

international conferences. This led to her desire to live abroad, arriving in the U.S. in 1978.

Living in the free atmosphere of America, she gradually realized the horrific impact and the evil of the indoctrination that she and all Arab children are subjected to. Years later, after the 9/11 tragedy, she started writing in support of Israel and against the current Islamist culture of hate and violence.

Nonie Darwish believes that the kind of Islam taught by most mosques in the U.S. is subversive, extreme and follows a radical Wahabi agenda. She is eager to see a major reformation in how Islam is taught in order to embody, once again, the best in Islam - so that Moslems can contribute to the uplifting of the human spirit and the advancement of civilization, as was their role in centuries past.

In terms of human rights, respect and equality under the law, she supports a diverse Middle East with protection for all minorities, including Jews and Christians. She blames Arab media and the lies of the Arab leadership for the misinformation and incitement of the 'Arab Street' that produces rage and violence.

Married and the mother of three, Nonie is now a freelance writer, a public speaker and an interpreter. Her articles have been published widely and she speaks throughout the U.S.A. to convey her message of reconciliation, acceptance and understanding. She runs the website www.ArabsForIsrael.com.

By Nonie Darwish

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WILL THE GAZA EVACUATION BRING PEACE?

A child of Egyptian parents, I grew up in Egyptian occupied Gaza during the 1950s. Because I know and understand the culture of the area, I have troubling questions about Israel's Gaza evacuation. Will it bring hope and a new beginning to the Arabs of Gaza who have never ruled themselves before? Will it bring peace to Israel's Southern border? Will the people of Gaza reject the status of being permanent victims in the Arab world and start living in peace? Will they reject Arab meddling and the use of Gaza as shooting grounds into Israel? Will they end the culture of hate, terror and retaliation? Will the people in the Jabalia camp reject the title of "refugees"? Will Egypt start allowing fellow Arabs from Gaza to travel freely into the Sinai and Egypt? And most importantly, will the Gaza people *end terrorism*?

I have mixed feelings about Israel's evacuation and wonder if the citizens of Gaza will meet the challenges facing them, especially since the dynamics in Arab politics and press are still the same as they have always been.

When the West Bank and Gaza were under Arab control, citizens from those areas allowed Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia to use their land to attack Israel and constantly incite against the new Jewish State. Arab countries used these areas to fight Israel and everything else become secondary in the Arab psyche, even the safety and security of the Arab people.

Egypt and Jordan, who occupied Gaza and the West Bank in 1948-1967, conducted daily guerrilla attacks on Israel, especially in Gaza 1954-1956. Nasser created the *Fedayeen* group that carried out cross-border terror attacks against Israelis. That was prior to the 1967 war and "Israeli occupation". Aspiring to unify the Arab world under his command, President Nasser used the threat to destroy Israel as the badge of pride and honour for Arab leadership. I witnessed this firsthand because my own father headed the *Gaza Fedayeen*.

Back then, surrounding Arab countries shamed, blamed, bribed, pampered and abused Palestinians to fight and never accept Israel, turning them into sacrificial lambs for Arab glory. In a culture based on pride and shame, Palestinians had to prove that they were worthy of respect by attacking Israel.

Nasser imprisoned Gazans who dared to cross the borders into Israel for peaceful reasons. They were branded as traitors and some were killed on the spot. The Egyptian authorities arrested them for “violating the *Hudna*” (temporary cease-fire). Ironically, Egypt later took 52 of these prisoners and started the first *Fedayeen* unit to do exactly what they were imprisoned for in the first place. They were trained to cross the border and cause as much damage, death and destruction as possible against Israelis.

My father was killed as a result of these operations and was hailed as a national hero, a “*Shahid*” (martyr). Nasser vowed that all of Egypt would take revenge, ignoring the possible consequences of such retaliation.

Very few people know that the Palestinians’ first ‘*Intifada*’ was in 1955 *against the Egyptian authorities in Gaza* who imprisoned many of them and subjected them to constant crossfire. In the tiny Gaza Strip, Palestinians were sandwiched between Israel and the rest of the Arab world and needed a visa to even visit Egypt. The infrastructure and economy in the West Bank and Gaza were neglected by Arabs who only gave them weapons for terrorism. Palestinians have been simply exploited and sacrificed as the frontline of Arab *jihād*.

In Gaza elementary schools we learned to praise hate, vengeance and retaliation, never peace. The “Glory of Battle” was the ultimate honour. They scared us about Jews and taught us to solve disputes through violence. I was told not to take any candy from strangers since it could be a Jew trying to poison me. Girls were in tears reciting *Jihadist* poetry and pledging to give up their lives as “martyrs”.

Several generations were brought up under this severe indoctrination. Yesterday’s *Fedayeen* became today’s suicide bombers. Like robots they pride themselves in killing Jews while killing themselves in the hope of going to heaven. Tunnels are still being dug to smuggle arms into Gaza. The extreme living conditions in Gaza produced people who have not experienced normal living for over a half a century.

I sometimes wonder why Arabs cannot stand Jews to live in their vast lands, while Jews respect and allow Arabs to live in their tiny country. The Arabs just do not see the hypocrisy.

I am not sure if the Gaza evacuation will bring peace to Israel and prosperity to the people of Gaza. I respect Israel’s attempts of goodwill to pursue peace, but Arabs have not reciprocated the same message through their actions. At the end of Mubarak’s term, the political situation in Egypt is unpredictable and many Egyptians are worried about the radicals taking over. I received e-mails from Egyptians who say “Egypt is boiling with anger and frustration”. Gaza’s stability is closely linked to the stability of Egypt.

Will the people of Gaza finally stand up for peace after Israel’s evacuation or will they go back to the old days of *Fedayeen*, *jihād* and terror? Have they learned the lesson from the decades of turmoil and chaos? Do they even remember how to live in a peaceful, orderly society? If Israel withdraws, the Arabs of Gaza can take this opportunity to finally stand up for peace and end terrorism. Personally, I am not very optimistic, but it is up to the Arabs of Gaza.

Nonie Darwish was born in Cairo and raised in the Gaza Strip in the 1950s. Nonie’s father had been sent to Gaza under orders of President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, to head Fedayeen operations against Israel. The Fedayeen were the first organized terrorists from Arab lands, sent to conduct guerilla style operations inside Israeli territory and cause as much death and destruction as possible to the Jewish nation. Nonie was raised in this atmosphere of intense hatred of Israel, with her own father spearheading the wish of the Arab world to destroy Israel. Since her family had been sent by Nasser to live in the war zone of Gaza, she and her siblings attended Palestinian elementary schools where she suffered the intense indoctrination of hatred and anti-Semitism.

In 1956, however, her father was assassinated in the Jihad against Israel. He became a national hero, a “Shahid” (Martyr) and a symbol of the resistance against the Zionist state. Nonie was only 8 years old. She believes that the culture of Jihad and rabid anti-Semitism caused his death, and from this early age she was repelled by that culture and the hatred it engendered.

Her mother took the family back to Cairo where Nonie grew to maturity, eventually studying at the American University of Cairo, where she earned a Bachelors Degree in Sociology/Anthropology. Working as an editor and translator at the Middle East News Agency, she attended several local and