

Poets

In another small and divided country, the Jews and Arabs of Israelestine have been at each others throats since at least 1910. A divorce here might be a blessing for all concerned but the problem of how to divide their common property is making this all but impossible.

I was pleased to learn from *The Jerusalem Post* therefore that the Jewish part of Israelestine plans to introduce Arabic lessons as part of the core curriculum for its schoolchildren. While it is hard to imagine this leading to a tidal wave of peace, love and understanding in the region it certainly can't hurt to bring Hebrew speakers closer to the language of their traditional enemies. Heck, it might even encourage one or two friendships across the divide. I mean, by learning German I've been able to make friends with a couple of Krauts, even after what the Kaiser did to my grandad.

An article in *Haaretz* offered yet more hope of some reconciliation. A group of soldiers doing checkpoint duty on the West Bank decided, all on their own, to modify the language they used with the Arabs in these uncomfortable encounters. The Arabic they learned in their IDF training consisted of simple commands of the basic kind. Walk, stay, sit. So, instead, they began to address the Arabs with "pleasant greetings and respectful, traditional blessings", and they also made a point of not pointing their guns at anybody. And, lo, it came to pass that the waiting Arabs responded in kind. Said an officer, "...there was not one moment of tension or disturbance throughout the three weeks we were there."

Changing the checkpoint conversation was the idea of a reservist who is also a poet. Eliaz Cohen was quoted as saying, "I wanted to use language as a means of seeing the other side as equal human beings, not just as potential security risks." If ever there were proof needed of the usefulness of poets this must surely be it.