

Zionism in Gaza's Shattered Mirror

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At a time when Palestinian men, women and children, corralled in the ghetto of Gaza since 1948, are daily, hourly, relentlessly, being bombed from the air, land and sea, it is instructive to turn to some of the founding fathers of Zionism, and ask what they might have thought about this obscene consequence of their messianic vision.

In the writings of these founding fathers, the Palestinians rarely merit even a passing reference. You can pore through one of the earliest statements of the Zionist credo, Moses Hess' *Rome and Jerusalem*, but you will find not a single reference to 'Muslims' or 'Arabs.' Twice, the word 'Palestinian' enters this venerated text; the first time, it appears in connection with the training of Jewish youth for the "life of a Palestinian farmer;" and the second refers to the "Jerushalmi Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin." Palestine always exists, inscribed on some divine tablet, as Israeli land; but there are no Palestinians.

If you search Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State*, you come away with the same disappointing results. It contains not a single reference to Muslims, Arabs or Palestinians: or even Bedouins. Incredibly, a search through Arthur Hertzberg's *The Zionist Idea*, a classic anthology of excerpts from several generations of Zionist

thinkers, produced identical results. The Muslims, Arabs or Palestinians never entered into their plans for a Jewish state. To use a term from Lawrence Davidson, this is ‘perceptual depopulation’ of Palestine, at its extreme.

Nearly from the outset, the Zionists exuded power. Palestine was a thing to be bought; and if it was not for sale, they would take it by force. Twice, Rabbi Kalischer urged the head of the Rothschild family and Moses Montefiore to buy Palestine – or, at least, Jerusalem – from the Ottoman Sultan. More than once, Theodore Herzl too offered to buy Palestine from the Ottoman Sultan. He was told, it was not for sale.

That would not derail Zionist plans; they could persuade one or more European powers to take it *for the Jews* by force. In 1818, Mordecai Noah, an early American Zionist, proposed that the Jews could create their own army and do it themselves. Nearly all Zionists were more pragmatic: they decided to let the Europeans do it for them.

This is how Theodore Herzl laid out *his* plan for creating a Jewish state. “Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; *the rest we shall manage for ourselves* (italics added).” Hidden in that innocuous ‘the rest’ are the unmentionable people who inhabited Palestine. Two agencies would suffice to carry out this plan: *The Society of Jews* and *The Jewish Company*.

In the plan that Herzl worked out, *The Society of Jews* would “treat with the present masters of the land [the Ottomans], putting itself under the protectorate of the European powers...” Herzl adds that the “creation of our state would be beneficial to adjacent countries...” but the people living there go unmentioned.

However, Herzl does pay careful attention to more weighty matters, such as how best to get rid of the “wild beasts” in the country they would appropriate. The methods used to colonize Palestine (or Argentina) would have to be modern, using the latest technology. “It is foolish,” he explains, “to revert to old stages of civilization, as many Zionists would like to do.”

Here is how the Zionists should work, Herzl explained, if they “were obliged to clear a country of wild beasts...” “We should not take spear and lance,” he emphasizes, “and go out singly in pursuit of bears; we should organize a *large and lively hunting party*, drive the animals together, and *throw a melinite bomb into their midst* (italics added).”

It is most unlikely that Herzl was speaking – even subconsciously, I will grant – of the Palestinians when he explains for the benefit of Jewish colons, how to clear their colony of “wild beasts” such as “bears.”

Nevertheless, who can escape noticing the eerie parallels between the methods that he proposes to get rid of the “wild beasts” and the strategy and tactics that Jewish colonists have adopted since 1948 to clear Palestine of its indigenous population?

Already, in the 1930s, the *Yishuv* had created “a large and lively hunting party” called the *Haganah* that would grow very quickly after 1948 into one of the most formidable militaries in the world.

In 1948, this “large and lively hunting party” would launch its first massive drive to “clear” Palestine of the “wild” Palestinians. The “hunting party” has since worked to ensure that the “wild” Palestinian refugees would never return to their lands. Whenever the “wild” Palestinians have ventured out of their refugee pens to re-enter or reclaim their lands, the “hunting party” has deterred them by throwing “a melinite bomb in their midst.”

A second drive to clear out the “wild” Palestinians was launched in 1967, when a much-expanded “hunting party” captured all of Palestine. After 1967, the Israeli “hunting party” began to implement a new plan for clearing out the West Bank and Gaza of the “wild” Palestinians. Eager to make room for new cohorts of Jewish settlers, the “hunting party” began to “drive...together” the “wild” Palestinians into ever-smaller enclaves within these newly acquired territories.

In Gaza, the Israeli plans began to run into difficulty with the start of the Second Intifada in 2000. The Islamist Hamas had been gaining strength in the heavily overcrowded and miserable pens to which the Palestinians had been confined since 1948. In preparation for a new approach to neutralizing the besieged Palestinians, Israel adopted a new approach in 2005. It removed its “hunting party,” including Jewish settlers, out of harm’s way, as it moved to seal Gaza’s borders, the better to throw “melinite bombs into their midst.”

It is the ghastly culmination of this new strategy we have been witnessing in Gaza over the past weeks.

Israel is the crowning achievement of modernity in our times, of the rational, efficient and ruthless pursuit of power for one tribe; its success depends now, as in the

past, on the massive deployment of “melinite bombs” against virtually unarmed “wild beasts.”

In the words of Herzl, again, Israel seeks to complete its colonial-settler enterprise “in a bolder and more stately style than was ever adopted before, for we now possess means which men never yet possessed.”

Yet, for more than a hundred years since the launching of the Zionist project, the “wild” Palestinians have remained undefeated. For more than thirty years, they faced the “iron wall of British bayonets;” and since 1948, they have courageously stood up against the thickening “iron wall of Jewish bayonets.”

The Palestinians have one resource the Zionists do not have: they have justice on their side.

Yet, justice has not always prevailed when it has been overmatched by brute force. America's dead natives can testify to that. That is the hope that drives Israelis; they are sustained by their conviction that they “possess means which men never yet possessed.”

Perhaps, world conscience will wake up in time to convince the Zionists to the contrary. Perhaps, this can happen before it is too late, before the tide of history has turned decisively against Israel.

Israel can only be sustained if it can score *repeated* victories against the peoples of the Middle East – clear, quick and stunning victories, like those of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1982. That has been changing, starting with Israel's unilateral retreat from Lebanon in 2000. Then there was Israel's costly and transparent failure to attain any of its objectives with the massive onslaught against Hizbullah in 2006. Israel faces another failure against Hamas now, against a much weaker foe.

How will Israel save face after this? Will they persist in their attempt to destroy the Palestinians, with a new generation of “melinite bombs” dispatched from the United States? Alternatively, will Israeli mothers force Israeli warmongers to make a sincere determination to make amends to the Palestinians and learn to live with them in a non-racist society?

Let us hope that Israelis – at last – will make the right choice.

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