By Sacha Wigdorovits

A few months ago, I was contacted on Facebook by a man named Paul (name changed) because of the war in Gaza. He’s Swiss, in his early seventies, and formerly held a senior position in the federal administration. Since then, Paul and I have been communicating regularly on WhatsApp, and we’ve even spoken on the phone once.

When it comes to the war in Gaza, Paul and I have completely opposing views. Still, I respect that he takes time to understand the situation (even if, in my opinion, his conclusions are often wrong), that he shares constructive, independent thoughts about possible solutions, and that our conversations are always polite and factual.

Paul is a strong critic of Israel. While he agrees that Hamas must be removed from power, he believes this should happen “without killing tens of thousands of women and children and turning civilian infrastructure into rubble,” as he put it.

He thinks Israel should “try something new”: for instance, release all administrative detainees or create a joint expert council to promote civil equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank.

Paul suggests isolating Hamas by integrating Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza into Israeli society—granting them equal rights in daily life but withholding political rights for the first 10 or 20 years. He’s convinced that Palestinians are a “hardworking, peace-loving people” and that “hatred of Jews is not dominant” among them.

To protect the existence and rights of Jews in this proposed unified state—where there would be roughly nine to ten million Palestinians and only around seven million Jews—Paul envisions a constitutionally guaranteed minority protection for Jews.

All of this is wishful thinking. It wouldn’t solve the immediate problem: Hamas must be eliminated as quickly as possible to end its control over Gaza’s Palestinians and to prevent another October 7.

Moreover, this model would essentially amount to the “from the river to the sea” solution—the eradication of the Jewish state—called for loudly on our streets, mainly by leftists and Islamists. (Paul, to be clear, is not one of them.)

Above all, such proposals have nothing to do with the realities or mindsets of the Middle East. They assume that things work there as they do in Europe. But they don’t.

Anyone who believes that the problems of the Middle East can be solved through reasoned arguments, balanced compromise, and faith in human goodness is dreaming.

Such thinking ignores the millennia-long history of this region. It fails to see that the Middle East still operates in a far more archaic way than Europe does today.

Wars between different cultures—like those once fought in Europe between Romans and Germanic tribes, or during the Christian defense against the Moors and later the Ottomans—are not ancient history in the Middle East. They are current reality.

This part of the world remains deeply shaped—more than most Europeans are willing to admit—by mutual mistrust and hatred. This is especially true of the antisemitism that has been deeply rooted in Muslim society since its inception over 1,400 years ago.

Hatred of Jews in Islam dates back directly to the Prophet Muhammad and has resurfaced throughout history in Muslim pogroms—long before the creation of Israel or the settlements in the West Bank.

It is therefore no surprise that this antisemitism is still taught today in Palestinian children’s television shows and schoolbooks—with generous funding from the EU and Switzerland—not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank.

This hatred is not limited to extremist terrorist organizations like Hamas or Islamic Jihad, as is often claimed in Europe. It permeates the entire Palestinian population.

Such hatred prevents any sober, analytical view within Palestinian society and its leadership. It also breeds counter-hatred, which has recently become increasingly visible in Israel among right-wing parties and their supporters, especially among settlers in the West Bank.

In Europe, the political consequences of this phenomenon are completely misunderstood. But it’s clear that in a region dominated by hatred and mistrust, only those who are militarily strong can survive.

Alliances there are not formed because of shared “values,” as they are in Europe. They are forged for practical reasons—political, military, economic, or a mix of all three.

When we try to export our own European ways of thinking and our belief in compromise and dialogue to the Middle East in order to promote peace, it’s naive, self-righteous, and utterly pointless.

This is something that European governments, parties, and politicians calling for the recognition of “Palestine” and the immediate implementation of the UN’s 1947 two-state solution should bear in mind.

Because it will not happen.

Yes, one day the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians will be settled at the negotiating table. But no one can predict what that outcome will be.

The Arab rejection of the 1947 UN partition plan, the failed joint peace efforts of U.S. President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 2000–2001, Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the peace offer made by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008, and Lebanon’s recent announcement to disarm Hezbollah after Israel largely eliminated the group—all point to one conclusion: peace in the Middle East comes only after military victory and the enemy’s defeat. Just as it did in Europe and Japan in 1945.

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