

Ramblings

Allan C. Brownfeld

Allan C. Brownfeld is our correspondent in Washington, D.C. He writes for Accuracy in Media.

However Difficult, Israelis and Palestinians Must Confront the Question of the Final Status of the Temple Mount

What the future holds for the Middle East peace process remains unclear. Sadly, there are many Israelis and many Palestinians who prefer continued conflict to the kind of compromises that a genuine agreement involves. Whether those who seek peace or those who refuse to make such compromises will prevail, remains to be seen.

What we can know, however, is that both Israelis and Palestinians are destined to live in the same neighborhood. The Israeli novelist and peace activist Amos Oz, writing in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, notes that

The new Israeli-Palestinian war is unnecessary and in vain. Everyone both in Israel and in Palestine knows that when it is over, there will be a two-state solution. Even people who hate this solution know that it is the only one, the unavoidable one. . . . Neither the Jews nor the Palestinians are going anywhere. They cannot live together like one happy family, because they are not one, because they are not happy and because they are hardly a family.

The best that can be hoped for at the present time, in Oz's view, is a settlement that will let Israelis and Palestinians live together, not as "brothers or sisters, just civilized neighbors."

However difficult, the parties will have to return to what became the main sticking point at Camp David, which remains the final status of the Temple Mount, known to Arabs as Haram al-Sharif.

At Camp David, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak tentatively agreed to the idea that the Palestinians should be granted religious sovereignty over the Mount, with the Israelis retaining political sovereignty. But in September, while visiting New York for the United Nations millennium meeting, Barak, who had come under fire at home for conceding too much at Camp David, reiterated that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount "are the cornerstone of the Jewish identity." He said

No Israeli prime minister will ever be able to sign a document that gives up sovereignty to the Temple Mount to Palestinians.

Menachem Klein, author of *Doves in the Jerusalem Sky*, says that,

If Arafat wants exclusive sovereignty over the Temple Mount, there will not be an agreement. Otherwise, anything else can be discussed.

A variety of solutions has been suggested: sharing sovereignty, deferring sovereignty, or even declaring that sovereignty over the Temple Mount belongs to God and therefore a treaty will deal merely with day-to-day authority.

For thirty-three years, since it captured the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, Israel had enjoyed the ambiguity of claiming that the Temple Mount “is in our hands,” while it continues to be administered by the waqf, for years an arm of the Jordanian government. After the Oslo accords, the Palestinian Authority succeeded in replacing the Jordanian officials. To do business at the Mount, Israel engages in diplomacy.

Right-wing Jewish fundamentalists in Israel and their Jewish and fundamentalist Protestant supporters in the U.S., however, are intensifying their opposition to any concessions over Israeli sovereignty on the Temple Mount.

Members of the Temple Mount Faithful and similar organizations have been holding daily demonstrations at the Old City’s Lion Gate and against the kinds of arrangements reportedly suggested by Prime Minister Barak at the Camp David summit in July.

The Temple Mount Faithful’s leader, Gershom Salomon, said the crucial moment will come if Mr. Barak signs off on an agreement transferring sovereignty over the Mount, in practical or legal terms, to the Palestinians.

Mr. Salomon said

This is not the first time that foreigners are coming and want to take the Temple Mount and Jerusalem from us, but this is the first time a Jewish government is giving the Temple Mount away of its own free will. . . . The moment such an agreement is signed, we will force our way into the Temple Mount to pray, and we will refuse to move.

These threats are not taken lightly by Israeli security forces. In 1993, Israel’s High Court of Justice denied Salomon’s petitions asking that he be allowed on the Mount to observe the Jewish holy day of Tisha b’av. At the same time, the state noted that security forces held Salomon partially responsible for the riots which broke out on the Temple Mount in 1990, in which seventeen people were killed and hundreds injured.

In the most recent conflagration at the Temple Mount, it was Ariel Sharon, a long time opponent of the peace process, who made his provocative visit accompanied by Israeli troops.

The history of the Temple Mount is a long and tangled one. Within weeks of its 1967 victory, Israel annexed the Mount, along with the rest of East Jerusalem. But the Mount was also Haram al-Sharif—and Israel let Muslim religious authorities, appointed by an Arab ruler elsewhere, continue to administer the site. Almost without exception, rabbis ruled that Jews should not set foot on the Mount, precisely because of its sanctity. In principle, Israeli law applied to the spot. In practice, the

Mount has enjoyed an undefined extra-territorial status.

The Temple Mount is the first historical location of the First and Second Temples, the place where Jews worshiped when Judaism was a religion of priests and sacrifices. Early cartographers saw Jerusalem as the center of the world and the Temple Mount as the center of that center. Jewish tradition holds that the patriarch Abraham raised the knife to slay his son Isaac there; some believe the patriarch Jacob rested his head there during his prophetic dream. King Solomon built the Temple there.

Archaeologists suggest that the site was holy to local pagans for a thousand years before King David conquered Jerusalem. A generation after they razed the Second Temple, the Romans built a temple to Jupiter on the spot. When the Islamic armies of the caliph Omar conquered Jerusalem in 638, a mosque was built, the forerunner of today's Al-Aqsa at the south end of the Mount. Another caliph, Abd al-Malik, ordered the construction of the Dome of the Rock in 691. The rock beneath the dome also has multiple meanings. In the accepted interpretation of the Koran, Muhammad had flown on a winged steed from Mecca to Jerusalem, then leapt to heaven from that rock.

Gershom Gorenberg, author of *The End of Days, Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*, to be published in December, notes that

The Mount was no different than holy places elsewhere in the world: conquerors evicted the old religion and moved their own in.

For religious fundamentalists, the Temple Mount holds an important theological position. Traditionally, Jews believed that the messiah could come only through the single meta-historical appearance of an individual redeemer. More recently, fundamentalists have given holy and redemptive status to the secular state of Israel. The Israeli victory in the Six Day War led many to believe that they were living in a messianic age. In the summer of 1980, the "Jewish Underground," which was created in reaction to the 1978 Camp David accords, engaged in a variety of terrorist acts, including blowing up the cars of several West Bank Arab mayors. Also planned, but never carried out, was the destruction of the Muslim Dome of the Rock. The reason: so the Third Temple could be constructed, ushering in the messiah.

Many activists are not bothered by the prospect that their opposition could scuttle an agreement, possible leading Israel into another war. Some seem to welcome the possibility, believing that from the ensuing chaos would emerge a new Israeli leadership not afraid to take bold steps to assert Jewish control over the Temple Mount—and, perhaps, even build the Third Temple.

It is not, needless to say, only Jewish fundamentalists who are unwilling to negotiate a compromise settlement over the Temple Mount. Waqf spokesman Adnan Husseini, for example, says

This is a closed file. The issue has been settled by God, and there will be no negotiations on the Haram al-Sharif. Muslims can't discuss it and can't make any compromise. This is the stance that every Palestinian and Arab

and Muslim will adopt, forever.

In reality, solutions could be achieved without inordinate difficulty. Leonard Fein, expressing a view shared by many American Jewish observers, points out that the intimate juxtaposition of Jewish and Muslim traditions “renders the Temple Mount unique.” He argues that,

It is the place where the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem meet, a place where the sacred and the symbolic have a physical geography. Plainly, there can be no such thing as sovereignty over the heavenly Jerusalem—not, at any rate, sovereignty as understood conventionally. Plainly, however, our instinctive reaction to territory is that it must belong to someone, that territory not only invites, but requires, sovereignty. However, insofar as the earthly Jerusalem is significant . . . was there ever a place so appropriately viewed as “No Man’s Land,” that land that acknowledges no earthly power at all? Make the Temple Mount this man’s land or that man’s land, Israel’s or the Palestinian’s, and you diminish—even demean—the sacred traditions that hover there. . . . What is required is only that the religious imagination be nudged into a recognition that it is precisely the centrality of the Temple Mount that renders it a genuine *corpus separatum*, God’s little acre, that cannot, ought not, and need not, be owned by anyone. . .

In reality, Muslims have had autonomy on the Mount since 1967 and Israelis have had sovereignty. Now that an arrangement for the Mount must be signed, sealed and legislated, both sides are reluctant. Given that reluctance, the voices of extremists on both sides—who engage in a form of idolatry by worshiping geography—have increased weight, making a settlement that much more difficult.

If there is a will for peace, the details can be worked out. But if no such will exists—on one side or another—or both—the future will be bleak indeed. There is now a chance to step away from the precipice. Hopefully, it will be taken.

Decline of Public Schools Has Led to a Shortfall in High-tech Workers, an Increased Reliance on Immigrants and Growing Security Concerns

The decline of our public schools, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science, has led to a shortage of high-tech specialists and an increasing reliance on immigrants, even in U.S. government programs with a high security component such as nuclear weapons development and missile defense systems.

Early in October, Congress overwhelmingly approved legislation to increase the number of visas for highly skilled foreign workers. The vote displayed a rare example of bipartisanship in a Congress where the two parties have been deadlocked over some of the most important items.

“Whether it’s Silicon Valley or my own state of Michigan, the need for these workers is extraordinary,” said Senator Spencer Abraham (R-Michigan), a principal sponsor of the bill.

Senator Abraham said that studies indicate that as many as one million information technology positions are unfilled, with up to 200,000 new jobs likely to be created in each of the next ten years.

A report issued in September by the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching, headed by former Senator John Glenn (D-Ohio), called the nation's progress in math and science education "just plain unacceptable." Senator Glenn pointed out that U.S. students finished near last among forty-two nations in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSSO). "The gap must be closed, and we can do this," he said, reciting statistics he called "scary."

Sixty percent of all new jobs in the twenty-first century require skills possessed by only twenty percent of the work force, noted Glenn, who added that one-fourth of all U.S. math and science teachers did not have majors or minors in those subjects. Glenn declared

Our nation is losing ground . . . compared to other nations around the world. The military security of the United States will depend on math and science.

The level of math and science education is shockingly low. Of the fifty states, only three require more than two years of math for high school graduation. More than a third of public high school graduates never took a full course in basic algebra. Almost half (forty-five percent) never took intermediate algebra. Only one in eight students did the minimum work in trigonometry.

The "Schools and Staffing Survey" conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that almost half of the secondary school math teachers are not equipped to teach that subject.

In Japan, for example, sixty percent of the students take advanced work, which includes trigonometry and some calculus. The other forty percent are on a slower track. Professor Richard Askey, a mathematician at the University of Wisconsin, says:

If our students could do as well as the slower Japanese track, it would be an advance. Secretary of Education Riley talks about our becoming number one in math, but even the new higher standards he advocates are no better than those of the slower Japanese. It's ridiculous. Our middle school is a good place to get students started on more advanced math, but we've made no progress.

There has been an anti-intellectual bias in the design of the curriculum for American high schools. Nobel laureate Glenn T. Seaborg believed that science education must feature rigorous memorization of fundamentals. Otherwise, he said, students will never think abstractly—an approach which is the reverse of contemporary educational theory. Seaborg, two other Nobel laureates, and thirty other scientists offered to write a curriculum (from kindergarten through high school) for the state of California at no cost. They were turned down, and the contract was given to professional educators for \$178,000. The educators

charged that Seaborg and his colleagues were pushing traditional science, which they feared was too “elitist.” Their proof? They said that science was dominated by white males.

Leon M. Lederman, Nobel laureate in physics, says that

The causes of scientific illiteracy—the superficiality, misinformation, ignorance and downright hostility toward science we encounter at virtually all levels of school—are numerous.

He is particularly concerned about the absence of physics in the high school curriculum, which guarantees that students “will have little idea of the fundamental forces that govern atomic and molecular interactions.”

In his book, *Conspiracy of Ignorance*, Martin L. Gross writes that

While ninety-three percent of students in public high schools take biology and fifty-four percent take chemistry before they graduate, only twenty-four percent—less than one in four—study physics. One would assume that a high school education would include all three . . . but only twenty percent of the graduates—one in five—take all three basic science courses. In many European countries, the study of physics, which is never taken here by most students, begins in middle school. The top-achieving science nations, like the Scandinavians, teach physics every year beginning in the sixth grade. In America, only a handful of schools, usually private ones, are beginning to promote physics.

The cost to American business of the inferior teaching of mathematics and science is large. Corporations complain that as many as one-third of new hires need remedial training after high school to become job literate. David Kearns, former CEO of Xerox, estimated that the failure of public school education costs U.S. industry at least \$50 billion a year.

American technology runs heavily on the skills of foreign students who regularly defeat the U.S. in world competition. Though American public schools leave the mass of youngsters unprepared in math and science, the U.S. does have the finest technical institutions in the world, which attract top students from other countries. While only a small segment of American students make it to these elite schools, foreign students take up the slack, providing the needed talent.

Overall, some forty-five percent of all the 13,000 Ph.D.’s in the hard sciences are awarded each year to non-Americans. In the most vital high-tech fields, the number of foreign students is even higher, approximately fifty percent. Because of our inability to educate our own students in these areas, the U.S. has become increasingly dependent upon the outside world for technical expertise.

Speaking of the general failure in the teaching of mathematics, the U.S. Department of Education states: “Half of the 17-year-olds lack math skills commonly taught not in their 11th grade, but in junior high school.” This record would be even worse if it hadn’t been buoyed up by studious Asian-American students who scored 331 in federally supported exams, as against an average score

of less than 300 for 17-year-olds in general.

In recent days, Washington has been shaken by the case of Wen Ho Lee, a Chinese-American nuclear weapons scientist at the Los Alamos laboratories. In an probe that began eight years ago as an effort to determine how China obtained highly classified information from American weapons laboratories, Lee became the target of an extensive investigation. In the end, Lee entered a plea-bargain agreement and admitted to a single felony charge of downloading classified nuclear weapons designs.

Whatever Lee's innocence or guilt, the case has put a spotlight on the dependence of the U.S. Government upon foreign-born scientists. Physicist Robert Richardson notes that

Every physics, engineering and life sciences department has brilliant young scientists born in Asia and the Pacific Rim. And we'd be in deep trouble if we didn't have them.

The most important lesson of the Lee case, argues Alan Chodos, a senior research physicist at Yale,

. . . is not that we must guard against foreign nationals who are conspiring to infiltrate our national laboratories. Rather, it's that American scientific preeminence is at risk because there are so few good young American physicists and labs must fill their ranks instead with foreign-born scientists. . . . Although foreign physicists may make excellent scientists who can fill these openings, concerns over spying will make the national laboratories want to hire American-born physicists, a group that is continuing to shrink.

If nothing else, the controversy over Wen Ho Lee has focused renewed attention on the decline of science and math in America's failed public school system. As long as our requirements for high school graduation are slim, and our teachers are not compelled to major in the subjects they teach, there is little reason to hope for any improvement in the near future. Massive education reform is needed, and our politicians—both Republican and Democrat—have failed to provide the leadership necessary to move in that direction. Ω