falls down, however, in that capacity by the policy conclusion: he, in a few short paragraphs, the solutions proposed – but not buttressed – are themselves not explained or defended as either necessary or remotely plausible: the need for an expansion of territory is simply asserted, and the likelihood of any of the surrounding states even contemplating it is (perhaps not surprisingly) not even explored. So the short, decontextualized, and implausible policy conclusion rather defeats the purpose of this article as a contribution to the public debate. The process comments (UN, etc.) similarly do little if anything to increase the plausibility.

I would suggest the author – with clearly an excellent grasp of the broad outlines of the history and dynamics of this conflict – continue work on this by delving into the extensive previous work that has been done on it, to see what analysis as well as policy ideas are already out there, and buttressing the account by sources more authoritative and compelling than Wikipedia. When it comes to novel policy ideas, it would be worth bringing to bear the field of conflict and conflict resolution studies, as well as some of the excellent previous policy work on Israel/Palestine (from academic scholarship to quality work by such groups as RAND and Crisis Group), before seeing what might and might not work, and then expose this to brainstorming with others before committing a future iteration of this work to paper.