

Downside UP

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Israel Has Lost Its Soul

My wife is my witness, right after Israel withdrew its settlements from Gaza, I declared: "This has nothing to do with making peace. In densely populated Gaza, moving the Israelis out just makes it possible for Israel to shell Gaza without killing Israelis." Or, as we now know, to open up a full assault on Gaza.

It is more than ironic; it is bizarre that the latest attack on Palestinian occupied territory should be carried out by the same prime minister who recently -- publicly and explicitly -- explained that there could be no peace for Israel without giving up all of the West Bank and exclusive control of Jerusalem.

The latest attack on Palestinian territory is a lot about the recent election in the United States where the Israeli leadership worries that the new president will be more even-handed. It is also about the up-coming elections in Israel where the Kadima-Labor coalition wants to make points against the Likud party. But, in fact, it is a piece with the pattern evident from the first days of the Israeli State.

As far back as the original war for statehood, Israeli forces were intent on not merely holding the territory mandated by the United Nations but expanding it and removing Palestinians living there. Yes, they were attacked by the new state's neighbors who vowed to destroy it, but Arab opposition to the existence of the state has always served Israeli interests, feeding on memories of the Holocaust, pogroms, and raging anti-Semitism directed at Jews around the world.

The 1967 War was a preemptive strike on Egypt leading to the "Green Line" which disputatiously divides Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories today. On and on for decades: Israel launches attacks. Palestinians launch attacks. Israel establishes new settlements. Palestinians call for the destruction of Israel. Israel claims it is "retaliating" with "restraint," but always ends up with more land and/or kills far more Palestinians. Hamas and Israel: the violence of each justifies the other.

The Holocaust Is Over

In the words of Avrum Burg's latest book recently translated from Hebrew into English, *The Holocaust Is Over*. Although opposition to Israeli policy within Israel is significant and growing, in the United States, American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC) propaganda still weighs heavily on American Jews and American politics. Every violent attack on any Israeli is an attack on all Jews. Every defense of a Palestinian perspective is a revival of anti-Semitism. Israel is always the innocent victim, their guns always "precision-targeted" -- as if that wouldn't make people wonder what it then means when those guns keep hitting a UN school here, a medical facility there, an apartment building everywhere.

Most Americans, not just most American Jews, really believe the AIPAC line. They have an *Exodus* understanding of Israeli history – that is, a perspective heavily influenced by the Zionist perspective of *Exodus's* author, Leon Uris. Yet, propaganda or not, it is revealing that one of the heroic events featured in the book is the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Only in the twisted dishonesty of Israeli-American propaganda is the Jewish struggle for their homeland patriotic and the Palestinian struggle terrorism.

Truth to tell, the Hebrew Bible – the Christian Bible's Old Testament – is in large measure a history of the Hebrew people's struggle for freedom. I get that. I understand that. Their continual rebellions, large and small, against Roman rule are epic in Jewish history. Yet Israeli treatment of the people in its empire – the occupied territories – is much like the Roman response: ruthless overkill.

It gets weirder. Even if it were reasonable for non-Jews to accept a claim to Palestine based on a book written by Jews to rationalize Jewish history, that book is in fact, a questionable source. What the Hebrew Bible promises is the land of Canaan to the "descendants of Abraham," not distinguishing between the descendants through Hagar starting with Ishmael and the descendants through Sarah starting with Isaac. By this quite valid interpretation, the Arab people, also descendent of Abraham, are equally entitled to the land which Zionists claim for Jews alone.

Lies Make Strange Bedfellows

Most of my closest non-Jewish friends are practicing Christians, most of whom are on the Left where this country has found most Jews on almost every issue from poverty to civil rights for a hundred years. All of these friends have supported, and still do support, the idea and the reality of a Jewish State. But all of them have also over the past five or ten years become more and more critical of Israeli policy. At the same time, for my Jewish friends, if it were any other country, they would be among the loudest protestors of Israeli policy. Instead, they stand side-by-side with the historically anti-Jewish Christian Right, avidly supporting an Israel-can-do-no-wrong US foreign policy.

It's insane the lies people have come to call the truth. The people of Israel are told that removing the Jewish settlements from Gaza was an act of peacemaking, giving the Palestinians autonomy, but then, when a free and fair election puts Hamas in power, Israel refuses to turn over the taxes it had collected for the Gaza government. Since then, truce or no truce, Israel has opened and closed Gaza's borders at will and regularly squeezed the Palestinian economy, even its medical supplies. There is no freedom when you don't control either your own revenue or your own borders.

How about "authorized" and "unauthorized" settlements. It's a distinction without a difference. Israel the occupier authorizes the actions of Israel the occupier. Even the morally disabled American government, though it has long acquiesced in feeble protest of expanded Israeli settlements, does not recognize any settlements as legitimate.

As Israel announced its recent "unilateral ceasefire," I was reminded of the story, told by the Greek guide for my wife's and my recent trip to Greece. Alexander the Great, in the 4th century B.C.E., after concluding his conquest of the East as far as the Indian Ocean, announced, "Now, let us have peace throughout the land." When

I laughed, the guide was baffled. She did not see any irony at all. I was so shocked that I could only mumble something about "that's what all conquerors say." Once they are in control, that's peace, and all who would disrupt the new order are terrorists. Like Rome's Jews. Like Sam Adams and John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry.

There Is No Peace Without Justice

Most Americans who have thought about it, and most American Jews, think that the 2000 "Barak [!] Proposal" was an overwhelmingly generous Israeli offer of peace and that Arafat showed his stripes by rejecting it. Yet even the somewhat less "Bantustanized" "Road Map to Peace," backed by the U.S., left what the Associated Press in 2003 described as "one of the odder countries in history, on scattered patches of land with wildly zigzagging borders, ringed by foreign troops, without a capital and less than full sovereignty." Along the entire length of the Jordan River, just one narrow corridor a couple of miles wide connected the Palestinian state to Jordan. Along the rest was a wide swath controlled by Israel, leaving the "Palestinian State" all but totally surrounded by Israel.

Occupation is a violent act and maintaining occupation requires violence or the threat of violence. By the same token, violent resistance is the main weapon a conquered people has to resist. Right-wing African American columnist Thomas Sowell's solution is "a couple of generations of Palestinians in Gaza living in peace under Israeli occupation." Pretty much Alexander the Great's and Israel's solution. Gandhi turned upside down.

Indeed, Israel makes cessation of violence its prerequisite for talking peace. That is, the Palestinians, *a priori*, have to give up the main means they have for getting back occupied territory, leaving Israel free to cut down more Palestinian olive trees and seize more land and more homes. Every Israeli adjustment of its "security wall" along the Green Line has left the Palestinians with less land and the Israeli's with more. Never the other way around. A conquered people is always justified in rebelling against their conquerors.

There is no peace without justice and Israel will never have peace until it agrees to the same independent existence for the Palestinians that it demands for itself. Controlling more land will never work. If anything, the weaponry available to its enemies will continue to outrun its sphere of control. Israel has forgotten the Jewish people's and their God's commitment to justice. They have forgotten their own history.

Israel has lost its soul. In the crucible of American politics, I fear that Obama, Clinton, and all Americans will lose theirs too.

Ronald Woodbury is the writer, publisher, editor, and general flunkey for all of *Downside Up*. While publication benefits from the editorial advice of one of his daughters, a friend, and occasional other pre-publication readers, they will, for their own privacy and sanity, remain anonymous.

Woodbury has B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in history, economics, and international affairs from Amherst College and Columbia University. In addition to many professional articles, he has published a column, also called *Downside Up*, in the Lacey, WA, *Leader*. After a 36 year career as a teacher and administrator at six different colleges and universities, he retired with his wife to St. Augustine, FL. He has two daughters, one a physician and one an anthropologist, and six grandchildren.

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