

The Oppression of the Palestinians



NOTHING IN THESE ARTICLES is intended to give support to the antisemites seeking the destruction of the Jewish state. However, it is a discussion of the predicament in which Zionism and Israeli society finds itself.

This situation is not restricted to the current Israel-Hamas War. Indeed, it lies at the heart of the Jewish state. Israel is an ethno-religious state. As such Jews have a built-in advantage over its Arab citizens. It is a state rather like Pakistan, founded at around the same time, to provide special or privileged citizenship to people of a particular ethnicity.

Consequently, despite the Zionist's best intentions, Israel can never offer or provide equality of opportunity, or equality of outcomes, to those citizens who are not Jews. This conundrum is built into the idea and fact of any ethno-religious state, and cannot

be resolved with voting rights or good intentions.

However, the particular circumstances in which Zionism arose in response to the failure of the struggle for *Jewish emancipation* during the course of the nineteenth-century can never be forgotten. Zionism is the product of what I refer to as “the long holocaust” which commenced with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, in 1881, and ended with the post-war Polish pogroms of 1945-6. Of course, the most intense period of the killings was 1941 to the defeat of the Third Reich early in May 1945, but the almost routine discrimination, brutalising, and murder of Jews was a daily reality throughout Eastern Europe from 1881.

There is no getting around these facts, nor of the mass expulsion of Jews in the late nineteen-forties and early fifties from North Africa, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. These people were robbed of all their assets and possessions, and left with no alternative, but escape to Israel.

Yet, we cannot forget the continuing tragedy of the Palestinians or the role of the Zionist state in this intractable disaster. Here is a column I published five years ago which I think is particularly relevant to the current situation:

“KILLING PALESTINIANS

Recently [May 2018] young Israeli soldiers shot sixty-two, mostly unarmed, rioters on Israel’s border with Gaza. It has been established by the Israel Defence Force that some eight or nine protestors were armed, whilst Hamas has claimed that fifty of those killed were Hamas members. In one incident a Hamas fighter managed to shoot an Israeli drone out of the sky to wild applause among the throng below. In any event the crowds were bellicose and tumultuous, hurling stones and rolling burning tires towards the border fence, in their attempt to stage a mass break out of Palestinians from Gaza into Israel.

If two or three Palestinians had been shot and killed, or even a dozen, one could have believed that the killings were the work of young soldiers panicking

in the face of a ferociously hostile crowd. If more of the Hamas members had been armed we could have attributed the death toll to 'collateral damage'. However, with sixty-two dead and a thousand or more injured, such explanations beggar belief. Therefore, we have to conclude that the killings of Palestinians from Gaza, was an act of state policy, murder inspired and ratified by Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The murders were not simply produced by robust intransigence on the part of Israeli authorities, but by a particular view of Arabs in general, and Palestinian Arabs in particular. Since the struggle for the possession of Palestine began in earnest around a hundred years ago there has never been peace between Arabs and Jews in Mandate Palestine, in Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, on the West Bank, or in Gaza. The relationship has been characterised by waves of killings, all-out wars, ethnic cleansing, and repression.

Both sides have participated fully in this enterprise – the struggle for control of the land – and its bloody consequences. There is no innocent party here.

However, the Jews, who started work in Jaffa on the construction of their state and the formal development of their political, military, and economic institutions, some ninety-eight years ago, have outclassed the Palestinian Arabs who, until the late 1960s, largely relied on the leadership of influential families and notable personalities; a network dating from the days of the Ottomans, and upon rulers and soldiers in Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, rather than their own internal development.

All sides in the conflict have been the beneficiaries of billions of dollars in foreign aid, largely from the United States, but only Israel has succeeded in creating a thriving, technologically advanced, economy and society, largely attributable, I would argue, to its robust and argumentative democratic culture and traditions.

There is a bitter paradox in this, because Israel's democracy is predicated upon the exclusion and

oppression of the Arabs in its midst. Israel is a democracy for its Jewish citizens – for Israelis – but not for Palestinians. It is true of course that Palestinians can vote, and be elected to the Knesset. But their formal equality stops there. From the foundation of Israel in 1948 the Arab citizens of Israel were governed by martial law regulations stemming from the days of British rule.

In 1966 responsibility for regulating the residence, employment, travel, organisations, education, and opinions, of Israel's Arab citizens was shifted from the military to the police. It remains the case that in welfare, in education, in health, in basic infrastructure, Arabs are distinctly second and third class citizens. They do not even enjoy the basic freedom to live or work anywhere they please without permission from the state. For sure, Arabs in Israel live in a police state; they live in better circumstances than those existing under Israeli occupation on the West Bank, and those confined to the Gaza Strip, but Arabs in Israel are not free, and do not enjoy the same rights either in theory or in practice with the Jews living around them.

This situation springs directly from the fear that Arabs are intrinsically unreliable citizens who cannot be trusted not to side with the state's enemies. This fear and suspicion feeds the repression, which in turn, exacerbates the hatred of the Zionist state amongst the Arab masses both inside Israel and in the surrounding territories. Indeed, in the wars between Arabs and Jews in 1948, 1967, and 1973, and in the Intifadas – the sustained rebellions, staged by the Arabs in the years 1987-91 and 2000-2005, the IDF killed four or five times more Palestinians than Jews killed by Arabs.

This is not, and has never been an even-handed fight. The Jews, in response to their own terrible history, have since 1948 always outgunned their enemies in what they regard as a battle for the survival of the Jewish state against all odds and all comers. There is no possibility of surrender, like the heroic armed risings of Jews in Warsaw and Vilna, and in the

forests and marshes of Byelorussia and Ukraine in the nineteen forties, Israeli submission to the enemy is simply inconceivable.

The rights and wrongs of this struggle are as irrelevant as the charges repeatedly made against Israel of its deployment of so-called 'disproportionate force'; one wonders what 'proportionate' force would look like – perhaps more dead Jews – allowing the Palestinians to even up the death toll? This is the grotesque calculus of those who wish to see the Palestinians simply as victims and the Zionists as the oppressors – the classic left wing binary of the oppressed and the oppressors – in which we can all live with Jeremy Corbyn on the moral high ground, whilst cheering on the 'anti-imperialist' or losing side.

There is a grim irresponsibility at work here – among those who encourage and support the Palestinian aspiration for the dissolution of the Jewish state, and its replacement by a predominantly Muslim polity. Of course, the mantra of many of those who promote Solidarity with Palestine with flags, sloganizing, and Fedayeen scarves, is the proposal of a single state from the 'Jordan to the Sea' in which Jews and Arabs would live happily side-by-side, or perhaps a two-state solution in which a fully armed sovereign Palestinian state would peacefully and amicably share the territory with Israel. These enthusiasts for Palestinian interests must surely know in their heart-of-hearts that such utopian aspirations merely mask the almost universal Arab desire for the destruction of the Jewish state.

The Palestinians insist upon the right of the refugees who fled in 1948, and their descendants, to return to take possession, of their former lands, neighbourhoods and villages, in what has been Israel for the last seventy years. All concerned know the absurdity of this demand – it could not be met without the destruction of the Jewish state, and payback for 1948, in a process of ethnic cleansing in which Jews rather than Arabs were expelled from the territory.

This is what the virtuous humanists of Palestinian Solidarity are demanding: the defeat of Zionism and the destruction of the real state, the actually existing Hebrew culture, and society, of Israel.

From Netanyahu on the right to the peaceniks on the liberal left of Israeli society, all concerned know full well that the survival of the Jewish state is at stake. Some call for moderation in the use of force, while others, with an attitude indistinguishable from racism, believe that the Arabs have no right to live anywhere in *Eretz Yisrael*. From the moderates to the extremists, Zionists all know that killing Palestinians was necessary in the process of founding the Jewish state, and is necessary in the struggle to ensure its survival.

This accounts for the range of responses in Israel to the few hundreds of Jews who protest against the murders on the Gaza line to those more interested in welcoming the return of Netta Barzilai from Eurovision, or to following the doings of the grandees gathered at the new American Embassy in Jerusalem. From the outraged and horrified, to the indifferent, on to the messianic Zionists, Israelis know that the murder of unarmed civilians by their soldiers is the result of Palestinian and wider Arab refusal to accept the permanence and reality of the Jewish state.

The crowds mobilised by Hamas, an explicitly anti-Jewish Islamist organisation, were not innocently fighting for the right to peacefully travel from Gaza into Israel, but people both armed and unarmed who seek the departure of the Jews from Palestine and the destruction of Israel.

Those who support the Palestinians in this quest are anti-Semites who believe that whilst the Jews have a right to nationalism and statehood, *in theory*, in practice, have no right to either. The refusal of the Arab states in the region to resettle displaced Palestinians as full citizens, and those who insist upon maintaining the status of Palestinians as stateless refugees, wish to ensure the war against the Jews continues without end.”

[OffTheCuff , No. 246, May 2018]