

# Farewell Israel: Bush, Iran and The Revolt of Islam

Written and Directed by Joel Gilbert

Film Review by Rael Jean Isaac



Joel Gilbert has pulled off a remarkable tour de force: in "Farewell Israel" he has produced a technically sophisticated, visually imaginative, scholarly documentary that manages in the space of 145 minutes to investigate the belief system and history of Islam, the development of the Arab-Israel conflict (more accurately the Muslim-Jewish conflict) and the aftermath of 9/11. The documentary's enormous achievement is in bringing all this together to show incontrovertibly the total misunderstanding of Islam that shapes the policy follies of the West in general and the U.S. and Israel in particular. The potentially deadly results are summed up in the foreboding title—Farewell Israel.

Following a striking opening in which Iran's Ahmadinejad calls for "Death to Israel," the first half of the documentary offers a crash course on Islam, which Gilbert makes visually interesting through the skilful use of Islamic art, maps and graphics. (Himself a musician, Gilbert also makes good use of an original score.) This first section is centered visually by a mosque, with doors which Gilbert opens to reveal facets of Islamic doctrine and history. While lengthy and dense with information, this part of the documentary is essential to understanding more recent events. For example, Gilbert shows how Mohammad's conflicts with the Jewish tribes of the Arabian peninsula formed the basis for the development of Islam's relationship with both Jews and Christians, both tolerated in an inferior dhimmi status to a superior Islam.

Gilbert describes the amazingly rapid conquests of Islam (within a century its empire grew to be larger than the Roman empire at its height) which fortified Believers in their sense of Islam's superiority, the Golden Age of Islamic cultural achievements, and the crushing blow to Believers when the West, thanks to its growing technological edge, first turned back Islam from its European conquests and eventually assumed imperial control of much of the Islamic heartland. Given the framework of Islamic beliefs, all of this was difficult to understand and impossible for Muslims to accept. The feeling grew that Islam had lost its way and would have to turn inward, that in the phrase that has become famous, "Islam is the solution!"

Gilbert depicts the rise of Zionism and shows how the establishment of Israel and the military victory over the combined Arab states by the despised Jews posed an unbearable challenge to Islam that had to be reversed at all costs. By conveying the tremendous shock posed to Islamic beliefs, which were scrupulously laid out in the first part of the documentary, Gilbert is able to make the viewer understand Islamic attitudes and assertions that otherwise seem wildly overstated and hard to credit seriously. For example, Egypt's Nasser is shown declaring that Israel is the greatest crime in the history of mankind, while Muslim religious leaders fulminate that Israel must be destroyed lest Zionism succeed in replacing Islam and destroying Islamic identity.

But the key theme of this film is the lethal misunderstanding of the Islamic world view and its goals which bedevils Israeli policies as well as those of the United States. One of my favorite passages in the film, because it typifies the theme so perfectly, is the juxtaposition of a huge peace rally in Israel, with blue and white balloons flying and Israeli singer Miri Aloni belting out Shir Lashalom (Song to the Peace) with Arafat's urging his people to fight on. The camera goes back and forth, interlarding snippets from the Israeli rally with Arafat's incitement. The singer thrusts the microphone first before Peres, then Rabin, standing on the platform with her, who join in singing "Don't just say the day will arrive, cheer only for peace" while Arafat shouts "Fight, fight, fight" and "Jihad, jihad, jihad" and "We will march to Jerusalem."

In another fine section, Gilbert examines Sadat's strategy in coming to Jerusalem in 1977, the performance that so bedazzled the Jews and indeed the entire world. We see him address the Knesset and Gilbert shows how Sadat's words had different meanings than the way they were understood by his audience. (This too is an important underlying theme of the documentary—the way in which the same words, including "peace," "freedom," "tyranny" are understood differently by Islam and the West.)

Sadat keeps saying that peace must be based on "justice" (Gilbert notes that he uses the word fifteen times in that one speech) and defines justice (if only his listeners had paid more attention) as Israel's disappearance. "Justice," says Sadat, requires Israel to give up all the territories taken in the 1967 conflict and the return of Palestinian Arab refugees. Sadat also proclaims that Jewish independence in Palestine is illegitimate in its totality ("the land did not belong to you"). As Gilbert notes, the "peace and justice" which Sadat offers Israel in that famous speech is really only dhimmi rights in a Muslim Palestine.

And so, at the end of the Camp David negotiations, when we see Begin declaring "peace now celebrates a great victory" we can understand how Sadat saw the situation in a wholly different way – Islam had taken a major step in reducing Israel's territory on the path to her elimination.

Gilbert has assembled some wonderful historical footage. As Nazism

gathered force, we see Vladimir Jabotinsky testifying on behalf of Jewish statehood before the British Royal Commission in 1936, delivering those famous lines in which he compared the claims of the Arabs and Jews to Palestine to the claims of appetite as against the claims of starvation. And, we see Chaim Weizmann and David Ben Gurion testifying with surprisingly little conviction to that same commission, the first saying Jewish statehood might have to be put off for "hundreds of years." We also see the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini (Arafat's uncle and Adolph Eichmann's close friend) inspecting the Bosnian Moslem troops he had mobilized in Hitler's service.

Coming closer to the present, Gilbert shows how Arafat (banished to Tunisia, discredited and defeated in the wake of the first Gulf war when the PLO sided with Saddam) was rescued from oblivion by Israel's Labor government. In another visual gem, Gilbert shows Peres, in the aftermath of Oslo, echoing Sadat's demands for Israeli withdrawals one by one, this time as Israeli policy. Israel, Gilbert notes, was now in agreement with Sadat's diplomatic strategy "of stages" against her, believing this would bring peace! And Gilbert produces some fantastic recent footage of a hapless Peres falling asleep as he is asked about Iran's intentions and coming to consciousness looking as lost and foolish as he – and the government he represents – has come to be.

Gilbert rightly sums up the Netanyahu years with a single pithy sentence: promising to revoke the Oslo Accords, he simply continued them at a slower pace and having accomplished nothing was replaced by Labor. Where does the peace process come into all this? Nowhere at all. Gilbert demonstrates conclusively that there is, and can be, no peace process that leaves Israel standing as a Jewish sovereign state. Gilbert shows how after 300 years of decline Islam is undergoing a revival, and central to that revival is the rock-solid determination that the land occupied by Israel be returned to Dar al-Islam, the territory of Islam. Gilbert says "Islam must reacquire Palestine to redeem itself from Westernization on the path to successful Islamic revival."

But it is not only Israel that misreads Islam. Gilbert takes us into the aftermath of 9/11 in which he argues that President Bush fell into the Islamist trap. In a sobering, if indirect slap at the "Bush doctrine," i.e. bringing democracy to the Middle East -- and the doctrine's neoconservative supporters -- Gilbert argues that given the current "Revolt of Islam" genuinely free elections will only bring Islamists to power. This is precisely what happened in the Palestinian elections which the Bush administration insisted be held. With his talent for unearthing the perfect film clip, Gilbert shows Chamberlain on his return from Munich in 1938, but rather than seeing him pronounce the famous sentence promising "peace in our time," we see England's Prime Minister say that after his meeting with Herr Hitler he feels satisfied that "each of us fully understands what is in the mind of the other." What better way of making the point that Bush has as much insight into Islam (the religion of peace!) as Chamberlain had into the mind of Herr Hitler?

Gilbert makes no bones that Israel—and the Jews of the world not far behind—will bear the most lethal consequences of Islam's obsession with destroying Israel on the path to Islamic revival. But he offers scant comfort to the West. The documentary concludes with Gilbert's warning that the loss of Israel will erode, not enhance, the West's security, for the goal of the revived Islamist movement that we see enunciated by Ahmadinejad – bringing the whole world to Islam – will now only be pressed the harder.

I have one small cavil and that concerns the documentary's subtitle "Bush, Iran and the Revolt of Islam." In terms of accurately reflecting what the film is about, a better subtitle would focus on the West's misunderstanding of Islam.

Most documentaries are specially suited to a particular audience, but in this case the audience should rightfully be huge. For starters, every single reader of Outpost should see and see again this documentary, for there is no way to fully absorb it in one viewing. (This much is easily accomplished by ordering the DVD from AFSI.) It should be required viewing for every politician and bureaucrat, beginning with the President and his Secretary of State. It should be seen by every American who thinks Islam is similar to Christianity or Judaism. It should be seen by everyone who believes there is such a thing as a Middle East peace process.

Perhaps most important of all, every Israeli needs to see this documentary (which means the narration must be translated into Hebrew). Farewell Israel cannot fail to wake up at least some people from the delusional somnolent state into which most of the population has lapsed. But perhaps the last word belongs to a viewer from San Diego who wrote into the documentary's website: "Where it should go is on national TV and replayed at least three times a week for a year."

This film will be distributed on a free DVD included in the Billboard Magazine section of the Jerusalem Post on Friday, January 30th. The film trailer and more info at: [www.farewellisrael.com](http://www.farewellisrael.com)

