The Long Accounting ...
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The explosion in the Middle East has a fuse that goes back to the dawn of history but the men now fighting respond to the events they know and feel. The old folk among them remember the Balfour Declaration of fifty years ago. Some were alive in 1897 when Theodore Herzl called the conference in Basel where, as he prophetically wrote, "I founded the Jewish state."

But those who fight today are trying to settle accounts stemming from events set in motion hardly a quarter-century ago. Following the unspeakable atrocities against Europe's Jews under Hitler, an attempt to bring about a peaceful partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states after the end of World War II failed; but out of the ensuing struggle —in 1948 in the first of the Jewish-Arab conflicts— came Israel.

Just as many historians see the Second World War as a delayed continuation of the First, so one can say today that the struggle which began in 1948, which flared up again in 1956, and which burst into flames once more yesterday, constitutes a still unended war.

Nothing was settled—not ever—and this is the tragedy of the Middle East. The great Palestinian Arab exodus of 1948 that has spread a million or more embittered refugees all over the Arab world; the humiliation of the Egyptian forces by the Israelis in 1956; the Syrian terrorism; the Israeli reprisals in Syria and Jordan; the Egyptian and Arab insistence on remaining in a "state of war" with Israel—these are some of the unsettled accounts. More virulent than anything that happened is the hatred of Arabs for Israelis and the fears of Israelis under constant threat of annihilation.

Instead of a settlement there has been the uneasy balance of the past eleven years. It was to a certain extent held in place by Russian arms and political support for Egypt and Syria and by a more neutral support for both Israel and some Arab nations by the United States and France.

Even this briefest of summaries shows that so long as there is unfinished business in the Middle East there can be a truce, but there will be no peace. No matter how the present war turns out, there will be the explosive material of war unless or until the fundamental fact of history is accepted that there is an Israeli nation and that it has a right to exist in peace.

How ironical it is that a Jewish state should stand in the ancient land of Palestine like Ruth "amid the alien corn," surrounded by so many millions of enemies from Morocco and the Sudan to Pakistan. They all belong there, whether Moors, Arabs, Jews or Iranians. Before Mohammed and before Jesus, they fought each other, but they all lived within those lands, as of right.

Today, one can only seek an end to the war; but tomorrow one must seek a lasting reconciliation.

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