

AMBASSADOR Modai is wrong if he thinks Israeli oppression of Palestinians is not a recruiting sergeant for al-Qaida (Analysis, Sept 24).

The present head of the CIA, General David Petraeus, said it was in a report he presented to the US Senate in March last year, in his then role as head of US Central Command. He wrote: "The [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of US favouritism for Israel.

Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR [area of responsibility] and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-Qaida and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilise support."

It follows from this that Israel could make a major contribution to reducing the appeal of extremism by ending its 44-year long occupation and oppression of Palestinians by withdrawing back to the 1967 borders, so that a Palestinian state can be established in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

An as indication of its good intentions in this regard, Israel should cease its opposition to Palestine becoming a UN member state and should persuade its US ally to withdraw its threat to veto our application for membership in the Security Council. Such a step by Israel and the US would have immediate effect in reducing tensions in the Middle East and the likelihood of its otherwise spread much beyond.

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