

“Zionism Today is the Real Enemy of the Jews”

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This is an emotive subject so let me begin by stating where I stand. I have never questioned the legitimacy of the Zionist movement or of the state of Israel within its pre-June 1967 borders. What I reject, and reject totally, is the Zionist colonial project beyond the 1967 border.

Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories since 1967 is the basic problem. This is one of the most prolonged and brutal military occupations of modern times. I condemn it above all for what it has done to the Palestinians. But sadly, it has also eroded the democratic foundations of Israeli society.

Occupation distorted the natural course of mainstream Zionism. Zionism was, above all, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people but it also upheld universal values like freedom, equality, socialism, and peace. Post-1967 Zionism, however, both in its secular and in its religious varieties, developed a territorial obsession. It is not about values; it is about land. The obsession is to keep the whole of the Land of Israel in the hands of the Jewish people. This transformed the Zionist movement from a legitimate national liberation movement for the Jews into a colonial power and an oppressor of the Palestinians.

By Zionism today I mean the ideological, ultra-nationalist settlers, both religious and secular, and their supports in the Likud-led government. These settlers are a tiny minority but they maintain a strangle-hold over the Israeli political system. They represent the unacceptable face of Zionism. Zionism does not equal racism, but many of these hard-line settlers and their leaders are blatant racists. Their extremism and their excesses have led some people to start questioning the legitimacy of the State of Israel, its very right to exist. And it is these settlers who also endanger the safety and wellbeing of Jews everywhere.

Ariel Sharon personifies this xenophobic, exclusive, aggressive, and expansionist brand of Zionism. One of the greatest accolades in Judaism is to be a *rodef shalom*, a seeker of peace. Sharon is not that by any stretch of the imagination. He is a man of war and the champion of violent solutions. George W. Bush famously described Sharon as “a man of peace”. I have done a bit of research on the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and I can honestly say that I have never come across a single shred of evidence to support the view of Sharon as a man of peace!

Sharon's purpose is politicide: to deny the Palestinians any independent political existence in Palestine. For him the Palestinian Authority is not the government of a state in-the-making but a sub-contractor that is failing in its

primary duty which is to protect Israel's security. Sharon refuses to negotiate with the PA on a solution to the conflict. His plan for withdrawal from Gaza is called "the unilateral disengagement plan". Sharon is the unilateralist par excellence — excuse my French. He is a Jewish Rambo — the antithesis of the traditional Jewish values of truth, justice, and tolerance.

Sharon's government is waging a savage war against the Palestinian people - not just militants but ordinary civilians. Its policies include

- the confiscation of land and property
- the demolition of houses
- the uprooting of trees
- curfews, roadblocks, and 736 checkpoints that inflict horrendous hardships - systematic abuse of Palestinian human rights
- and the culture of impunity that allows Israeli soldiers to kill not only Palestinian children but peace activists like Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall.

Last but not least there is the so-called security barrier that Israel is building in the West Bank. Its declared purpose is to prevent terrorist attacks but it is as much about land-grabbing as it is about security. By building the wall Israel is unilaterally redrawing the borders at the expense of the Palestinians. It is "in your face" violence against the Palestinians. It separates children from their schools, farmers from their land, and whole villages from their medical facilities. The wall is a flagrant violation of international law. It was condemned by the International Court of Justice and by the UN General Assembly but construction continues regardless. It is not for nothing that Sharon used to be called "the bulldozer".

It is this brand of cruel Zionism that is the real enemy of what remains of liberal Israel and of the Jews outside Israel. It is the enemy because it fuels the flames of virulent and sometimes violent anti-Semitism. Israel's policies are the cause; hatred of Israel and anti-Semitism are the consequences.

There has been much talk in recent years about "the new anti-Semitism". The argument, in a nutshell, is that the resurgence of anti-Semitism has little or nothing to do with Israel's behaviour. Anti-Zionism is merely a surrogate, so the argument runs, for bad, old-fashioned anti-Semitism.

These arguments need to be addressed. First of all: what is anti-Semitism? Isaiah Berlin defined an anti-Semite as "someone who hates Jews more than is strictly necessary!" This mischievous definition has the merit of applying to all anti-Semitism, old as well as new.

But we need to look beyond the labels. Is there a lot of classic anti-Semitism about? Yes. Do some people use anti-Zionism as a respectable cover for their despicable Judeophobia? Yes. What is the relative weight of hatred of Israel on

the one hand and Judeophobia on the other in the making of the new anti-Semitism? I don't know.

What I do know is that a lot of decent people, without any anti-Semitic baggage, are really upset and angry with Israel over its inhumane treatment of the Palestinians. There is simply no getting away from the fact that attitudes towards Israel have changed in recent years as a result of its own shift towards the Zionism of the extreme Right and of the radical rabbis. We have to recall that during the years of the Oslo peace process, when Itzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres were leading, Israel was the favourite of the West. Anti-Semitism was limited because they gave the message that Israel was willing to withdraw from the occupied territories for the sake of peace. Sharon's government is prepared to withdraw from Gaza but only as a prelude to annexing large chunks of the West Bank to Greater Israel. This is a recipe not for peace but for perpetual conflict, violence, and bloodshed.

Israel's image today is negative not because it is a Jewish state but because it habitually transgresses the norms of acceptable international behaviour. Indeed, Israel is increasingly perceived as a rogue state, as an international pariah, and as a threat to world peace.

In a Eurobarometer poll in 2003, 59% of respondents said the Israel posed a threat to world peace. This was the highest percentage for any of the 15 countries on the list. America was the runner-up with 53%.

This perception of Israel, I submit, is a major factor in the recent resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe and in the rest of the world. In other words, Zionism today is the real enemy of the Jews.

Chaim Weizmann wrote in his autobiography that Zionism will be judged by its treatment of the Palestinians. Well, in this respect, Zionism today is a catastrophic failure.

But the principal purpose of Zionism was to provide a haven for the Jewish people after the Holocaust. It is very melancholy to have to add that, in this respect too, Zionism turned out to be a failure. Israel is now one of the least safe places on earth for Jews to live in.

This sorry state of affairs is unlikely to end until the Zionist colonial project across the 1967 border comes to an end. Zionism's supreme interest lies in ending the illegal occupation of what is another people's land.

Israel ought to withdraw from the occupied territories not as a favour to the Palestinians but as a favour to itself for, as Karl Marx noted, a people that oppresses another cannot itself remain free.