

# Counter-Rhetoric

Challenging “conventional wisdom”  
& reframing the conflict

*by Emily Schaeffer, Jeff Halper & Jimmy Johnson*



**הוועד הישראלי נגד הריסת בתים**

**The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions**

**الحركة الإسرائيلىة ضد هدم البيوت**

*First printing 2006*

*Design & Typesetting by Matzat (matzat.org.il)*

*Printed by Shmuel Tal, Jerusalem*

*Published by*

**The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions**

PO Box 2030

Jerusalem 91020

Israel

+972 2 624-5560

info@icahd.org

*The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions wishes to thank the following for their generous support for our activities: The European Union, Christian Aid, The Church of Sweden, Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et pour le Développement, Mu'assasat, Austrian Development Agency and the government of Ireland.*



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# Reframing The Conflict

When it comes to resolving conflicts such as that pitting Israeli Jews against Palestinian Arabs, framing is more important than the facts. Everyone agrees that around 3500 Palestinians and more than 1000 Israelis have been killed in the four years of the second Intifada (September 2000-2004). For most Israelis, however, the Israelis were victims of terror while the Palestinians were terrorists or unfortunate (but unavoidable) casualties, with no distinction made between combatants and civilians. For most Palestinians, their dead were casualties of a struggle for independence and victims of Israeli state terror, while the Israeli dead were the unfortunate victims of their government's repressive policy of Occupation that left the Palestinians little choice. These are not minor differences. They embody fundamentally divergent perceptions and assumptions regarding the nature of the conflict, determining in the end what solutions are or are not possible.

All Israeli governments, be they Labor or Likud, have successfully promoted a framing based solely on security. Israel, the official framing goes, is a tiny, peace-loving country, a Western democracy besieged by a sea of Arabs intent on destroying it, embroiled in an existential fight for its survival in which it acts only out of self-defense. Missing from Israel's security framing is the very fact of occupa-

tion, which Israel both denies exists and excises from all its utterances. Instead, it casts itself as an innocent victim of “Arab terrorism.” This framing, compelling and making great sense in the post-9/11 discourse of “security,” nevertheless conceals other elements of the framing not related to security and not stated explicitly: That the entire country between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River “belongs” exclusively to the Jews, thus nullifying any Palestinian rights and claims — indeed, even their even their existence as a people; that “security” requires Israeli control over the entire country, thus eliminating the possibility of any truly viable and sovereign Palestinian state; that one side must win and the other lose, rendering impossible a just peace based on human rights, international law, reconciliation and regional integration; and a rejection of the Middle East in favor of integration — culturally, politically and economically, if not physically — into the Western world.

While security is certainly a legitimate concern for Israel as it is for other countries, accepting its exclusively security-based framing means ruling out the possibility of a just and sustainable peace with the Palestinians. As Israelis who believe that Israel’s security, survival and moral integrity depend upon reaching an accommodation with its neighbors, we do not find this an acceptable option. In fact, we reject the official framing altogether. Our reading of the history of the region and of Zionism, our under-

standing of how and why Israeli policy is made in regards to the Occupation and our experiences with our Palestinian partners and friends lead us to very different conclusions, to a very different framing.

The reframing suggested here seeks to address the underlying causes of the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians and the wider Arab world while offering ways out. It might be called a “post-Zionist” approach because the critical Israeli peace camp (“to the left of Peace Now,” as we sometimes refer to ourselves) understands that an expanding Jewish state plumped in the middle of a country already inhabited by another people poses fundamental problems of co-existence, human and civil rights, self-determination and justice. It rests on the principle that two peoples live in Israel-Palestine, each possessing rights of self-determination yet capable of finding ways to co-exist. At a minimum it endorses a two-state solution, yet it is open to others as well: the creation of a common bi-national or democratic state encompassing both peoples, a regional confederation, or any other arrangement that respects the parties’ human and national rights. Indeed, it argues that only a political solution conforming to human rights and international law will finally meet each people’s concern for justice and security.

Since it also recognizes the strong and vital cultures of both peoples, the alternative human rights framing relies less on attempts to carve out distinctive Jewish or Palestinian states — an impos-

sible task in a country in which the peoples are so intertwined — as it does on finding a political configuration that affords each its national expression yet preserves the fluidity of residence and movement this shared space requires.

In the end, the reframing offered by the critical Israeli peace camp rejects the fundamental premise of the security paradigm: That Muslims and Arabs as a whole, and Palestinians in particular, are our enemies. We insist that the conflict be conceived as a political one that therefore has a solution. We reject all attempts to mystify it through claims that Jews and Arabs have been enemies “from time immemorial” or that we are involved in a “clash of civilizations.” We also reject the notion that terrorism lies at the root of the conflict. While we condemn any attack on civilians, we recognize that such violence is a symptom of intolerable oppression that will end only when the peoples’ underlying claims and grievances are resolved.

We also point out that significant gains have been made towards a just solution to the conflict even though they have been obscured by the violence of recent years. Both the Palestinians and the Arab League have recognized Israel within the “Green Line” (that is, on 78% of the shared country); Israel is at peace with Egypt and Jordan, has relations with many Arab countries and expanding ties throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds; a promising diplomatic Road Map has been formulated by the US, Europe,



Russia and the UN; a majority of Israeli Jews have indicated a willingness to relinquish the Occupied Territories if their security could be assured; and Israelis and Palestinians have engaged in prolonged negotiations in the past. At the same time, as Israelis, we hold our country accountable for its actions. Security concerns aside, we reject the notion of Israel expanding into the Occupied Palestinian Territories, that 22% of the country that offers a displaced and battered Palestinian people its only hope for self-determination.

Our reframing, however, rejects the notion of “both sides.” While we recognize that the Palestinians and the wider Arab and Muslim worlds possess their share of responsibility, we also recognize the fundamental asymmetry of power between the sides. Israel is an internationally recognized state possessing overwhelming military and economic might and allied to the world’s dominant super-power. It is occupying the lands of a stateless people, impoverished, with no army and little political leverage. Given that equation we contend that Israel possesses the ability to end the Occupation, the major obstacle to a just peace and regional security, and will do so only when it is brought into compliance with internationally accepted standards of human rights and international law — not to mention Jewish morality and values. We offer an alternative framing, a win-win approach, upon which a just peace can be built. Re-framing, we believe, opens possibilities for

peace, security, self-determination and co-existence foreclosed by Israel's security paradigm. And finally, by presenting a framing that offers a clear and compelling way to a just peace, we aim to empower our partners to more effectively present our common case. In the end we offer a hope that permanent conflict need not be the lot of the suffering peoples of the Middle East.

# Challenging “Conventional Wisdom”

## Zionism

*“The land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people.”*

It’s a genuine historical tie but not exclusive. Jews were the majority in the Land for only some 1,900 of 10,000 years of modern history, and were the governing authority for even less. Exclusively maintaining the land ignores the 21<sup>st</sup> century reality, which is one in which Jews have lived outside of Israel for centuries and must accommodate the other populations who have lived, and continue to live here.

► For example the Canaanites were the dominant group for over two thousand years, as were the Natufians. The Yarmukians were around for some four thousand years and laid the base for the agricultural communities that followed. Jews have no more, and no less, a right to the land than the others who have populated land, including the Arabs (1200 years).<sup>1</sup>

–AND/OR–

If Israel is a democratic state, then it belongs to *all* its citizens, at least 24% of which are not Jews.

► Out of Israel's 7,026,000 people, 1.39 million are Arabs and just over 300,000 are "Other." This means 24% of the Israeli populace is not Jewish.<sup>2</sup> If Israel is a democracy, then it belongs to its citizens the same as the United States has a Caucasian and Christian majority but it does not "belong" to Caucasian Christians. Even Israel's Declaration of Independence states that the country: *will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.*



*"The Arabs only came to this country after the Zionists started to build the country."*

No serious historian, Israeli or otherwise, supports that myth. The Arabs originally came to this land in 638 under Caliph Umar.

► The Christians of Jerusalem surrendered to the armies of Caliph Umar in 638. The Arabs colonized Palestine and over a few centuries Arabic language and culture became dominant. From that time, but for some 88 years of Crusader

rule, until the founding of the State of Israel and the expulsion of the refugees, the Arabs were the dominant demographic majority of the area.<sup>3</sup> The myth of Zionist-era Arab migration to Palestine has been thoroughly refuted by every major historian familiar with the area. The population increase amongst the Arabs began in the 1850's as a result of improved medical care provided by the Ottomans and Christian missionaries. There was certainly some immigration, but also emigration, from that point on but the population increase amongst Arabs was due entirely to natural growth.<sup>4</sup>



*“Jews have a right to self-determination.”*

Certainly, but rights are universal so Palestinians have them too. The same laws and treaties that protect the Jewish peoples' right to self-determination also protect the rights of others.<sup>5</sup>



*“France wants to maintain its French identity, why can't Israel maintain its Jewish identity?”*

*“We just want our Jewish state.”*

Despite it being perfectly reasonable to question the basis of the legitimacy of any state, no one in the international community, or in the Palestinian leadership, is saying otherwise. Only that the Palestinians have an equal right to a Palestinian state, on Palestinian land, and that Palestinian citizens of Israel (Arab Israelis) have full civil rights inside Israel.

- ▶ The international consensus, since 1967, has been for a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.<sup>6</sup> Calling for an end to the Occupation does not require Israel to give up one inch of the country's territory.

## 1947-49 Wars

*“We were under attack in 1948, what else could we do?”*

There are laws of war to which all countries are obliged. These laws allow for a vigorous and effective defense but do not allow for human rights violations against civilians, the expulsion of peoples, or the acquisition of territory by force.

- ▶ The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 were already customary law at the time of the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli wars

that started in 1947. The subsequent Geneva Conventions too make clear that Israel (as well as Jordan), violated international law during the conflict.



*“The refugees left voluntarily or under the direction of Arab commanders.”*

This is a popular, but inaccurate, rendition of events. But even if it was accurate, Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states: *Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.*

–AND/OR–

Those who left were the ones who, rather than fight the Jews, chose to avoid the conflict altogether. This may have come about by forcible expulsion, panic or any other reason, but for all the hyperbole about pushing the Jews into the sea, the Palestinians in the refugee camps are the ones who weren't pushing anyone anywhere.

► The Convention to the Status of Refugees, Article 1, Part C., clearly outlines what exactly a refugees is. The Convention also outlines the rights of refugees. This convention, and

even rights of Palestinian refugees specifically, have been reaffirmed over the years in several UN Resolutions and legal analysis.<sup>7</sup> For a more accurate rendition of the expulsion of the refugees see Benny Morris' *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* and Walid Khalidi's *All that Remains*.



*“There were no massacres.”*

- Balad al-Sheikh: 31 December 1947 & 1 January 1948. 21-70 killed.<sup>8</sup>
- Deir Yassin: 9-11 April 1948. 100-120 killed.<sup>9</sup>
- Ein al Zaytoun: 1 May 1948. 30-70 killed.<sup>10</sup>
- Al Dawayima: 29 October 1948. 80-100 killed.<sup>11</sup>
- Safsaf: 29 October 1948. 50-70 killed.<sup>12</sup>
- Hula: 31 October 1948 and 1 November 1948. 35-58 killed.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these six, Israeli historian Benny Morris states that eighteen other massacres were perpetrated by Jewish forces during the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflicts between 1947-49.<sup>14</sup>



*“If events had been turned around, the Arabs would have massacred us.”*



But history was not turned around and we massacred and expelled many of them.

► Most modern readings of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict of 1947-48 and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49 state that the victory of the Haganah was essentially assured by the numeric and qualitative superiority, in both training and equipment, of the Haganah.<sup>15</sup> The only Arab force that could have threatened the Jewish forces was Jordan's Arab Legion, which did not enter into Israel proper, according to historian Avi Shlaim, due to understandings reached between the Israelis and King Abdullah of Jordan.<sup>16</sup>

## 1967/Occupation

*"There is no Occupation. It is disputed territory."*

The same international law that protects the rights of Israel and gives it the right to defend itself against hostile attacks, also states that the Israel's presence in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is a military occupation, and illegal under international law.

► As defined under international law, it's a military occupation. This is the position of the entire international community and the United

Nations Security Council. It has been reaffirmed in court cases before the World Court, the ICJ, and Israel's own Supreme Court/High Court of Justice, and even Ariel Sharon used the word "Occupation", if perhaps just once.<sup>17</sup>



*"The settlements are for security."*

No country can place its civilians in the middle of hostile territory and reasonably claim it is for security.

► The settlements are merely a way to grab more land from the Palestinian Territories. As long as the settlements are populated with civilians, Israel can claim that the settlements are for security only if it assumes the settlements are unavoidable. The military presence near Ariel, for instance, is only explicable in the context of having a civilian presence there. There is no plausible explanation for a military presence there without Israeli civilians in the area.

## **Arabs, Terrorism & Security: No Solution**

*"The other Arabs don't help the Palestinians."*

But for the occasional peace initiative this is largely true and should lead us to support the Palestinians all the more for it.



*“Jews and Arabs cannot live together peacefully and/or never have.”*

Then Zionism was a really bad idea!

–AND/OR–

This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If either side approaches the idea with that mindset then of course it won't happen.

–AND/OR–

The vast majority of the histories of the Middle East and North Africa say otherwise with vibrant Jewish communities in almost every country but for Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, until recently, it was a daily routine for as many as 150,000 Palestinians to work in Israel. Even now, there are many close friendships maintained by Arab and Jewish Israelis living side-by-side, as well as strong partnerships between Jews and Palestinians nonviolently working toward peace.

► It would be inappropriate to try and gloss over the anti-Semitism that occurred in many Arab countries, but it would be equally inappropriate to paint the history as worse than it actually is. The fact remains that when the Jews were slaughtered in Europe over the centuries, it was the Muslim world that offered refuge. Most of the historical discrimination in Arab countries came from a time before international standards of human rights. One need only look at the Jews of Tunisia and Morocco today for an example of the ever-improving situation for those who struggled through some awful racism into an era of acceptance and equality. The analogy would be to use the situation of whites and blacks in the American South during the 1950s as proof that they could never live together in peace.



*“The Arabs have no concept of human rights.”*

Even if true, which it is not, this is not a valid argument. Should it be proposed that only nations with certain guaranteed freedoms be allowed to live without foreign military rule?

► It was actually Babylonia, what is now Iraq, which gave us the Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest codifications of laws that defined

individual rights. It included women's rights, slave rights and even protections for animals.<sup>18</sup>



*“The real problem is the anti-Semitic propaganda that Palestinians receive since childhood.”*

In addition to having the disadvantage of being false, this is a nothing more than a distraction unless one thinks that a good education is a prerequisite for self-determination, human rights and peace.

► While there is clearly a nationalist sentiment in Palestinian texts, as there is for Israelis, there is no call for incitement or violence against Jews or Israelis in the Palestinian Authority's curriculum. The PA has even gone so far as to ban the posting of “martyr posters” on schools out of concern that it will encourage violence amongst the youth.<sup>19</sup>



*“There are no Palestinians.”*

Groups of people define themselves, and even David Ben Gurion differentiated between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arabs of other countries.<sup>20</sup>

*“There are 22 Arab states, why can’t the Palestinians go there?”*

There is no justifiable reason for the Palestinians to go to any other country, especially when the Palestinian and Israeli states are not mutually exclusive.

–AND/OR–

This perspective assumes that all Arab/Muslim states are the same, rather than acknowledging the wide variety of cultures, foods, customs, dialects and climates represented by them. According to the same logic, an Italian should feel right at home in Finland just because the majority in both countries are white and Christian.



*“The Palestinians do not want peace.”*

It was Israel, not the Palestinians, who had to be pressured by the first Bush administration to enter negotiations with the Palestinians at Madrid in 1991. The earlier rejection of Madrid was just one of many rejections Israel had made in response to Palestinian overtures.

- ▶ In June of 1990, in response to Israel’s unwillingness to meet the PLO, United States

Secretary of State James A. Baker stated, “everybody over there should know that the telephone number of the White House is 1-202-456-1414. When you are serious about peace, call us.” The US even went so far as to delay loan guarantees to Israel in order to bring about Israeli compliance.<sup>21</sup>



*“Most Palestinians are terrorists or support terrorists.”*

The main reason behind Hamas’ period of “calm” in 2005-2006 was the need to take into consideration the desires of the general Palestinian populace, which largely supported the lull and the disarming of the militant groups.<sup>22</sup>

–AND/OR–

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defines terrorism as, “the deliberate and systematic assault on civilians to inspire fear for political ends.” This definition would include Israel’s actions against the Palestinians as well.<sup>23</sup>



*“The Palestinians will never be satisfied with part of the land — they want it all.”*

It is not the Palestinians, but Israel, who is confiscating land and colonizing it. It is Israel, not the Palestinians, that insists upon retaining the territory of the other.

–AND/OR–

In addition to the implicit recognition that came with various agreements signed with Israel, the Palestinians have recognized Israel, officially and publicly, two times, in 1988 and during Oslo.



*“There is no partner for peace.”*

If the definition for “peace” is permanent Israeli control over East Jerusalem, control over the borders and water resources of the Palestinian state, etc., then no, there is no partner for *that* peace. But the Palestinian leadership, including Hamas, and the entire international community are united in calling for a two-state solution on the 1967 borders, something Israel is not willing to agree to.



*“The Palestinians rejected Barak’s ‘Generous Offer’ and then responded in violence.”*



It was the Israelis, not the Palestinians, who walked away from Taba.<sup>24</sup>

–AND/OR–

At Camp David, Ehud Barak presented the following: No Palestinian sovereignty over the Temple Mount, no Right of Return or any return of refugees to Israel, Israel’s annexation of large settlement blocs, an Israeli military presence in other areas, and effective Israeli sovereignty over the borders of the future Palestinian state. These were unreasonable conditions, conditions that no Palestinian leader could accept though Arafat proved willing to negotiate on several of them.<sup>25</sup>



*“The Palestinians have ruined every possibility of peace.”*

During the Oslo Process, Israel almost doubled the size and population of the settlements, creating facts on the ground that may be irreversible. This did far more to damage the long-term prospects for peace than any of the Palestinians’ mistakes.



*“Even if Israel withdraws, all the Arabs want is to throw*

*the Jews into the sea.”*

Given that Israel’s military retains a significant qualitative, and in most cases a quantitative, edge over that of its neighbors, this is an unlikely scenario.<sup>26</sup>

–AND/OR–

Each of Israel’s neighboring states, as well as many other states in the region, have made repeated overtures to Israel for peace and integration into the region as the costs of permanent conflict do not affect Israel alone.<sup>27</sup>



*“The Palestinian Authority can’t control its people. Until the PA controls terrorism we cannot end the Occupation.”*

The Palestinian Authority has only limited authority and does not even have a national security infrastructure. Without sovereignty over its own territory, it is unreasonable to expect the government to be able to exert influence over it. To expect this with no financial resources is even more absurd.

- ▶ Part of the Oslo Process was the divvying up of the West Bank and Gaza Strip into Areas A, B and

C, where Israel and the PA would have varying degrees of authority. Areas B and C, where Israel has full security control, carve up the West Bank into small, isolated cantons, making dependable travel, transport and other necessary elements for institutions of order to operate successfully, essentially unattainable.

–AND/OR–

Even were the PA able to exert authority, without resources or sovereignty, it still cannot address the motive for terrorism, the Occupation. Only Israel can do that.



*“The world never receives information about Palestinian collaborators killed by other Palestinians without evidence or judicial processes.”*

The fact that Israel does not hold a monopoly on extrajudicial executions of Palestinians has no bearing on Palestinian self-determination. Likewise, internal Palestinian failings have no bearing on the inalienability of their human rights.



*“The Palestinians fare better under the Occupation*

*than they would under their own PA.”*

With the near-constant humanitarian crisis in much of the Gaza Strip and West Bank this is highly unlikely and nothing more than speculation. Even more important though is that this goes against all principles of self-determination.



*“The Wall is not a wall, but a fence/The Wall is 85% a fence.”*

The material that the Wall/Fence/Barrier is made from is immaterial to the discourse. Whether it is made of concrete, barbed wire or chicken wire, it is a barrier that prevents the Palestinians from accessing roads, schools, hospitals, courts, family members, their holy sites, and their capital, East Jerusalem. Moreover, this same Wall/Fence/Barrier has been built so as to confiscate large sections of land from the Palestinian Territories, in contravention of international law.



*“The Wall is for security.”*

The Wall includes over 200,000 Palestinians on the

“Israeli side.”\* If the danger comes from Palestinians, how can this possibly be for security?<sup>28</sup>

–AND/OR–

Israeli government officials have spoken often and publicly about the both the path of the Wall and the integration of the settlement blocs into Israel leading to the conclusion that even if the Wall is for security, its path is dictated by political considerations.

► In December 2005, then Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni said, “One does not have to be a genius to see that the fence will have implications for the future border. This is not the reason it was built, but it could have political implications.” In February of 2006, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated, “We will hold on to the main settlement blocs,” all of which are on the “Israeli side” of the Wall.<sup>29</sup>

–AND/OR–

Had the Wall been built on the Green Line, it wouldn’t even be controversial.



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\*By “Israeli side” we refer to the land on the Palestinian side of the Green Line that is cut off from the rest of the West Bank by the Wall, not the land on the Israeli side of the Green Line.

*“The Wall is temporary.”*

On the “Israeli side” of the Wall, large swaths of land have been expropriated and settlements are being expanded. Even if the Wall itself is temporary, the facts established on the ground may be permanent.<sup>30</sup>



*“If we take down the Wall, there will be more attacks/ Gaza is a testament to the effectiveness of a wall.”*

Since The Wall has gone up, there has actually been an increase in attacks. Despite declining numbers in casualties since 2002, in 2005 there were more attacks, and more civilian deaths, than in 2000, two years before the Wall was first proposed.

- ▶ The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has on its website data related to the number of attacks by Palestinians against Israelis. They include in their data on terrorism attacks against Israeli soldiers inside the Palestinian areas. The data available on the website show dramatic increases in attacks from 2000-2002, then a period of decline afterwards in the numbers of deaths, but not the numbers of attacks except in 2005, when Hamas, the most active group, declared a “calm” and largely adhered to it. Despite the

decline since 2002, the rate of attacks remains higher than it was in 2000, three years before construction began on the Wall. Additionally, the attack on the Kerem Shalom military post in June 2006 was done with through a tunnel the Palestinians dug *underneath* the Wall.<sup>31</sup>

–AND/OR–

Even the Israeli government states that the effect of the Wall does not “indicate any difference whatsoever in the motivation of the terrorist organizations to attack Israeli targets.” Without addressing the motives of Palestinian terrorism, there is no reason to think it will abate.



*“A country has the right to defend itself.”*

This is absolutely true and universally accepted, however international law puts limits on some activities and prohibits others entirely and the international community makes a distinction between war crimes and self defense.



*“If the Palestinians were given the right of return, there would be no room for them/If there is the Right of Return,*

*the Jewish state will no longer be Jewish.”*

Ignoring the fact that the Right of Return is enshrined in international law, according to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, only ten percent of all refugees prefer to return and become Israeli citizens. The rest prefer to become citizens of the Palestinians state, to be resettled in third countries, or to be rehabilitated in their current host countries rendering this dilemma moot.<sup>32</sup>

► It is important that the Right of Return be acknowledged; no matter in what form it is realized. Especially important is Israel’s recognition of the role it played in driving out the refugees. It goes without saying that the acknowledgement of historical anti-Semitism, especially the Holocaust, is very important for Jews. Similarly the campaigns to: recognize the Armenian Genocide, reparations for slavery and other crimes against humanity are very important to the victims and their descendents. For the Palestinian refugees it is a similar situation.

## **Illegitimacy of Criticism/Anti-Semitism**

*“Anti-Occupation and/or anti-Zionist Jews are ‘self-hating.’”*



There is no single definition for being Jewish and, in addition to being condescending, authors of statements like these claim to have a monopoly on Jewish life and Jewish values, something no one has.

–AND/OR–

Most of the world's Jews do not live in Israel and most Israelis want a two-state solution. Given all this, self-hatred would have to be a very common dilemma amongst world Jewry.



*“Criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic.”*

It would be no surprise to find anti-Semites critical of Israel, but to criticize specific Israeli policies that violate international law is the opposite of bigotry. Instead it is a just act — one might even say a very Jewish one — that works to strengthen human rights, rights that protect Jews as much as anybody else.

–AND/OR–

If one is criticizing house demolitions, checkpoints, extrajudicial executions and like, and one is called anti-Semitic, then the accuser is bizarre indeed. In order for those criticisms to be anti-Semitic the

accuser has to accept those violations of international law as inherent characteristics of Jewry. So who is being anti-Semitic here?



*“The whole world is anti-Semitic.”*

While it’s true that there is anti-Semitism in the world, what does this have to do with the military occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem?

–AND/OR–

Unlike in the past, there are international institutions to combat bigotry and injustice. Israel’s continued violation of international law, and the lack of attempts to address this, weakens these institutions making them less effective.



*“If you weren’t born here, aren’t Jewish, didn’t lose a relative in an attack or didn’t serve in the army, you can’t understand...”*

There is nothing inherent in experiencing an event first hand that improves the understanding of that event. After all, who normally understands an event

more, the witness or the detective?



*“Double standard: The world judges Israel more harshly than it does other countries/ The UN is anti-Semitic — which you can see by the disproportionate number of UN resolutions dealing with Israel.”*

It seems true that more attention is paid to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than many other serious and pressing issues in the international community, but the fact that criticism of Israeli policies has not led to Palestinian self-determination means that insufficient pressure is being applied. Raising the profile of other international issues is not mutually exclusive with continuing to pressure Israel over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



*“The international community did not intervene during the Holocaust; therefore Israel is under no obligation to follow them now.”*

The fact that the international community did not intervene early enough during the Holocaust has no bearing on the conflict here. The fact that the world is intervening at all here means that it has learned from the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity.

## The Nature of Israel

*“Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East.”*

Though many important criticisms can be made about Israel’s form of democracy, how does being a democracy justify the Occupation?<sup>33</sup>

–AND/OR–

Is Lebanon not a democracy? And recently Iraq (admittedly *very* flawed)?

–AND/OR–

It is certainly not a democracy for almost half the people who live under Israeli control.

- ▶ Since 1967 around half of the population between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the residents of the Occupied Territories, have not had any say in how Israel governs them.



*“There is no contradiction between a Jewish state and a democracy.”*

There is a contradiction if the state does not extend full rights, and protect those rights, to all of its inhabitants.



*“Israel has the most humane army in the world.”*

Given the multitudes of human rights violations perpetrated by Israel’s armed forces, and lack of similar violations in other nations, this cannot possibly be true.



*“Israel treats its Arab citizens better than Jews were treated in Arab countries.”*

This could be argued but even if it was true, how is second-class citizenship in Israel justifiable solely because Jews might be third-class citizens in Syria?



*“Israel has more civil rights than any of its neighboring Arab nations.”*

In many ways, but not all, this is true. But this does not excuse Israel from the need to correct internal injustice and discrimination.

## Endnotes

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