

Title: Jewish Self-Determination

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When one hears the argument that Zionism is a form of colonialism, or that Israel is a colonialist imposition upon the Middle East or that the Arabs are paying the price for the Holocaust, I cannot help wonder whether the proponent is against self-determination for all peoples, or only against self-determination for Jews. Singling out one people to not have a collective right that other peoples have is racist. The term to describe racism against Jews is antisemitism.

Self-determination is of course a reaction to colonialism. It is a right in international law designed to enable once colonised people to stand up and be counted in the family of nations. Israel is the Jewish reaction to colonisation. It is not colonialism, but rather the human response to it.

Israel is the embodiment of the Jewish people's right to stand up — without the shackles of the preceding British and Turkish colonisers — in the Jewish ancestral homeland and to be counted in the family of nations.

My cousin is in the Israeli army now. He has to be, because, although Israel has offered peace to all of her neighbours every decade of her existence, so far only Egypt and Jordan have entered into peace treaties with her. Israel's closest neighbour, the Palestinian Authority, is now ruled by HAMAS, an organisation committed to Israel's destruction. HAMAS continues to promote homicide bombings and the murder of civilians who are targeted because they are Jewish and because they wish to sustain the Jewish right of self-determination.

History now recognises that the Jewish people, even before Israel was born, accepted and have reiterated their willingness to live in peace alongside their Arab neighbours, including the Palestinians, on the condition that each extends to the other the right of peace and security. Israelis know that peace requires compromise, often painful compromise, and they have more than once proven their willingness to give up territory for the sake of peace.

The Jewish people however know that compromise must be reciprocal and it must be genuine. In 1948, Jewish lives were lost resisting an attempt by five Arab armies to abort Israel's birth. Israel's Arab neighbours made further attempts to destroy her in 1967 and 1973.

This century Israeli civilians continue to face calculated streams of homicide bombings by groups such as HAMAS, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades, all of whom hate Jews more than they love their own children. Israel responds attacking the men who arm and despatch the homicide bombers. Because

they shelter themselves in civilian areas, far too many innocent lives are lost in the reprisals, adding to the unnecessary casualties caused by the homicide bombers in the first place.

So rather than have to spend every day and night fighting a war against opponents who do not respect law or life, Israel has built a barrier in an endeavour to keep the homicide bombers out. This is not a wall (less than 10 per cent actually is a wall) designed to keep innocents imprisoned. It does not encircle the Palestinians who have borders with Arab nations that are unfenced.

It is a fence Israelis also do not want, but faced with a choice of living in daily fear of the ruthless murder of civilians or an ugly and undesirable fence, they overwhelmingly prefer the fence.

One must remember the doll's house size of this conflict. Downtown Tel Aviv is only 30 kilometres from the fence. It was the Israeli Labour Party, under the leadership of then Prime Minister Ehud Barak, that first proposed the fence as a defensive physical obstacle to terrorism. Separation is now seen as so important that a majority of Israelis even favour doing it unilaterally, if need be. In the wake of the Second Intifada, much of the population has lost faith in negotiated solutions.

Quite simply, the security barrier is being built to prevent Israelis from being systematically murdered. Part of the barrier — a little under a tenth of its length in two places along the Trans-Israel Highway — is a wall. It has electronics on either side to prevent infiltrators. It is a wall in those two sections because Palestinian gunmen had been shooting from Palestinian territory onto the highway and killing innocent Israelis.

In Australia and in other Western countries, barrier walls are built along freeways to shield against noise. In Israel, barrier walls are built along freeways to prevent passengers from being killed by bullets.

The barrier is being erected to protect many of the survivors of the Shoah and their descendants, and the Jews who were persecuted and expelled from Arab countries in the 1950s and their descendants. The Jewish victims this time have the capacity to try to stop the purveyors of death, an option that the Jews of Nazi Europe or those in Arab countries did not have.

There is no doubt that the barrier causes great hardship, but it also saves lives. If there were no more terror attacks upon Israel, the construction of the barrier could cease, and the negotiated demolition of the built section could commence.

It is a barrier the Palestinians do not want, but one must remember that the so-called Road Map to Peace (the plan put together by the US, EU, Russia and the UN) called for the Palestinians to 'immediately undertake an unconditional cessation of violence.' The deadline for that was May 2003. It has yet to happen.

The fence is needed also because Palestinian schools continue to present the homicide bomber as a moral example.

To Australians, celebrating the murder of innocents reflects a fundamental and persistent disregard for the right to life. It reflects values we simply do not share, and which we find difficult to understand. After all, if you teach that life has value for all human beings regardless of race, religion or other differences, then those who destroy life will be cast out rather than celebrated.

For Israel and her Arab neighbours to have real peace, it must last for generations, and for that to happen the children must learn peace and not war. Arab children must not be promised paradise for the murder of their neighbours. This can only lead to psychological trauma in the upcoming generations of Palestinians.

Two peoples traumatised in fear of each other will find peace near impossible to conceive let alone deliver.

Once Palestinian children learn that that the 'other' is human and deserves a future, then the barrier will come down both physically and psychologically.

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Thursday, 07 February 2008

(1081 words)