

# Lamed-E

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## East & West Palestine, or Hamastan vs. Fatahland

By Ariel Natan Pasco

*The Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Agreement, still in its infancy, is already facing problems. What is the prognosis? Can it work?*

The Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Agreement, recently cooked up in Cairo, which would see the Palestinian Authority resume control of Gaza by December 1, has barely cooled, and already there are problems in paradise – in spite of the early celebrations of Gaza residents waving Egyptian, Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and Fatah flags, upon announcement of the deal. Just days after signing the agreement, Egypt canceled its planned opening of the Rafah border crossing, between Gaza and Sinai, a major incentive in the agreement, after another ISIS terror attack, that killed six Egyptian soldiers in Northern Sinai.

Egypt has kept the border crossing closed since October 2014, with a few exceptions for the passage of humanitarian aid. Egypt blames Hamas for a horrendous attack, that killed 30 Egyptian soldiers in 2014, by aiding ISIS terrorists in Sinai, through their weapons smuggling tunnels. Numerous attacks have occurred since, and Egypt continues to blame Hamas for the aid to the Sinai Islamists. And, it's not lost on President el-Sisi, that Hamas was started by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Since the Sharm El-Sheikh meeting of 2005, which included the US, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, it's been rumored that there's a proposal to bring Egyptian influence back into Gaza, and Jordanian influence back into Judea and Samaria. They are supposed to help the Palestinians reform their security services, democratize and stabilize society, so that the PA's Abbas can govern, and

ultimately negotiate with Israel. It seems that Trump is continuing to carry out that plan.

As I wrote a couple months ago, "The Trump administration is exploring new approaches for easing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that builds on talks with the budding Sunni Arab coalition of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan," according to an unnamed US official.

The American strategy is to unite the Palestinian Authority (Fatah) and Hamas, under Abbas' leadership, so that a united Palestinian bloc could renew negotiations with Israel. The Trump administration is using its connections with the Sunni Arab states to put pressure on all the Palestinian factions to join up. Hence, the Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Agreement. The Americans, in return, have promised to deliver Israel to the negotiating table, when the Palestinians are ready. And to grease the squeaky wheel, the US is trying to bring Jerusalem and Ramallah together through joint economic initiatives.

Meanwhile, the Arab coalition has tried to push Hamas closer to Egypt and the UAE, and distance them from Qatar, which for years has been a major financial backer. Mohammed Dahlan, a former Fatah leader in Gaza, who has been living in the UAE, has been the key intermediary. He recently returned to Gaza and organized UAE-financed humanitarian aid there, said to include about \$15 million a month in food and social assistance for families, plus additional money for electricity and water.

The plan is to provide economic and social support, through Egypt, with Israel's blessing, that can weaken the Muslim Brotherhood's influence. Israel has allowed fuel and other shipments to pass from Egypt through the border crossing at Rafiah, signaling it's tacit support. Dahlan and the UAE have larger plans. Dahlan said the UAE has pledged to finance a \$100 million electricity plant, to be built on the Egyptian side of the border, to help power Gaza. Therefore, the announced canceling of the Rafiah border opening by Egypt, presents a serious challenge to the plan.

Over the years, international peace plans, have seen “Palestine” as having a common border with Jordan, Egypt and a territorial link between Judea, Samaria (the West Bank/Fatahland) and Gaza/Hamastan.

### *We Know What Happened to East and West Pakistan...*

If a Palestinian state is born, East and West Palestine (the West Bank/Fatahland and Gaza/Hamastan) will suffer a similar end. Or, do they intend to carve up Israel to gain territorial contiguity? Will Israel be reduced to a Northern and Southern Kingdom as in the Bible? Will Tel-Aviv and the Galilee – formerly the coastal and northern parts of Israel – become disconnected from the Negev, the newly formed Southern State?

Whatever they tell you, know this, states collapse, countries or areas of a country merge with other states, and some ethnic groups go extinct over time. East and West Palestine is just such a creature. It will be still-born at best, on long-term international life-support. But that won't save it from the fate of East and West Pakistan. So, even if an illegitimate child-state is born, expect its early demise.

For starters, because there never was an independent Palestinian Arab state or shared identity. The closest thing they have to a shared identity, is hatred of Jews, the desire for statehood, and to use it to wipe out Israel. If they achieved statehood and actually lived peaceably with Israel for some time, their whole purpose of existence would end. History abhors a vacuum, and the so-called “Palestinian identity” would probably be subsumed in a greater Muslim identity; Hamas will work to ensure that. And, that will lead right back to conflict with Israel.

Beyond this, Jewish identity is stronger. Simply put – Israeliness notwithstanding – Jewish identity, the connection to our ancient and modern homeland, will prevail over a sick child-state and its international doctor-backers. You know, I feel that the US, EU, and UN are about to play the role of Dr. Kevorkian (the suicide doctor). They're about to help the “Palestinians” commit national suicide.

### *Why is this Fledgling State Doomed?*

Because it won't be a real democracy, in spite of a likely Jimmy Carter certification, as he did in 2006 when Hamas won parliamentary elections. My proof? Ask yourself, will Jews living in towns in Judea and Samaria be allowed to stay and be equal Palestinian citizens – including voting rights and electability to parliament – as Israeli Arabs are in Israel? No, they're

talking about ethnic cleansing, uprooting hundreds of thousands of Jewish “settlers”, making “Palestine” *Judenrein* –free of Jews. And a state born in such sin will never redeem itself. An independent Palestine might be described by some as a democracy, but, in fact, it will more closely resemble a Nazi state. Remember, Yasser Arafat's uncle Haj Amin Al-Husseini, was Hitler's friend.

Does anyone really believe that Abbas/Fatah will gain control over Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Hezbollah and ISIS elements in Gaza? He's been having problems within his own Fatah movement. East and West Palestine will be a terror state, and its eventual end will gladden the hearts of millions around the world.

If born, this moral-AIDS-ridden terror state won't be a democracy. Lacking democracy, freedom, prosperity and real control over their own lives, Arabs will continue to suffer deprivations at the hands of their corrupt leaders and be used – by the likes of Hamas – to attack Israel. Because it won't integrate the different elements of Arab society into an organic whole, they will never overcome their deeper inner contradictions. As long as they have an external enemy, the Jews, they might hold off the internal feud, but for how long?

### *Hamastan vs. Fatahland*

To give you an idea on how deep the divisions run, this latest Hamas – Fatah Reconciliation Agreement, is the 14th attempt at reconciliation since 2005.

In 2005, they signed the Cairo Declaration. In 2006 the Prisoners' Document; in February 2007, the Mecca Agreement to form a national unity government; and March 2008, they signed the Sana'a Declaration. They held talks in 2009 and again in 2010. In May 2011, they signed the Cairo agreement, to form a joint caretaker government, with presidential and legislative elections to be held in 2012. The February 2012 Doha agreement, and the May 2012 Cairo accord, were a further push to implement the 2011 Cairo agreement. They held more talks in January 2013, following the upgrade of “Palestine” at the UN. Then signed the 2014 Gaza and Cairo Agreements, followed by more talks about reconciliation in 2016.

East and West Palestine, or Hamastan vs. Fatahland, won't last because they aren't the same societies.

Gaza is medieval, insular, Islamic, poverty-stricken, overcrowded and, in just plain language, “a hell hole.” It has no culture beyond terrorism, and no real chance of commerce or serious relations with Egypt, its neighbor to the west. They'll be under Egyptian

“occupation.” After Sharon’s “disengagement” plan and the Hamas takeover, being cut-off from Israel – which got tired of being attacked by them – the Gazans grew closer to the Bedouin of the Sinai.

The “West Bank or Fatahland,” by contrast, is more cosmopolitan. Although overwhelmingly Muslim, there is a significant minority of Christians. It has the potential to be more secular, more democratic, and more tolerant. Trade and cultural relations with Jordan exist and will continue to flourish.

East and West Palestine will suffer from uneven development. If the child-state is born, and democracy does “rear its ugly head” with its tolerance and pluralism, Western movies, music, gambling casinos and bars; you can count on the Ayatollahs and sheikhs of Gaza-Hamastan to rant and rave against “the infidels” in East Palestine, i.e. the West Bank-Fatahland.

I firmly believe that an independent Palestinian State will suffer the same outcome as East and West Pakistan.

For those of you who don’t remember, East and West Pakistan fought a bloody civil war in 1971, and the outcome was Bangladesh, an independent state. Although both parts of Pakistan were Muslim – the only reason for its separation from India in 1947 in the first place – cultural and ethnic differences led to serious animosity between the two sides.

Yet, developmental inequality is what pushed the final button. East Pakistan was an economic basket case (as it continues to be today). “Blessed” by being at the convergence point of several natural phenomena, the southern third of East Pakistan/Bangladesh sits on the mouth of the Ganges River, where it empties into the Bay of Bengal. Never short of water, they regularly suffer from floods from the Ganges overflow and yearly monsoons (hurricanes).

### *Prognosis for ‘Palestine’*

A former International Relations professor of mine – originally from Thailand – once commented that Bangladesh is situated in one of the harshest inhabited areas of the world. “Why would people want to live there?” he asked. “It would do the international community good to simply move the entire population out of there. It would save a lot of lives, money and time in disaster relief efforts.”

East Pakistan – the more populous area – for years complained that they weren’t getting their fair share of central government budgets. After a period of military rule, in December 1970, the East Pakistani Awami League won absolute control over the newly formed

parliament. With the Awami League set to control the government and demanding autonomy for East Pakistan in a federated state, General Yahya – junta leader from West Pakistan – chose to disband the assembly and invaded the East. Civil war broke out and, after a half-million Bengalis (East Pakistanis) were massacred, India invaded to establish order. Ultimately India recognized Bangladeshi independence and so did the international community. But India continues to suffer until today from the Muslim fanatics of Pakistan.

Is that the prognosis for East and West Palestine? Will Gaza scream foul? Is a civil war or societal degeneration in the offing for the unborn child-state, or would a partial-birth abortion better serve the international community?

The world should think seriously about the viability – or not – of a territorially divided Palestinian state. Show me a successful model, anywhere in the world, of an independent country divided in two parts by another state. Or, will there be continuous warfare between Israel and Palestine to foster unity between the Arabs and to gain contiguity?

### *An Experiment Doomed to Failure from the Start*

Like my former professor’s advice about Bangladesh, I suggest about East and West Palestine that, “it would do the international community good to simply move the entire population out of there. It would save a lot of lives, money and time...”

Few things in life are certain, but these two are worth betting on. First, that East and West Palestine won’t survive long if born, and second, that the territorial integrity of the Land of Israel will. The Jewish people didn’t survive 2,000 years of dispersal and persecution just to return to their homeland, gain independence, and then give it away to 7th century Arab imperialists and early 20th century Arab squatters.

Posts are contributed by third parties. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent United with Israel.

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# Rewriting the Six-Day War

By Gabriel Glickman



Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin talks with soldiers, 1967, image via GPO

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: When Israeli officials seemingly questioned their country's narrative of the Six-Day War, politicized historians and commentators seized on their words as vindication of their claim that Israel had been the aggressor. But what these officials had actually said was abridged, misrepresented, and taken out of context. This distortion provided fodder for a tendentious rewriting of history.*

In 1972, retired Israeli general Matityahu Peled sparked a public debate when he claimed that in the run-up to the June 1967 war, the Israeli government “never heard from the General Staff that the Egyptian military threat was dangerous for Israel.” British journalist John Cooley described it as “newer evidence” that Israel was culpable for the war, while another prominent British journalist, David Hirst, observed that “Peled ... committed what ... seemed nothing less than blasphemy.”

What made Peled's “revelations” particularly odd is that at the time of the prewar crisis, he was one of the generals who argued most forcefully for a preemptive strike to stave off the Arab threat. According to one account, Peled used “aggressive, highly pejorative language” to entice the Israeli government into a

decisive blow against the Arab armies massing on Israel's doorstep. To delay, he argued at the time, was to cast doubt on the abilities of Israel's armed forces, and Peled was particularly concerned with protecting the military's reputation as a deterrent against future Arab aggression. “We deserve to know why we have to suffer this shame!” he demanded of Israel's civilian leadership.

In his post-army incarnation, Peled became a well-known leftist activist and politician. This swerve could, of course, neither change his actual behavior in the run-up to the war nor give him carte blanche to rewrite history to accord with his later political agenda. Nevertheless, the Peled thesis continued to be promoted as vindication of Israel's supposed culpability for the 1967 war.

In 1982, the argument was amplified by another statement, this time coming from then Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who had been a member of the national unity government formed by Levi Eshkol shortly after the mobilization of the Arab armies in May 1967. In a speech at Israel's National Defense College, Begin made a passing reference to the 1967 War in order to justify his own controversial decision to wage war against the PLO in Lebanon. Some Western observers, however, saw it as another confessional moment. According to one account: “In Israel itself ... a little of the truth about the June war has seeped out over the years.”

To be sure, Begin seemed to contradict Israel's moral justification for 1967 when he said, “The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.” However, while most historians stop there when quoting Begin, his reference to the Six-Day War went on. The crux of the speech was that there are two types of war: “[W]ar without choice, or a war of one's choosing.” Begin classified the Six-Day War as the latter, because Israel decided to preempt rather than absorb the Arab attack (as happened in October 1973).

Yet he viewed the war as a fight for survival – i.e., there was, in fact, no choice involved, because Israel faced the threat of annihilation at the hands of multiple Arab armies. Thus, he went on to say: “This was a war of self-defense in the noblest [sense]. The Government of National Unity ... decided unanimously: we will take the initiative and attack the enemy, drive him back and thus assure the security of Israel and the future of the nation.”

Indeed, it was common knowledge in 1967 that the Arab wartime strategy was predicated on Israel's taking the first shot. Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser was confident that his forces could take on and outperform the IDF, and his mouthpiece at the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram*, Muhammad Heikal, openly taunted Israel in widely publicized editorials.

In short, Begin's comments were abridged and taken out of context by historians and commentators seeking to score political points.

The false narrative of Israeli "confessions" gained further traction on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war, this time involving a posthumously published interview with wartime minister of defense (not to mention one of the most universally recognized heroes of the war) Moshe Dayan. However, the authenticity of the interview is unclear, since it was allegedly adapted from a series of private conversations with Dayan in 1976 of which there is no original record. Nonetheless, this has not stopped Israel's critics from quoting its most striking portion and hailing it as another key admission.

The excerpt refers to skirmishes between Israel and Syria over contested land. Over the years, Israeli kibbutzim had been subjected to harassment from Syrian artillery that was stationed on top of the Golan Heights overlooking the Israeli valley. Some historians have looked to Israel's suffering in those years as a validation of its moral position in 1967. But if a prominent Israeli official (supposedly) claimed that it was Israel's modus operandi to pretend to be a victim in order to provoke conflict for territorial gain, and that official was responsible for Israeli military operations during the Six-Day War, then surely Israel must have feigned victimhood in 1967.

Here is what Dayan supposedly said:

I know how at least 80% of the clashes there started. In my opinion, more than 80%, but let's talk about 80%. It went this way: We would send a tractor to plow some area where it wasn't possible to do anything, in the demilitarized area, and knew in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance farther, until in the end the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force also, and that's how it was. The story typically ends there. But what most accounts fail to mention is that Dayan was only the minister of agriculture during the period he was allegedly describing. He was also a member of David Ben-Gurion's small opposition party, Rafi, which

aggressively sought to undermine the premiership of Eshkol – a leader who was seen as indecisive and a stubborn proponent of ineffective bids for peace.

Whatever Dayan said (or did not say), this does not change the clear historical record. Apart from its own regular harassment of Israeli villages, Damascus sponsored attacks by the nascent Fatah on Israeli villages along the border with Lebanon and Jordan, which were the main irritant between Israel and Syria in the year leading up to the 1967 war. Most anti-Israel historians do not even mention either Fatah's terrorist attacks or Syria's "popular liberation war" doctrine, which called for utilizing these attacks as a way to instigate a pan-Arab war against Israel.

In the words of Syria's prime minister: "We say popular liberation war is the only way to crush Zionism and imperialism ... This slogan will not remain only a mere slogan ... Popular liberation war means sacrifice and expense ... All the progressive and toiling forces will be in the vanguard to lead the people to victory." When Israel asked Damascus in October 1966 to put a stop to Fatah's attacks, Syria's prime minister proudly admitted his regime's partnership with Fatah in a broadcast interview: "We are not guards for Israel's safety. Also we are not resigned to holding back the revolution of the expelled and oppressed Palestinian people. Under no circumstances shall we do so ... We shall set the entire region afire."

In the process of sifting through the historiography of the 1967 War, it becomes abundantly clear that carelessly worded statements have provided fodder for the writing of polemical history. Former and current officials beware: words are everlasting, and have the power to irrevocably alter the meaning of the historical events they describe.

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# Before Islam: When Saudi Arabia Was a Jewish Kingdom

*The discovery of the oldest-known pre-Islamic Arabic writing in Saudi Arabia, from ca. 470 CE, evidently caused some consternation, given its Christian and Jewish context*

By Ariel David



*The Najran Fort today, Saudi Arabia: Early Christians in the city of Najran were persecuted by the Himyarites, leading some to speculate that the Himyarites couldn't have been true Jews. Wikimedia Commons*

In 2014, researchers from a French-Saudi expedition studying rock inscriptions in southern Saudi Arabia announced they had discovered what could be the oldest texts written in the Arabic alphabet. But they did so very quietly, perhaps because the context of the texts is something of an embarrassment to some.

The dozen or so engravings had been carved into the soft sandstone of the mountain passes around Bir Hima – a site about 100 kilometers north of the city of Najran, which over millennia has been plastered with thousands of inscriptions by passing travelers and officials. Conveniently, at least two of the early Arabic petroglyphs that were discovered cited dates in an ancient calendar, and expert epigraphists quickly calculated that the oldest one corresponded to the year 469 or 470 CE.

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The discovery was sensational: the earliest ancient inscriptions using this pre-Islamic stage of Arabic script had been dated at least half a century later, and

had all been found in Syria, which had suggested that the alphabet used to write the Koran had been developed far from the birthplace of Islam and its prophet.

Yet the announcement of the discovery was subdued. A few outlets in the French and Arab media tersely summarized the news, hailing the text as the “missing link” between Arabic and the earlier alphabets used previously in the region, such as Nabatean. Most of the articles were accompanied by stock photos of archaeological sites or other ancient inscriptions: it is almost impossible to find a picture of the inscription online or a reference to the actual content of the text.

## *Thawban son of Malik, the Christian*

Only by delving into the 100-page-long report of that archaeological season published in December by France’s Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres – which supports the study – is it possible to see the find and learn more about it.

According to the report, the Arabic text, scrawled on a large rectangular stone, is simply of a name, “Thawban (son of) Malik,” followed by the date.

Underwhelming? Well, there is the matter of the large, unmistakably Christian cross that decorates the head of this inscription. The same cross systematically appears on the other similar stelae dating more or less to the same period.



*Ancient engravings carved into the soft sandstone of the mountain passes around Bir Hima. Screenshot from YouTube*

Behind the low-key announcement of the find, one can almost sense the mixed feelings of Saudi officials faced with an important discovery for their heritage, which, however, seems to connect the origins of the alphabet used to pen their sacred book to a Christian context, some 150 years before the rise of Islam.

Further consternation may have arisen when realizing that these texts are not only the legacy of a once-numerous Christian community, but are also linked to

the story of an ancient Jewish kingdom that once ruled over much of what is today Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

### *Jews vs. Christians in the desert*

While the Koran and later Muslim tradition make no bones about the presence of Jewish and Christian communities across the peninsula in Mohammed's day, the general picture that is painted of pre-Islamic Arabia is one of chaos and anarchy. The region is described as being dominated by *jahilliyah* – ignorance – lawlessness, illiteracy and barbaric pagan cults.

The decades immediately before the start of the Islamic calendar (marked by Mohammed's "hijra" – migration – from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE) were marked by a weakening of societies and centralized states in Europe and the Middle East, partly due to a plague pandemic and the incessant warfare between the Byzantine and Persian empires.

The bleak representation of pre-Islamic Arabia was less an accurate description, it seems, than a literary metaphor to emphasize the unifying and enlightening power of Mohammed's message.

Reexamination of works by Muslim and Christian chroniclers in recent years, as well as finds like the one in Saudi Arabia, are producing a much more elaborate picture, leading scholars to rediscover the rich and complex history of the region before the rise of Islam.

One of the key, but often forgotten, players in Arabia at the time was the kingdom of Himyar.

Established around the 2nd century CE, by the 4th century it had become a regional power.

Headquartered in what is today Yemen, Himyar had conquered neighboring states, including the ancient kingdom of Sheba (whose legendary queen features in a biblical meeting with Solomon).



*Petroglyphs in Wadi Rum, Jordan* Etan J. Tal, Wikimedia Commons

In a recent article titled "What kind of Judaism in Arabia?" Christian Robin, a French epigraphist and

historian who also leads the expedition at Bir Hima, says most scholars now agree that, around 380 CE, the elites of the kingdom of Himyar converted to some form of Judaism.

### *United in Judaism*

The Himyarite rulers may have seen in Judaism a potential unifying force for their new, culturally diverse empire, and an identity to rally resistance against creeping encroachment by the Byzantine and Ethiopian Christians, as well as the Zoroastrian empire of Persia.

It is unclear how much of the population converted, but what is sure is that in the Himyarite capital of Zafar (south of Sana'a), references to pagan gods largely disappear from royal inscriptions and texts on public buildings, and are replaced by writings that refer to a single deity.

Using mostly the local Sabean language (and in some rare cases Hebrew), this god is alternatively described as *Rahmanan* – the Merciful – the "Lord of the Heavens and Earth," the "God of Israel" and "Lord of the Jews." Prayers invoke his blessings on the "people of Israel" and those invocations often end with *shalom* and *amen*.

For the next century and a half, the Himyarite kingdom expanded its influence into central Arabia, the Persian Gulf area and the Hijaz (the region of Mecca and Medina), as attested by royal inscriptions of its kings that have been found not only at Bir Hima, just north of Yemen, but also near what is today the Saudi capital of Riyadh.

### *Thawban the martyr*

Returning to the early Arabic texts discovered at Bir Hima, the French-Saudi team notes that the name of Thawban son of Malik appears on eight inscriptions, along with the names of other Christians in what was probably a form of commemoration.

According to Christian chroniclers, around 470 (the date of the Thawban inscription), the Christians of the nearby city of Najran suffered a wave of persecution by the Himyarites. The French experts suspect that Thawban and his fellow Christians may have been martyred. The choice of the early Arabic script to commemorate them would have been, in itself, a powerful symbol of defiance.

This pre-Islamic alphabet is also called Nabatean Arabic, because it evolved from the script used by the Nabateans, the once-powerful nation that built Petra and dominated the trade routes in the southern Levant and northern Arabia before being annexed by the Romans in the early 2nd century. Used at the gates of Yemen, this northern alphabet would have stood in

sharp contrast to the inscriptions left by Himyarite rulers in their native Sabaeans.

“The adoption of a new writing signaled a distancing from Himyar and a reconciliation with the rest of the Arabs,” the French researchers write in their report. “The inscriptions of Hima reveal a strong movement of cultural unification of the Arabs, from the Euphrates to Najran, which manifested itself by the use of the same writing.”

### *Joseph the rebel*

The growing outside pressures ultimately took their toll on Himyar. Sometime around the year 500, it fell to Christian invaders from the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum.

In a last bid for independence, in 522, a Jewish Himyarite leader, Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar, rebelled against the puppet ruler enthroned by the negus and put the Aksumite garrison to the sword. He then besieged Najran, which had refused to provide him with troops, and massacred part of its Christian population – a martyrdom that sparked outrage amongst Yusuf's enemies and hastened retribution from Ethiopia.

In 2014, the French-Saudi expedition at Bir Hima discovered an inscription recording Yusuf's passage there after the Najran massacre as he marched north with 12,000 men into the Arabian desert to reclaim the rest of his kingdom. After that, we lose track of him, but Christian chroniclers recorded that around 525 the Ethiopians caught up with the rebel leader and defeated him.

According to different traditions, the last Jewish king of Arabia was either killed in battle, or committed suicide by riding with his horse into the Red Sea.

For the next century, Himyar was a Christian kingdom that continued to dominate Arabia. In the middle of the sixth century, one of its rulers, Abraha, marched through Bir Hima, leaving on the stones a depiction of the African elephant that led his mighty army. A later inscription, dated 552 and found in central Arabia, records the many locations he conquered, including Yathrib, the desert oasis that just 70 years later would become known as Madinat al-Nabi (the City of the Prophet) – or, more simply, Medina.

### *Were they 'real' Jews?*

One big question that remains about the Jews of Himyar is what kind of Judaism they practiced. Did they observe the Sabbath? Or the rules of kashrut?

Some scholars, like the 19th century Jewish-French orientalist Joseph Halevy, refused to believe that a Jewish king could persecute and massacre his Christian subjects, and dismissed the Himyarites as

belonging to one of the many sects in which Christianity was divided in its early days.

Robin, the French epigraphist, writes in his article that the official religion of Himyar may be described as “Judeo-monotheism” – “a minimalist variety of Judaism” that followed some of the religion's basic principles.

The fact is that the few inscriptions found so far, along with the writings of later chroniclers, who may have been biased against the Himyarites, do not allow scholars to form a clear picture of the kingdom's spirituality.

But there is another way to look at the question.

Through Christian and Muslim rule, Jews continued to be a strong presence in the Arabian Peninsula. This is clear not only from Mohammed's (often conflictual) dealings with them, but also from the influence that Judaism had on the new religion's rituals and prohibitions (daily prayers, circumcision, ritual purity, pilgrimage, charity, ban on images and eating pork).

In Yemen, the heartland of the Himyarites, the Jewish community endured through centuries of persecution, until 1949-1950, when almost all its remaining members – around 50,000 – were airlifted to Israel in Operation Magic Carpet. And while they maintain some unique rituals and traditions, which set them apart from Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, no one would doubt that they are indeed, the last, very much Jewish descendants of the lost kingdom of Himyar.



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*Haaretz*





# The Jews Will Have to Wait

*In 1942 a band of Algerian Jews risked all to help the Allies invade North Africa. Then Washington betrayed them. Thus was born modern American Middle East policy*



*American troops entering Algiers in 1942 as part of the Allied invasion of North Africa known as Operation Torch. Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images.*

**By Robert Satloff**

On November 8, 1942, a full year-and-a-half before the Allies invaded Normandy, about 110,000 American and British troops invaded North Africa. They had set out in more than 850 ships from U.S. and British ports, sailed for up to 4,500 miles through treacherous Atlantic waters teeming with Nazi U-boats, and, once at their destination, put ashore in three landing zones spread across more than 900 miles of coastline, from south of Casablanca to east of Algiers.

This was Operation Torch, America's first offensive operation in the European theater of war and, until Operation Overlord's Normandy landings, the greatest amphibious attack in history. Today, it is all but forgotten. And yet, aside from rivaling Overlord in terms of its enormity, complexity, and peril, Torch was also vastly consequential, for it helped to determine the future course and ultimately successful conclusion of the war. If that weren't significant enough, Torch also deserves to be remembered for the critical role it played in setting the terms of America's long-term relationship with the rulers and peoples of the Middle East.

Among those peoples not least are the Jews, whose role in this story is central in more ways than one.

## *I. The Forgotten Battle of World War II*

Both politically and militarily, Torch was a huge gamble. Pressured to open a second front to relieve the strain of Hitler's push into the Soviet Union, President Franklin D. Roosevelt found himself caught between, on the one hand, the advice of his generals who urged an early and massive invasion of Nazi-held France and, on the other hand, the post-Dunkirk caution of Winston Churchill, who feared that his beleaguered nation was just one defeat away from collapse.

Siding with his British ally, FDR endorsed Churchill's alternative idea: a bold plan to circumvent continental Europe and begin the long march to Berlin by means of an invasion of the North African empire that was then held by Germany's collaborators, the Vichy French.

Through courage, cunning, and luck, the Torch invasion—led, like the Normandy invasion nineteen months later, by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then in his first battlefield command—somehow achieved strategic surprise. Germans monitoring the Anglo-American armada were tricked into thinking the bulk of it was headed to Malta, and the invaders were ultimately able to overwhelm French defenses in just three days.

Still, it was no walk on the beach. Eleven-hundred allied troops were killed in the fighting, almost half as many as those who had died at Pearl Harbor and a quarter as many as those who would fall in the "other D-Day" attack in Normandy. But in the end, thanks to their sacrifice, American and British troops had a foothold on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, which they then expanded eastward into Tunisia, eventually crossing from there into Italy and proceeding north through what Churchill famously described as "the soft underbelly" of Europe.

Why, then, has Torch been the virtually unknown outlier of American wartime victories? In 1994, President Bill Clinton led a massive U.S. delegation to France to mark the 50th anniversary of the Normandy landings; two years earlier, Torch's golden anniversary merited neither a congressional resolution nor even a statement from President George H.W. Bush, the decorated World War II veteran then in the White House. This year, in a first-ever commemoration, Torch will be marked by a ceremony at the World War II memorial in Washington; after 75 years, there will be few Torch veterans left to appreciate the moment.

If officialdom has been indifferent to Torch, it has fared no better in popular culture. True, the most beloved film to emerge from the entire war may be the

story of an American antihero's lonely fight for love and liberty in Vichy-held Casablanca, but not a single major motion picture has chronicled Torch's military exploits. (*Candlelight in Algeria*, starring James Mason as a pre-invasion British spy in Algiers, comes closest.) Richard Burton and Rock Hudson made British victories at Tobruk and El Alamein famous, but America's film archive has nothing equivalent to show for Torch's landings in Safi, Oran, or Sidi Ferruch—to say nothing of a North African version of *Saving Private Ryan*. Whatever the reason for this relegation of America's first military encounter with an Arab land since the Barbary wars to a footnote in American popular memory, it is an afterthought that books like Rick Atkinson's 2002 *An Army at Dawn* have only begun to repair.

Torch deserves a more hallowed spot in our memory, and not only for the fact that it was a critical turning point in the war. Even less known, less recognized, and less appreciated is the influence Torch had on another story that, as I suggested at the outset, still resonates loudly today: namely, the making of American policy in the Middle East.

## II. The Forming of Modern Middle East Policy

When was modern U.S. Middle East policy formed? Two early landmark events may spring to mind. The first was President Roosevelt's March 1945 meeting with King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia. Their conversation aboard the *USS Quincy*, then cruising in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, laid the groundwork for the strategic bargain—energy in exchange for security—that for the past seven decades has been at the core of U.S. relations with the proprietors of the world's largest reservoir of oil. The second was the May 1948 decision by another president, Harry Truman, to disregard the advice of George Marshall, a great war hero turned secretary of state, and extend U.S. diplomatic recognition to the newborn state of Israel. As the first country to do so, America, thanks to Truman, would forever be linked to the Zionist enterprise—and to the broader dispute between Israel and the Arabs.

To be sure, other, later moments also deserve notice in this connection. Truman's vow to protect Turkey and Greece from Soviet expansion in 1947-1949 eventually put much of the Middle East under America's cold-war umbrella; Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in 1973-74 inaugurated America's focus on a "peace process" that has consumed presidential attention ever since then; George H.W. Bush's decision to lead an international coalition to reverse Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait triggered America's now quarter-century entanglement in Iraq. Still, to a great extent, the

modern history of U.S. policy in the Middle East is a chronicle of presidential efforts to mitigate the conflicts and contradictions in America's relations with two very different allies—Saudi Arabia and Israel—and to find the magic balance between commitments made separately to Arabs and to Israelis.

So where does Torch fit into this history? A strong argument can be made that Torch gave birth to it, two-and-a-half years before FDR's visit with Ibn Saud and more than five years before Truman recognized Israel. This is not because Torch had a lasting military impact on the region. It didn't. Other than a handful of temporary cold-war installations in Morocco, all of them shut down by the early 1960s, America's victory in North Africa did not lead to the establishment of naval bases, airfields, or long-term deployments. Two forgettable historical markers, one outside Casablanca and another near the Roman ruins of Cherchell, Algeria, constitute the sole residual evidence of the invasion. Nor does any cemetery serve as a final resting place for the American soldiers, sailors, and airmen who fell in either Morocco or Algeria; all of the bodies were either sent home or interred at a single battlefield gravesite in Tunisia.

Rather, Torch's lasting impact was political. In the hours immediately after the first U.S. troops came ashore outside Algiers, the capital of France's North African empire, two key decisions were made that would exercise a profound impact both on the war and on America's long-term role in the Middle East. The first decision was to fight Vichy but then ultimately to embrace both Vichy's local leaders and key aspects of their policy. The origin of this story long predates Torch.

In June 1940, following France's battlefield collapse and its subsequent armistice with Nazi Germany, Marshal Philippe Pétain set up a rump French state in the spa town of Vichy. Soon thereafter, FDR and Churchill became attracted to the idea of finding some Frenchman in uniform who could break the hold on the French officer corps of Pétain, the elderly hero of Verdun, and "turn" the French military from collaborating with the Nazis to partnering again with the Allies.

Finding the right person was not easy. Charles de Gaulle, the haughty, charismatic general who led the Free French partisans from his London redoubt, was a non-starter, disparaged by many French officers still in service as an *arriviste* who had flouted the chain of command and fled the field of battle. (Later he would become positively reviled for giving cover to the British attack on the French fleet harbored at the Algerian port of Mers el-Kebir and for leading the failed French-on-French attack on Dakar.)

Over the next two years, Allied diplomats, officers, and spies, led by Robert Murphy, Roosevelt's

personal emissary in North Africa, searched in vain for a candidate. One after another, they proved either too old, too timorous, or too deeply in the thrall of the Pétain mystique. Eventually, the Allies settled on General Henri Giraud, a high-ranking army commander whose claim to fame was that he had twice, once in each world war, escaped from German prisoner-of-war camps. Because he was so widely hailed as an irrepressible French patriot and resourceful hero, a reluctant Pétain had given him sanctuary.

As Torch evolved, the Allies planned to fly Giraud to Algiers, where his onetime deputy and loyal supporter General Charles Mast was serving as chief of staff of French troops, and to install him as commander of French forces in North Africa. But the self-aggrandizing Giraud had other ideas. He spent the anxious hours of the Torch landings on Gibraltar arguing with Eisenhower over his title and prerogatives. In essence, Giraud demanded that he be appointed commander of *all* Allied forces. With landing ships unloading tens of thousands of U.S. and British troops across the North African coast, being cooped up with Giraud in an underground bunker bickering over rank was, Ike would recall, “one of my most distressing interviews of the war.”

By the next morning Giraud had rethought, but by then it was too late. Murphy, on the brink of having failed in the main mission entrusted to him by Roosevelt—to prevent Vichy French commanders from ordering their men to fire on the troops coming ashore—had found someone to save the day. By happenstance, Admiral Jean-François Darlan, Pétain’s own deputy and appointed heir, was in Algiers. Although a willing collaborator with the Germans, he was first and foremost an opportunist who had quickly recognized that the invasion might shift the balance of power in North Africa. He therefore proposed a deal: in exchange for recognition of his status as French high commissioner for North and West Africa and commander of all French land, sea, and air forces in the region, he would guarantee both a cessation of the already ongoing hostilities and unfettered Allied access through Morocco and Algeria to engage the Germans in Tunisia.

Murphy and Major General Mark Clark, Ike’s deputy, accepted the deal, and the French defenders ultimately stood down. But what did this mean? With the explicit endorsement of American forces, fascist Vichyites would now retain power and authority in the region. To the extent that among Torch’s original goals had been the *liberation* of North Africa, it had instead become, within hours of the landing, a narrow operation to ease the transit of Allied troops through North Africa.

The “Darlan Deal,” as it was immediately dubbed by American editorialists, prompted a howl of protest.

With the Democrats having suffered a drubbing in mid-term elections just five days before Torch, Roosevelt was forced to cauterize an additional political wound that was being portrayed as a tawdry bargain with one of Hitler’s favorite Frenchmen. He duly issued a statement describing the arrangement as no more than a “temporary expedient”—repeating the word “temporary” six times in nineteen sentences. In the end, there was nothing temporary about it. On one level, the problem may have seemed magically to resolve itself when a young French monarchist assassinated Darlan six weeks later. But on a deeper level, the Americans had by then grown accustomed to working with a compliant partner who both delivered the promised strategic benefits and freed them of the need to get involved in messy local politics. When Giraud succeeded Darlan, finally achieving the status and recognition Eisenhower had offered him on Gibraltar, he slid easily into the same arrangement with the Americans: in essence, “You may pass through my lands but don’t bother us along the way.” A key aspect of American Middle East policy was thus born.

Torch had presented the Allies with their first opportunity to apply the principles of the 1941 Atlantic Charter, issued by the U.S. and Great Britain, to lands freed from Axis control. Those principles—the core precepts of which FDR, in a pre-Torch message to the people of North Africa, had famously described as a “great jihad of freedom”—included self-government and the freedom from want or fear: gifts later imparted with bountiful generosity to postwar Europe. But when the time came to apply them in liberated Arab lands, even through the very incremental step of transferring power from one set of French colonial officers to another, Washington balked and ultimately punted.

Daily Weekly of course, some might contend that, in contrast to Europe, these Arab lands were (and perhaps still are) unfertile soil for such ideas. All we can be certain of, however, is that when the U.S. was the uncontested power in Algiers and across North Africa, it decided not to put this question to the test. Instead, Torch became the first chapter in an instrumentalist strategy toward Arab lands—prioritizing partnerships with friendly strongmen over the political and economic development of their peoples—that by and large has governed America’s relationship with the region ever since.

### *III. “The Jewish Question” in North Africa*

The second Torch decision pregnant with implications for the future revolved around the fact that immediately upon landing on the North African coast,

American commanders came face to face with what in European circumstances was dubbed “the Jewish question.”

By November 1942, many details of the Holocaust, as it would later be named, were already well known. During that same month, the State Department publicly confirmed reports of Nazi plans to annihilate the Jews of Europe. Just six weeks after Torch, twelve Allied governments issued a joint statement vowing retribution against those responsible for the extermination of Jews.

Though much less dire, the situation in North Africa was also known, certainly in the upper reaches of the U.S. government. A steady stream of diplomatic reports and journalistic accounts detailed the application of Vichy laws that had stripped Algerian Jews of French citizenship and, across all French-controlled territories, denied Jews the rights to live, work, and study freely.

More ominously, thousands of Jews had been dispatched to what the French themselves called “concentration” or “punishment” camps. The deportees ranged from Jewish soldiers who had been serving honorably in the Foreign Legion when Vichy took power, to Jewish refugees from Central or Eastern Europe driven by fear of the coming Nazi onslaught to seek refuge in France or its North African possessions. The camps, often deep in the Sahara, were remote sites of arduous forced labor where torture was common and death by hunger, thirst, exposure, and mistreatment a daily occurrence. Until Torch, the misfortune facing the Jews in lands under fascist domination was, for the Roosevelt administration, a faraway problem, distressful to contemplate but distant from the battle front. Torch changed that equation. For the first time during the war, Torch’s success put American troops in direct control of territory in which Jews faced government-ordained and -implemented persecution and possible death.

This reality made “the Jewish question” a pressing issue. Moreover, thanks to one remarkable but little-recognized fact, it became an immediate issue as well. In the early morning hours of November 8, 1942, as U.S. and British forces waited anxiously on troop ships spread across the North African coast, 377 young men, led by a twenty-year-old medical student named José Aboulker, had fanned out across Algeria’s capital city of Algiers to execute a daring mission that would help determine the fate of Torch.

Aboulker and other resistance leaders had established clandestine contact with the Americans, who promised to supply them with machine guns, grenades, and other weapons. Those promises had gone unfulfilled; but the conspirators were undeterred. Armed only with knives, pistols, and antiquated 19th-century rifles, they aimed at nothing less than to take

over the city, arrest the local Vichy generals, admirals, and prefects in their beds, cut communications with the outside world, and immobilize thousands of French soldiers in their barracks.

Astonishingly, through gumption, guile, and guts, these ragtag volunteers succeeded. By 2:00 a.m. on the morning of the invasion, Algeria’s capital was theirs. No less astonishingly, they then proceeded to hold it for an additional five critical hours, making it far easier for Allied troops to enter Algiers than had proved the case in the landing zones of Casablanca and Oran.

If mainstream histories of Torch mention this episode at all, they describe it briefly as but one in a line of heroic tales of French partisans. The official U.S. army account of American military engagement in North Africa, for example, records that “Algiers came under control of the irregulars of the French resistance at the time the landings began.”

But that account and virtually all others miss a critical aspect of the story: not only Aboulker himself but fully 315 of those 377 resistance fighters in Algiers were Jews, motivated to fight precisely because, as Jews, they had been denied their rights as Frenchmen by Vichy France. At its core, then, theirs was a Jewish resistance movement.

Moreover, unlike other Jewish resistance movements during the war, theirs was inherently and organically bound up with the fate of America’s own war effort. The risks taken by those Jews saved the lives of American soldiers and sailors, perhaps hundreds of them. Thanks to their herculean effort, Algiers was the only landing zone where Allied forces encountered little French opposition, in stark contrast to the relatively stiff defense put up by the Vichyites elsewhere along the North African front. As Léon Poliakov, a giant among French historians of the war, would later put it with only slight exaggeration, “the role of the small Aboulker group was decisive in the world war at a crucial moment.”

Indeed. While the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and other Jewish resistance efforts may have been more significant politically and psychologically, especially in helping to refute the image of Jewish passivity, the Algiers resistance was the most consequential in helping to change the course of the war—and, in the process, was the only Jewish resistance movement to save American lives.

#### *IV. Bowing to Expediency*

That was how, from the moment Allied troops disembarked from their landing ships on North African soil, America’s wartime leaders, from FDR and Eisenhower to Mark Clark and Robert Murphy—respectively, Ike’s military and political representatives in Algiers—came face to face with

“the Jewish question.” Moreover, because of the Allies’ decision to pivot from the original plan for new French leadership to a partnership with the existing Vichy regime, this question was no longer theoretical but, to the contrary, pressing and practical. More specifically, it comprised three questions. First, what to do about the hundreds of Jewish conspirators whom the newly emboldened Vichyites viewed as traitors for having risked their lives to support the Allied invasion? Second, what to do about the thousands of Jews (and other anti-fascists) languishing in Vichy concentration camps? Third, what to do about the tens of thousands of other Jews who had been rendered stateless by Vichy’s discriminatory laws?

Once again, the answer given by American officials in Algiers, and endorsed by higher-ups in Washington, was to bow to expediency. But this time there was a difference. Trucking with Jean-François Darlan had been a regrettable but defensible exigency of war, the price to pay for the swift transit of U.S. troops across Morocco and Algeria to fight Germans in Tunisia and expel them from the African continent. By contrast, the American response to “the Jewish question” was laden with deceit and duplicity.

Partnership with Darlan meant accepting, internalizing, and executing Vichy’s warped advice on how to govern lands filled with both Muslims and Jews. The essence of that advice had been to do nothing to assist the latter even if doing something involved no cost to the former. Time and again, the basic position taken by the Americans—led by Murphy, later lionized as one of the greatest American diplomats of the 20th century—was that helping the Jews would have to wait.

Freeing Jews from concentration, punishment, or forced-labor camps became a slow, grinding process. In his November 17 statement on the post-Torch political setup, FDR had issued a “request” for “the liberation of all persons in Northern Africa who had been imprisoned because they opposed the efforts of the Nazis to dominate the world.” But instead of simply freeing the prisoners, the Americans, acceding to the French, organized with the British a Joint Commission for Political Prisoners and Refugees that laboriously undertook to review the individual status of virtually every internee to determine whether, when, and under what conditions release might be granted.

Not until three months after Torch did U.S. Army Major Donald Q. Coster and British Army Major Kenneth Younger, along with French officers who only weeks earlier had pledged fealty to Pétain, receive their orders to set out from Algiers to investigate the status of Jews, Spanish Republicans, and other anti-fascists interned at Vichy work camps in the vast desert expanse in southern Algeria and

along the remote route of the Trans-Saharan railway. Theirs was the first Allied mission to glimpse camps where, as Younger wrote in his diary, “all the devices of Dachau and Buchenwald are in current use.”

Another three months would then elapse before the committee finished its work—meaning that it took twice as long *after* Torch to decide how to liberate Jews and others languishing in Vichy camps than it had to plan and execute the then-greatest amphibious assault in human history.

If the Allies were in no hurry to free prisoners, neither were they in a hurry to restore the civil rights stripped away by Vichy laws. Algerian Jews were unique in that, outside of Germany, they were the only Jews in the world rendered stateless by fascist edict. In the days after Torch, FDR himself promised to repair this injustice; in his November 17 declaration he specifically said: “I have asked for the abrogation of all laws and decrees inspired by Nazi governments or Nazi ideologies.”

But it didn’t take long for Vichy officials to whisper in the ears of Murphy and other American officials that any measures on behalf of the Jews—including just rolling back the clock to the legal status quo ante—would inflame the Arabs and thus in turn compel U.S. forces to divert energies and resources from fighting Germans into managing an unruly occupation.

A careful bureaucrat, Murphy seems to have appreciated the political delicacy of recommending a delay in the restoration of Jewish rights. He quickly appointed Major Paul “Piggy” Warburg, from the prominent New York banking family, as his “Jewish affairs adviser.” In memos to Murphy, Warburg dutifully proposed that unofficial quotas on Jewish doctors, lawyers, and other professionals should stay in force “for [the Jews’] own good,” and that full French citizenship should be restored to only a tiny percentage. (In his 1964 memoir, Murphy would return the favor by praising Warburg’s “invaluable assistance.”)

The result was that, for more than a year after Torch, virtually nothing was done to restore French citizenship to the vast majority of Algerian Jews. Only after de Gaulle took over the leadership of the French Committee of National Liberation in November 1943, fully displacing the Vichyites and others who had been America’s partners, did the Jews finally regain their civil rights.

Nor did America even protect the courageous Jewish (and non-Jewish) partisans of the Algiers resistance from the threats of retribution issued by vengeful Vichy officials. Once the deal with Darlan was sealed, many of the fighters found themselves jailed by those whom, just hours earlier, they had immobilized on behalf of the invading forces.

A few years ago, I interviewed one of these fighters: a twinkly-eyed, ninety-one-year-old doctor named Paul Molkhou. Just nineteen at the time of Torch, he was one of the youngest members of the resistance. Molkhou recalled for me the chilling moment when, after the tide had turned and the Vichyites were back in charge, the highly placed official he had kept in custody during the Torch landings vowed to gain his vengeance: “I remember the image of the secretary-general of the Vichy government. He said to me ‘You are a Gaullist terrorist; you will be judged and shot.’” In the event, spared the worst, Molkhou was jailed in Algiers’ infamous Barbarossa prison along with a couple of dozen comrades.

Fortunately, not all Americans agreed with Murphy’s policy. When, in the aftermath of Darlan’s assassination, Giraud and the anti-Semitic proto-fascists around him took advantage of the chaos to be rid of the resistance leaders altogether, rounding them up and dispatching them to a remote desert site where they would be executed, last-minute intervention by agents of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), America’s overseas clandestine intelligence operation, saved their lives.

Indeed, on most of the issues related to Jews, the OSS’s Algiers-based operatives held a different view from that of the State Department and argued for a more sympathetic policy. This may have owed something to their personal interactions with the conspirators in the Jewish resistance movement, or perhaps it was simply a reaction to the well-known tolerance for anti-Semitism in the foreign service at the time.

Murphy’s chief antagonist here was a courageous idealist named W. Arthur Roseborough, a Rhodes scholar from Oregon and former legal secretary to the World Court who was then head of the OSS’s strategic-intelligence desk in Algiers. A forgotten hero, Roseborough took seriously the principles of the Atlantic Charter, especially the principle of self-determination, and had the temerity to believe it deserved to be applied in North Africa no less than in other war zones—and that America owed a debt of thanks to the fighters of the Algiers resistance. When its leaders were arrested and sent to concentration camps in the Sahara, he begged Murphy to arrange for their release, reportedly arguing that “American honor is at stake.”

Murphy’s reply, cited in the memoir of another OSS agent, neatly sums up the prevailing official attitude: “Art, old fellow, if you have nothing better to do in Africa than to worry about those Jews and Communists who helped us, why don’t you just go home?”

Before long, that is precisely what happened: working behind the scenes, Murphy arranged for Roseborough to lose the confidence of his superiors, who forced

him out of Algiers and out of the OSS. His successors got the message; most (though not all) kept quiet and toed the line. Thus, in one of the U.S. government’s earliest and most portentous turf battles between State and Intelligence—a battle fought in large part over attitudes toward Jews and “the Jewish question”—did the venerable foreign service (established in 1789) handily triumph over the upstart OSS (established in 1942).

Still, it would be a mistake to claim there were no dissenters within the State Department itself. Some diplomats in Algiers hated the duplicity and double-dealing that characterized post-Torch policy toward Jews and other anti-Vichy partisans. Ridgway Knight, a key aide to Murphy who later became a three-time ambassador, wrote at the time that he was “sickened by the way we were neglecting our former associates”; in a memoir written 40 years later, he would characterize America’s post-Torch deference to the Vichyites as “politically and morally shocking.” As against such lone internal dissenters, however, there were others, outside the State Department, who may have not used the coarse and venal words ascribed to Murphy but ultimately made their decisions on the same basis. In particular, the principle that no military assets should be diverted for the non-military objective of saving or protecting Jews—later made famous in a November 1944 letter by Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy explaining why the War Department would not task U.S. bombers to target Auschwitz—was born two years earlier in the wake of Torch.

Just five days after the landings, Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles asked George Marshall, then the Army chief of staff, to sign off on instructions to “make every effort that any elements whose sole crime consists in having aided the cause of the [Allies] . . . should not remain in jail” and that “those anti-Jewish measures which have been imposed as a result of Vichy’s surrender to German pressure should be lifted.” In reply, Marshall termed such instructions “inadvisable at this time” and went on to explain, in language uncannily similar to the words McCloy would use later:

As to the second and third measures suggested [i.e., regarding freeing Jewish and other anti-fascist prisoners and restoring Jewish civil rights], I am in thorough accord with their purpose and I am sure that General Eisenhower will take measures to alleviate the condition of the Free French and the Jews as soon as such action will not jeopardize pending military operations. However, the release of a large number of individuals who will undoubtedly constitute a disturbing element in a most difficult situation might involve the immobilization of large numbers of American troops that are desperately needed elsewhere.

In the face of Marshall's strong opposition, Welles's instructions were changed to remove any sense of urgency.

### V. *Arabs and Jews*

What jumps out from Marshall's reply to Welles is the phrase describing Jews liberated from concentration camps as "undoubtedly . . . a disturbing element." Whom would they have disturbed?

In this connection, it is important to note that the zero-sum approach to U.S. relations between Muslims and Jews, born in the wake of Operation Torch, was *not* a product of the rise of Zionism or the fear of losing access to strategic oil resources. Nor was it a reaction to Arab rioting against Jewish empowerment in Palestine, or to threats by local Arab political or religious figures that their "masses" would erupt in outrage at government efforts to repair the injustices done to Jews. While Vichy certainly had its share of Arab collaborators, without whom it would have been impossible to govern, there were surprisingly few public declarations by local notables cheering Vichy's anti-Jewish policies.

To the contrary: there are multiple examples of Arab public figures who during this period sided with Jews, opposed anti-Jewish laws, and declared they would welcome restitution for Jewish loss of rights and property. For example, when Vichy abrogated the 1870 decree giving Algerian Jews the right to acquire French citizenship, returning them instead to the depressed legal status of Muslims, local Muslim leaders found in the Jews' misfortune little to gloat over: "This cannot be considered progress for the Algerian people," declared Messali Hadj, the jailed head of the nationalist Parti Populaire Algerien. "Reducing the rights of the Jews did not increase the rights of Muslims."

It seems instead that the zero-sum approach to Jews and Arabs, if not created by Vichy out of whole cloth, had at least been encouraged beyond all proportion by French (and especially French *colon*) prejudice, and then simply presented to the Americans as a gift. As Younger, the British officer who surveyed the Vichy concentration camps (and who would later serve as a Labor MP and deputy foreign secretary), wrote in his wartime diary:

I feel justified in considering that the alleged Arab question as propounded by the anti-Semites of Algiers is greatly exaggerated. . . . [T]he fault lies with French anti-Semites rather than with the Arabs or even the German propagandists.

In his own memoir, Eisenhower offered a lengthy description of this phenomenon, explaining that the decision to appropriate French colonial policy toward Arabs and Jews was, in part, a way to counter rumors that he himself was Jewish:

One complication in the Arab tangle was the age-old antagonism existing between the Arab and the Jew. Since the former outnumbered the latter by some forty to one in North Africa, it had become local policy to placate the Arab at the expense of the Jew; repressive laws had resulted and the Arab population regarded any suggestion for amelioration of such laws as the beginning of an effort to establish a Jewish government, with consequent persecution of themselves. Remembering that for years the uneducated population had been subjected to intensive Nazi propaganda calculated to fan these prejudices, it is easy to understand that the situation called for more caution and evolution than it did for precipitate action and possible revolution. The country was ridden, almost ruled, by rumor. One rumor was to the effect that I was a Jew, sent into the country by the Jew, Roosevelt, to grind down the Arabs and turn over North Africa to Jewish rule. The political staff was so concerned about this that they published material on me in newspapers and in special leaflets to establish evidence of my ancestry. Arab unrest, or even worse, open rebellion, would have set us back for months and lost us countless lives.

Roosevelt may have labeled the deal with Darlan a "temporary expedient," a decision so politically radioactive that it prompted him and Churchill to declare, for the first time, the wartime goal of "unconditional surrender" at their Casablanca conference just three weeks after Darlan's killing. But at least one aspect of America's partnership with the Vichyites in North Africa was not so temporary. The rationalizing myth at the heart of Vichy policy—that Arabs and Jews were mutual and mortal enemies, that any step toward the Jews would come at the expense of the Arabs, and that the best way to keep the mass of Arabs under control was to give them no cause for outrage at the progress of the Jews—found a ready home in the welcoming environment of America's foreign-policy and national-security machinery. Nor was that the only myth. A few years later, as the debate over Palestine heated up, a related if in some ways opposite idea would also find an audience among American foreign-policy makers. This was the notion that Arabs and Jews had lived together harmoniously and without discord in Muslim lands for hundreds of years, and that endorsing Zionist claims would disastrously upset this historical pattern of peaceful coexistence.

While it is undeniably true that Jews in Muslim lands never faced the massacres, atrocities, and degree of heinous persecution suffered by their coreligionists in Christendom, this angelic description of historical relations between the two groups is no less unhinged from reality. With rare exceptions, limited to certain moments and certain places, Jews were generally treated by Muslim rulers as *dhimmis*, tolerated as

“people of the book” but subjected to numerous legal and social restrictions, special taxes, and, periodically, outbursts of murderous violence.

But nostalgia for “the golden age of Andalusia”—an idyllic image originally promoted by 19th- and early 20th-century European students of Islam and later adopted by many political and diplomatic critics of Zionism—made for a compelling talking point. As far as U.S. foreign policy was concerned, the details of the myth mattered little; what connected Algiers and later debates over Jewish refugee immigration to Palestine, the establishment of Israel, decisions to arm the Jewish state, and U.S. policy toward peace talks between Israel and Arab parties was the readiness of many to accept whatever myth would validate their opposition to Jewish rights and Jewish empowerment. In this sense, the roots of subsequent U.S. policies based on warding off anticipated Arab outrage can be traced all the way back to the “expedient” post-Torch decisions made in Algiers *circa* November 1942.

## VI. Torch’s Most Enduring Legacy

Taken together, these two decisions—to instrumentalize the Middle East for the sake of larger U.S. security interests and to adopt a zero-sum approach toward U.S. relations with Arabs and Jews—became a hallmark of U.S. policy in the region for decades.

To be sure, contrary approaches have had their powerful political advocates over the years and occasionally have even prevailed, beginning with Harry Truman’s rebuff of Marshall on the issue of recognizing the state of Israel. Other examples include Alexander Haig’s short-lived effort at “strategic consensus” in the early 1980s, which posited the common Arab-Israeli fear of Soviet expansionism as a basis for a more enlightened U.S. regional policy. Today the U.S. may be in the midst of another such Arab-Israeli convergence of interest—this time, to counter an insurgent Iran. Whether it, too, is short-lived, only time will tell.

In the area of relations between Middle East rulers and ruled, George W. Bush’s “forward strategy for freedom” in the early 2000s was another such alternative approach. Specifically, Bush sought to put an end to decades of American indifference toward the region’s political architecture. As he memorably put it:

Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.

Since then, the Arab Spring has come and gone, with violence and tumult in its wake. Two subsequent

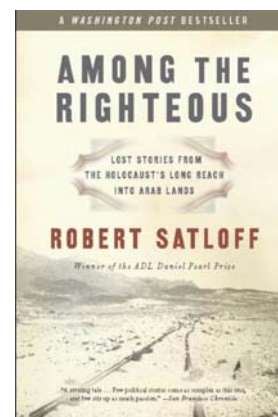
presidents—one Democrat, one Republican—have instead made a virtue of a return to the old policies. Bush gave his speech decrying 60 years of American foreign policy fifteen years ago. Sixty years before that, America had just arrived in Algiers. Operation Torch gave rise to America’s first experience wielding power in an Arab land, and early decisions in support of the approach decry by Bush have exercised a lasting impact on American foreign policy, with repercussions that continue to be felt to this day. That, alas, is Torch’s most enduring legacy, if one that is sure to go without notice on November 8 by the crowd cheering a handful of brave nonagenarian veterans at the National Mall on the 75th anniversary of the most underappreciated victory of World War II. For those veterans, however, and for that victory itself, both cheers and the nation’s gratitude are long overdue.

Oct. 9 2017

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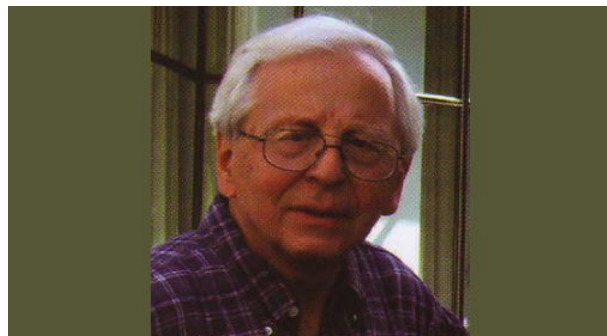
Robert Satloff is the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the author of several books on the Middle East, including *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands*





# Dušan Puvačić

By Sonja Besford



There is much to celebrate about the life of Dušan Puvačić, who sadly departed this world a few days ago in Belgrade. Following the dictum that a man's dying is an affair more for his survivors than for himself, as one of them and a decades-long friend, I shall write a personal rather than a standard obituary – not about about his academic achievements, where he was born and educated or how he came to live in London – but about his achievements as the years-long president of ASWA (The Association of Serbian Writers and Artists Abroad): about his books and translations; about his love and devotion to his wife, Tilda, to their daughters, Dina and Duška, and their own families; and lastly about his and my friendship which, I believe, created one of the principal elements of our personal, Anglo-Serbian reality.

Dušan and I conversed on formal terms, addressing each other in the plural (Vi). This formality increased our freedom to express our opinions and thoughts. It was, in many respects, a 19<sup>th</sup> century friendship: a man and a woman with interests in common, respectful towards each other, intimate in some confidences, distant in others, and above all sharing a belief in the transforming power of literature. We believed that books assisted humanity, as a work in progress, to wake up the curiosity inside us, to help us ask questions, even to reverse the entropy of the human condition.

Dušan was an idealist as well as a realist. He viewed idleness of the mind with passionate dislike. He presented his arguments with clarity and veracity. He read the work of many younger writers, including my own, offering sharp and constructive criticism. He was not easily pleased, high praise was not often given. However, even the harshest observations were delivered with such grace and respect for the process of writing, that we all listened and mostly took his advice. One didn't give ones texts to Puvačić of all

people, to be patted on the head, ego-stroked and lied to. For that one went elsewhere.

While he was the president of ASWA, during the 1990's and after, we must have had over twenty Serbian writers (no notes where I am at the moment) come to the UK to give us literary evenings, mostly at London University and a couple at the Serbian Embassy. During the war, the sanctions and subsequent NATO bombing, we managed to invite, accommodate, entertain, and even give modest fees to the visiting writers. This meant a lot to them and, perhaps equally, to the Serbs in London. During the same period, ASWA published five books, four in translation. ASWA had no funds, so the Puvačić/Besford 'foundation' bore all the costs. These, of course, were never recovered, not to Puvačić's surprise but nevertheless to our huge joint disappointment. (Are Serbs the Yorkshiremen of the Balkans?)

ASWA was started by Slobodan Jovanović in 1951. Its first president was Miloš Crnjanski. Neither of these people's achievements with the Association came anywhere near Puvačić's acts of kindness and generosity or his clear vision.

We used to laugh about *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) adding the caveat: *Sometimes I sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits.*

Puvačić had a wicked sense of humour, from jokes about Mujo, Haso and Fata to more serious, albeit, humorous possibilities for a good discussion, as in Becket's *He can't think without his hat.*

If we accept that we all accommodate several personas, each one adjustable to the person or situation we're with, I suppose the Puvačić persona that impressed me most was his devotion to Tilda, to her past and to the understanding of Jewish culture, history and literature. We often discussed Primo Levi and particularly Paul Celan: *There is nothing in the world for which a poet will give up writing, not even when he is a Jew and the language of his poems is German.* (This statement provoked several conversations.)

Apart from his own books, Puvačić was the chief editor of an online magazine "Kritika", originating in the USA, and publishing Serbian writing in translation. He was also a successful translator from English into Serbian.

Puvačić was an honourable man, a good writer, an excellent friend. Stubborn? Yes. Complicated? Yes. Tranquil? No. Learned? Yes. Passionate? Yes.

I hope that in his last years of enforced silence and

inability to communicate properly, he still had the will to look for answers to the questions we found so engaging. But even if he hadn't, what a legacy he leaves for us all to explore! What a wonderful creative life he had and how fortunate we all were to have met him.

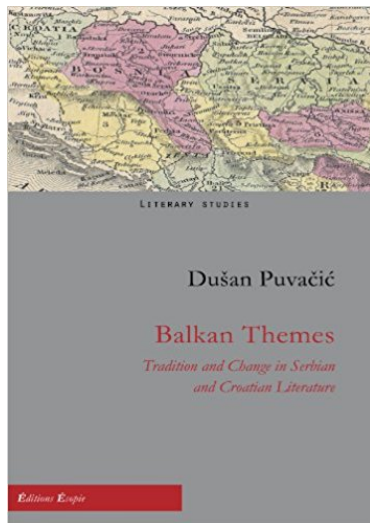
Rest well, my friend, and, as Harold Pinter would quote: TTFN.

July 21, 2017



Promotion of the book: [Balkan Themes by Dusan Puvacic on Vimeo](#)

<https://vimeo.com/AleksandarNikolic/Videos>  
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## There Are No Small Fascisms

### An Interview with Daša Drndić

By Dustin Illingworth



*Daša Drndić (Wikipedia)*

*The capacity to see the bricolage of a reticent, morally compromised, elegiac past—and, more unsettlingly, how that past might see us—is a central feature of the work of the Croatian writer Dasa Drndic. “I have arranged a multitude of lives, a pile of the past, into an inscrutable, incoherent series of occurrences,” one character says in Trieste, Drndic’s most acclaimed novel to date. “I have dug up all the graves of imagination and longing ... I have rummaged through a stored series of certainties without finding a trace of logic.”*

*Drndic adorns her novels—ostensible fictions encircling the Holocaust—with rich archival materials: photographs, biographical sketches, transcripts, testimonies, making a kind of blackened garland of twentieth-century history. It is as if, for Drndic, the atrocities of the recent past overwhelm the capacities of both fiction and fact, that only in braiding the two can our proximity to such horror be countenanced.*

*Her most recent novel, Belladonna, is forthcoming in English from New Directions. A ferocious book, it follows the life of Andreas Ban, an elderly psychologist, as he sifts through the remnants of his life—clinical research, books, his failing body, and the complicities of Central Europe—looking for “a little island of time in which tomorrow does not exist, in which yesterday is buried.”*

*Though she speaks English beautifully—in fact, she studied English Literature at the University of Belgrade—it is not her mother tongue. This was in no way a hindrance as Drndic adeptly answered my questions about the monstrous repetition of history, the mantle of “documentary fiction,” and the moral gravity of bearing witness. Drndic corresponded with me from Rovinj, a Croatian port on the Istrian peninsula.*

INTERVIEWER

In *Belladonna*, you write, “The event of destruction exists even when it is no longer happening, because it returns and is constantly repeated in memory, because through memory it is annihilated anew.” Do you think your novels partake of this repeated annihilation, or do you see them as acts of reclamation?

DRNDIC

It is not I, nor the character Andreas Ban, but my friend the philosopher and writer Predrag Finci from Sarajevo, who now lives in London, whose words you quote. Ultimately, Andreas Ban does not fully agree with Finci, because he works on the destruction of his own memories—unsuccessfully. To simplify and evade excessive philosophizing, it is not necessary to speculate about destruction—moral, social, political, ideological, artistic, et cetera—it is happening quite vividly and aggressively before our eyes. Also, we see how history is repeating itself, how its monstrous face is surfacing. Recently in Charlottesville, but throughout Europe and beyond, the extreme right is approaching, fortunately still on tiptoe and in *les petits pas*, which of course does not make it less dangerous. There are no small fascisms, there are no small, benign Nazisms. That is what I try to talk about in my books, the importance of remembering. In this age of aggressive revisionism—which tends to brainwash our already damaged, deformed minds—without memory, we are easy prey to manipulation, we lose identity.

INTERVIEWER

How do the archival materials in your fictions—photographs, sheet music, testimony—help you articulate or complicate the trauma of history?

DRNDIC

They do not help me, they are supposed to help the reader. The reader who has lost the capacity to imagine, to rely on the word, on language, and its immense possibilities that are less and less recognized and abused. Language has turned into tweeting, ideas are blogged, so, accordingly, the process of thinking has become shamefully simplified. But I’ve decided to

give up. In my latest book, there are few photographs and hardly any documents. The word is there to fight for its rite of passage.

INTERVIEWER

Critics seem eager to call what you do “documentary fiction.” How do you feel about that?

DRNDIC

It’s an unnecessary classification. As I see it, literature is a mélange of experienced events, proven facts, and “invented” detail which exploits language that is supposed to give it flavor, depth, spice it up, mold it, Botoxize it.

INTERVIEWER

In some ways, *Belladonna* is a litany of the failings of the human body. There is an almost masochistic attention to detail.

DRNDIC

Art is detail. I do not see the attention to detail as an act of masochism, but as the capacity to look, see, listen, and hear. Without detail—in literature, in painting, in music, et cetera—what do we get? A boring linear presentation of whatever, a skeleton, a simplified “story,” the obsession with the story is a story in itself, which is what unfortunately pacifies the public more and more today. A couple of years ago, I spent a month at a residency for writers in Tuscany. There were three or four youngish writers, late thirties, from the States, absolutely infatuated with Tuscany, who sublet their apartments and keep coming back summer after summer, which poses another set of critical questions. One evening, while talking about literature, superficially, I asked which European writers they read. There occurred an indicative silence after which I asked, Have you read Kafka, for example? One of them replied, Which of his works would you recommend? I don’t like exclamation marks in writing, but this deserves one.

As to the failings of the human body, that is a normal process. It’s the failings of the human mind that are disturbing and dangerous.

INTERVIEWER

Both *Trieste* and *Belladonna* feature pages-long lists of the names of those killed by Nazis. It is an overwhelming reading experience. What do you think this act of naming accomplishes in your writing?

DRNDIC

I do not think, I *know* what I want to say. However, I do not know how such an “act” resonates with an impatient reader. It is not only the names of the

victims of war that I list. Now, almost fanatically, although for literature onerously—that is, *needlessly*—I obsessively name people, because I see more and more clearly that their names are perhaps the last cobwebby thread which singles them out from the overall chaos of the world, from the cauldron of soggy, stale mash we are immersed in. Besides, if football—soccer—fanatics can memorize teams of players through time, it is polite at least to scan through a list of victims for whose destinies all of us bear responsibility.

INTERVIEWER

“Life is made up of separation,” you have written. “From one’s mother, from oneself, from used-up times, all made up of bright or dark gradual separations.” Do you think art functions as a kind of connective tissue, or is it merely an opportunity to aestheticize the reality of separation?

DRNDIC

Art cannot change the world, but it can change us. Art can and may aestheticize, but I do not think that is its only function. *Les belles lettres* is a heavily outdated term, therefore today a concept with hardly any weight. Art should shock, hurt, offend, intrigue, be a merciless critic of the merciless times we are not only witnessing but whose victims we have become. In this domain, the so-called intellectuals have enormously failed—by being silent, by committing treason, as Julien Benda of *La trahison des clercs* would say. Good literature asks for a trauma—a personal, collective, historical trauma, no matter—and then the ability to formulate it. Good literature does not need “a story.” It is *how* events are presented that separate good literature from mediocre fictionalized writing, so often a boring linear construction.



Now that the USA is going through “an interesting” historical period, perhaps there will be a more effective revival of literature similar to that which dominated the middle of the twentieth century. Because it is, at least for me, offensive that, for example, Jonathan Franzen goes to Albania to photograph birds for *National Geographic* and does not have the urge to say a word, let alone research,

about the life of a people in one of the most terribly oppressive systems in Europe which lasted until 1991.

INTERVIEWER

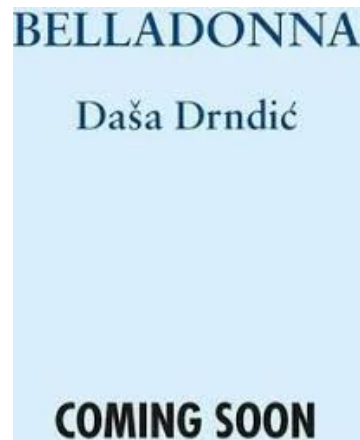
Erica Wagner referred to *Trieste* as “a powerful warning.” More than mere admonishment though, it seems to me that your novels offer a particular quality of remembrance—a salvaging of fragments that have fallen beneath time, a way of seeing.

DRNDIC

It is not my job to interpret what I write. I find it amusing, even comic, if not ridiculous, when at readings, especially of poetry, authors give a short “introduction” to their work. So that the audience would “get it.” So that there would be no misunderstanding. So that the listeners would grasp exactly what and how the “creator” wants. I love open endings, generally speaking, and not only in literature. The undefined, the unrestricted offers freedom of thought and freedom of action. The existence of didactic, logorrheic scribblers, though, is legitimate. They are marketable and easily digested. The problem is their metastatic proliferation at the expense of the ever-diminishing thinking species.

*Dustin Illingworth is a writer in Southern California. His work has appeared in The Atlantic, the Times Literary Supplement, and the Los Angeles Review of Books.*

*The Paris Review*  
August 21, 2017



*Read an excerpt from Belladonna, out in October from New Directions.*

# A Very Brief History of Gouged-Out Eyes

FICTION

By Daša Drndić



Daša Drndić (Wikipedia)

Throughout history, people have often gouged out each other's eyes, and they still do, only in secret. Through history, the plucking out of eyes then moves from life into literature and painting, where it still lives. As with Dante's harpies, those winged monsters with the head and torso of a woman, and the tail and talons of a bird of prey, which feed on the leaves of oak trees where suicides crouch, where one such tree preserves the body of the jurist and diplomat Pietro della Vigna (1190–1249), who did kill himself by beating his head against the walls of his prison, but only after the Emperor Frederick II had ordered, *Gouge his eyes out*.

All right, an eye can fall out or someone can pluck it out, but there are cases of someone gouging out his own eye, or eyes. It happens in various delusional states, particularly religious ones. In 1876, Gastone Galetti works as a waiter in Vienna and Trieste, and, when he does not work, he visits churches to which he invites his friends and acquaintances and interprets the Bible for them. In July of that same year, 1876, Gastone Galetti is on his way to Herzegovina to fight the Turks, but he is arrested and interned. One morning, the warden is startled by an unusually loud prayer coming from Gastone Galetti's room. On opening the door, he sees the unfortunate man completely covered in blood, his right eye lying on the floor and the left one hanging down his cheek. Gastone Galetti is immediately taken to the Trieste mental hospital, where he seems to have stayed until his death many years later. This unfortunate episode took place on July 25, 1876. By the end of September,

Gastone Galetti's eye sockets completely heal and Gastone assures the doctors that God had ordered him to do what he did and that he does not at all regret having obeyed God and that he hopes he will soon be able to see again.

Another known case is that of Albina Krota, who believed literally in the gospel according to Mark or Matthew, it does not matter which, because they both reel off the same horrors: *and if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and if thy hand offend thee, cut it off, and if thy foot offend thee, cut it off* (Mark 9: 43, 45, 47); *and if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee* (Matthew 18: 9). So Albina Krota gouged out both her eyes. Albina Krota's wounds also heal quickly, but unlike Gastone Galetti, she is released from the madhouse as cured and as such, cured, she carries on roaming through the world for a long time, interpreting the New Testament to people. It is interesting that both Gastone Galetti and Albina Krota, in a state of total exaltation, often repeated, *Oh, nothing hurts, nothing hurts at all*.

*The above is a selection from Dasa Drndic's forthcoming novel, [Belladonna](#), translated by Celia Hawkesworth, out in October from New Directions.*

*The Paris Review*  
August 21, 2017

Daša Drndić (born 10 August 1946, Zagreb) is a Croatian writer. She studied English language and literature at the University of Belgrade. She obtained a master's degree in theatre and communications from Southern Illinois University in the United States, which she attended with the aid of a Fulbright scholarship. She also studied at Case Western Reserve University. She obtained her doctorate at the University of Rijeka, where she later taught. She worked for many years in the drama department of Radio Belgrade, writing and producing numerous radio plays during that time. She has also worked in publishing.

The author of a number of books, Drndic is best known for her award-winning novel *Sonnenschein* (2007) which has been translated in many languages. It appeared in English translation under the title *Trieste*; the translator was Ellen Elias-Bursać. It was nominated for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. An earlier novel *Leica Format*, was translated by Celia Hawkesworth.

# Meet the Muslim Memoirist Who Works With Zionists to Try and Forge Islamic-Jewish Ties

*Haroon Moghul, the author of 'How To Be a Muslim: An American Story,' on his influences, struggles, and hopes for his new book*

## By Yair Rosenberg

I first discovered Haroon Moghul when I noticed him following me on Twitter. Normally, this wouldn't have attracted my attention, except that I was pretty sure that he disagreed with most of what I was writing. In today's world of social media silos and political polarization, it's rare to come across people who seek out viewpoints that vastly differ from their own. And given that much of my writing relates to the ideological minefield of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I almost never encounter them. Yet here was a Muslim writer and thinker who seemed to be following my work even though he often fundamentally disagreed with it—not to attack it, or me, but simply to learn.

Naturally, I asked Moghul to lunch.



*Haroon Moghul*

From him I learned about a new Muslim-Jewish project in which he'd recently taken part: the Muslim Leadership Initiative of the Shalom Hartman Institute. The program was an innovative effort by brave Jews and Muslims to understand each other's stories not by dancing around the concerns that divide their communities—Israel/Palestine chief among them—but by tackling them head-on. Fast forward to today, and Moghul is a full-time MLI staff

member overseeing the fifth cohort of young Muslim leaders who will be joining the program in Jerusalem.

Moghul's new memoir, *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story*, is many things, but it is not about this remarkable work, which began after the time period covered in the book. But in unstintingly chronicling Moghul's personal struggles with his faith, mental illness, and both the Western and Muslim worlds, the book does explain how the author became someone who could straddle even the widest ideological divides without fear.

I spoke with Moghul about his memoir, his faith, and his work.

***This is a book about yourself, and in some sense, for yourself—you describe it as a form of therapy—and for fellow Muslims who are looking for answers in a very difficult modern world. But it's also clearly intended for people quite different from yourself, including those who may not know very much about Islam, or even met any Muslims. What do you hope these people will take from it?***

I think there's a few things that I wanted to get across. The first is what it's like to struggle with doubt and faith and mental illness, and how that plays out in a person's life. Because I think that's a story that a lot of people, regardless of faith, can relate to. I also wanted to communicate something of the complexity and richness of being Muslim. A lot of the conversations we have about Islam are pretty one-dimensional; they're either glowingly positive or astonishingly negative, and I wanted to strike out a middle ground, which is where I think most Muslims—like most complex religious people—are. Finally, I thought it was an important story in terms of what it's like to feel a cleavage between your public self and your private self, and there's probably a lot of folks in this day and age who can relate to some of that.

***People often look at visibly religious individuals from the outside and impose certain expectations on them, assuming they hold certain beliefs or fulfill certain roles, even when it's not where those individuals actually are in their own faith journey.***

Yeah. For a lot of folks who are Muslim, the last sixteen years [since 9/11] have been pretty much this incredibly challenging time where you might have to work out your personal relationship to religion while the entire country and even the whole planet has a debate about your religion and the value of your religion in the world.

***In working out that personal relationship for yourself in the book, you cite a wide array of authors***

***and thinkers, from filmmakers to theologians. Are there any particular books or writers, Muslim and not, that you looked to as models for your own writing?***

There are a few books that probably influenced me pretty considerably. One was Yossi Klein Halevi's [Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist](#). [Halevi is Moghul's colleague at the Shalom Hartman Institute Muslim Leadership Initiative, and his book chronicles his journey from the far-right Jewish fringe.] I found it really interesting and helpful and enlightening to think about what it's like to inhabit an ideology and then to come to terms with your own relationship to religion. To struggle with growing up and becoming an adult and realizing that maybe the way that you think about your tradition isn't sufficiently complicated to reflect who you are as a person. Although I think calling my book "Memoirs of a Muslim Extremist" would probably have been a *bit* more charged in this political environment.

Reza Aslan's book, [No God But God](#), which is not a memoir per se but is very much an intimate, personal, and accessible study of Islam, had something that I wanted to capture, which is the ability to communicate a complex tradition in a way that anyone can pick up and say, "Oh, now I get that!"

And there's also [ex-hasid] Shulem Dean's book, [All Who Go Do Not Return](#). He and I end up on the opposite side of the same question, namely, are we supposed to believe in God, but what I found so affecting was how incredibly heart-wrenchingly honest he was. There were a few points in that book where I started tearing up because I was overwhelmed by what he was going through, and I was moved by the incredible courage it took for him to go through that life and then for him to tell that story. I recognize that even though his journey and mine go in different directions, there is something really inspiring and important about sharing your story, and for people who are struggling with the same demons to know that they're not alone.

***You clearly have a great affinity for science fiction, which comes across not just in this book, but in your other writings. You've even pondered the theological implications of extraterrestrial life. Many Jews have also been captivated by and contributed to science fiction over the years. Is there any particular work of science fiction that better helped you understand your own faith?***

I don't know if it helped me understand Islam, but Michel Faber's book [The Book of Strange New Things](#) is a novel about a Christian missionary who's sent to a planet where there's an indigenous species

that's intelligent but much more primitive than humanity. It's a really cool book because this missionary isn't exactly sure why this species wants to become Christian, and he also has no idea what's going through their heads because he has to learn their language and their culture and it's so different. So it's this incredibly intimate portrait of what it's like to try to communicate something that's deeply important to yourself to people who are literally alien. And there was an element of that with my own experience with my parents' [Muslim immigrant] background—feeling like, as a minority, you're always the stranger and you're constantly forced into translation. And I think that's something I tried to convey with the book and do with the book.

***Something that comes up in the acknowledgements to the book is that you didn't get to include a significant portion of your life, because books have editorial deadlines and memoirs have to end somewhere before the subject's actual life picks up. What didn't make it in, and is there anything you wish could have been included?***

Probably the most glaring omission is how I ended up working for the Shalom Hartman Institute, but you have to end a story at some point, and I thought it made sense to end the book right when I came back from Dubai and was trying to figure out how the different pieces of my life go back together. It's a really difficult process, and I didn't want to end the book on this simple, happy-go-lucky, *Everything's great now! I figured it all out! Now my life will have no problems and I will never make the same mistake twice!* (I have.)

What I can say is that for me to work at a Jewish educational institution that proudly identifies itself as Zionist, it's really weird and probably could not be understood without understanding my story. So, this book is the story of how I got to a place where I could contemplate working at a place like Hartman, and actually enjoy it and appreciate it and shrug off any criticism I got for it. But I had to go through all those failures, and all those trials, and all those tragedies, in order to get to a point where I'm okay with this.

**Related:** I Spent the Shabbat After Trump's Election With Muslim Leaders from Across America  
Muslim Voices After Trump [Tablet series]

*Yair Rosenberg is a senior writer at Tablet and the editor of the English-language blog of the Israeli National Archives. Follow him on Twitter and Facebook.*

Tablet June 9, 2017 • 10:26 AM

# Turkey: 4 arrested for trying to sell 700-year old Torah scroll

*An ancient Torah scroll was discovered in Turkey after four people tried to sell it on the black market to undercover police officers for almost \$2 million. The Torah scroll is believed to be 700 years old*



*The Torah scroll Photo Credit: Turkish TV/Channel 2 News*

Last week, Turkish security forces arrested four citizens who tried to sell an ancient Torah scroll on the black market. The prospective buyers were undercover police officers.

According to Turkish TV networks, the Torah scroll that was discovered in Muğla, a city in south-western Turkey, is 700 years old. The suspects were trying to sell it for \$1.9 million.

The Torah scroll has been sent to a local museum for further examination. One of the suspects is still in custody while the other three have been placed under house arrest.

*Becca Noy*

*Becca is currently completing her B.A in Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University and a member of the StandWithUs Israel Fellowship 2016. She served as an operations officer in the IDF's Givati Brigade.*

*JOL - Jerusalem On Line*

November 28, 2017,

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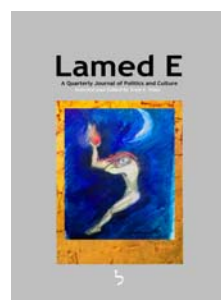
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