

Israelis, Palestinians both have rights to Jerusalem

The tribute to Teddy Kollek by George Weigel (CR, Jan. 18) was for a remarkable man who participated in the birth of Israel. Mr. Weigel, in his glowing tribute to Mayor Kollek, refers to the intifada and how it made cooperation with the Palestinians impossible. That remark reminds us that the struggle in the Middle East and for Jerusalem is one driven by two compelling narratives. Teddy Kollek represents one – the one Americans know the most about. It is the narrative of the Holocaust and the struggle of the Jews for a homeland. The other is the Palestinian narrative of the Nakbah, the Arab word for catastrophe, inflicted on the Palestinian people in 1948 and again in 1967.

Each day, the plight of the Palestinians becomes more desperate. They continue to be forced into ever-smaller enclaves or forced to leave their homeland altogether. Most Americans don't seem to know or care much about that narrative, but the Palestinians and over a billion Muslims and Christian Arabs around the world do. These two narratives are the banners waved in the conflict that has raged for six decades. Two peoples each with compelling stories to tell about the same piece of land.

Mr. Weigel speaks from the perspective of the Jewish narrative, which treats Jerusalem as a Jewish city. But the Palestinian narrative claims an historic right to participate in the governance of Jerusalem. To have acknowledged Teddy Kollek as the mayor of Jerusalem would have been to deny that right.

The Palestinians are not alone in making such a claim. The Catholic Church has historically backed these claims by supporting the U.N. Security Council Resolutions that call on Israel to leave territories taken by war in 1967.

The world also yearns for a strife-free Jerusalem where people of all religions can move freely. But that cannot happen until both the Jewish and Palestinian narratives are honored, until the occupation ends and Palestinian rights are restored, and until Israel accepts legally recognized borders.