

Has Israel Forfeited its Right to Exist as a Separate State?

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The relentless military violence applied by Israel to the population of Gaza is no longer a matter of indignation about the killing of people who have nowhere to go. Neither war crimes nor violation of humanitarian law need be raised any longer as if they happened for the first time. The moment has come where we must address the fact that the Zionist experiment to erect a Jewish state in Palestine, has turned out a failure.

For sixty years this state has had the opportunity, under governments of diverse stripe, to establish durable and peaceful relations with the expelled Palestinians and with the Arab neighbouring countries and their populations. In the process, Israel could draw on a moral credit that results from the suffering of European Jewry that turned into unspeakable horror when more than six million men, women and children of Jewish descent were destroyed by the Nazi murder industry. Who would not hesitate to censure a state which on the face of it, gave the Jews the weapons to prevent any repeat?

Yet states do not exist forever, and they must prove their viability to endure. Somalia comes to mind, but let us think also of Germany. Unified in 1870, its stable

sovereignty as a separate state has only been achieved in the context of European integration, after two world wars had brought to light it may have been too small for the world, but (on its own) was certainly too big for Europe. The GDR disappeared, just as Yugoslavia, and so on.

Israel is no exception to the rule that a viable state is not a given, and the founders of the Zionist movement were as aware of this as anyone. Theodor Herzl saw a Jewish state as a way to save European Jewry, the Ashkenazi. But they were the ones who ended in the mass graves of the Eastern front and the ovens of Auschwitz. To establish a Jewish state, the Ashkenazi as a group were not available (any longer). If they had survived the war at all, they preferred the familiar surroundings and comfort of post-war Europe or the US, or they remained in the Soviet Union.

To supply Palestine with a Jewish population, the Sephardic Jews of North Africa and the Middle East were the only alternative. But this group was poor and on the whole lived in harmony with its Islamic neighbours. The founders of Israel feared therefore that the new state, with a numerous Sephardic underclass, would lack sufficient national cohesion. The only way to weld the different strands together into a nation, according to David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the new state and its first prime minister, was war. War in his view was 'the main and maybe the only way to increase welfare and retain moral tension. Without it we would not have a fighting nation and without a fighting regime we are lost.'

This has become the motto of Israel, the world's fourth most powerful state in terms of armed might. That of course has been achieved with massive Western support throughout. In addition to US subsidies and arms, France supplied the first nuclear reactor, Britain the heavy water for it. Meanwhile the Israelis have more than two hundred nuclear warheads and they keep a close watch so that nobody in the region obtains a nuclear capacity as a military counterweight. The atomic reactor of Iraq was destroyed by an Israeli air raid in 1981, and as far as Israel is concerned, the same will happen with the nuclear facilities of Iran.

The four major land wars that Israel has fought with its neighbours (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973), it all won. The regimes of Egypt and Jordan, but also the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, which bundled the resistance after the Arabs had been driven from their homeland, all have been turned into instruments of the West through these conflicts. The field of forces as a result has changed fundamentally; apparently to the advantage, in reality to the disadvantage of the Jewish state in the longer term.

The first change was the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip following the Six Days' War of 1967. This occupation has been condemned in resolution 242 of the UN Security Council, but Israel has so far ignored the instruction to evacuate them and instead opened the occupied territories to Jewish colonisation. Certainly the settlements in Gaza were evacuated by Sharon, but the resulting open-air prison camp, tightly bolted on all sides, remains at the mercy of Israel, which can attack it at will—this time to improve the election prospects of the governing coalition.

The colonisation of the West Bank continues apace and religious Jews are a key driving force. Orthodox Jews were traditionally anti-Zionist, but to gain the confidence of the Sephardic immigrants, Ben-Gurion had to make concessions in the domain of religion, like religious education. These have contributed to the formation of a domestic, religious Zionist current. The occupation of 1967 was the breaking point here. The religious Israelis saw it as the biblical justification of an Israeli state, but the economic opportunities of the Sephardic Jews also improved as a result. According to Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the ideologue of this change of perspective, 'The State of Israel was created and established by the council of nations by order of the Sovereign Lord of the Universe so that the clear commandment in the Torah "that they shall inherit and settle the Land" would be fulfilled'.

The rise of the Right wing Likud party accompanied the ascent of the religious Zionists. The Likud leadership had a background in the Jewish terrorist groups which in the early days bombed Palestinian and British targets; both Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, later prime ministers, had been active in these terror groups. The Likud, too, declared itself committed to a Greater Israel. From the early 1970s, it also moved closer to Neo-Conservatives in the US who were trying to sabotage the détente policies of Nixon and Kissinger. For the religious Zionist/Right wing bloc in Israel, two goals now came within reach. One, to try and link Jewish emigration from the USSR to the ongoing arms control talks, and thus solve the perennial problem of the Jewish population deficit; the other, to force the West into a broader anti-Arab, anti-Islamic international posture.

The Soviet Union has in the meantime been dissolved as a state, and with the 'War on Terror' the confrontation with Islam is at the heart of Western geopolitical strategy. With a chief of staff who has a background in the Jewish terrorist tradition,

and his own position on Iran changing fast from a willingness to negotiate to one of confrontation, this position must not be expected to change under president Obama.

Israel's role in shaping the anti-'terrorist' policy, then, should not be underrated. Like all occupiers, the Israelis have consistently qualified any resistance as 'terror', and in the late 1970s they played a key role in redefining the USSR as the centre of a supposed 'international terrorism'; simultaneously, the term 'national liberation' was dropped from the Western vocabulary. Alexander Haig, Reagan's secretary of state, and CIA chief William Casey were the first to make this change in US foreign policy pronouncements and practice. Haig had read the proofs of Claire Sterling's bestseller The Terror Network, vice-president Bush attended a Jerusalem conference on the topic with the 'Senator for Boeing', Henry Jackson, and others. Yet the 'War on Terror' which has its roots in the new Cold War of the early 80s (and thus well predates 9/11), like the Israeli occupation policies on which it was modelled, has only brought new conflicts and more human suffering.

For Israel, the triumph of its worldview has in fact blinded the West to the country's impossible situation. All the main Israeli political parties have committed themselves to the occupation, which is unsustainable not just in terms of international law but also demographically. Even the original land of Israel will have an Arab majority by 2040, and if parliamentary democracy is upheld, the Jewish character of the state will disappear. That would end the ethnic profile of Israel as a state. Given the moral quality of the leadership and the destructive potential available to it, this is not an appealing prospect. As with its earlier, murderous expedition against Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israel's rampage in Gaza once again exposes local civilians, defended only by the militia of Hamas, to hell on earth. How long will we have to wait before those sympathising with the victims will want to strike back one way or another, so that we in the West can again raise the alarm over 'terrorism'?

Like their German tormentors after 1945, the Israelis will have to accept that their sustained preference for violent solutions must be reined in and their existence secured in a wider, regional context. As a separate state with exclusive control over its disproportionate military potential, Israel has forfeited its right to exist.

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