

A POSTSCRIPT FROM THE SPONSOR, PEOPLE FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE, by Member 24.

During the Q&A part of our most recent public event, Joe Goodner's talk about his recent visit to Palestine as part of the International Solidarity Movement, a number of points were raised which, in the circumstances, could be dealt with only in cursory fashion and which merit closer attention. I will concentrate on two.

Q: THE WALL AND ISRAEL'S "SECURITY"

An audience member suggested that Israel's so-called "Security Barrier" is justified because it has supposedly saved both Israeli and Palestinian lives. Since that barrier was erected, suicide bombings have basically stopped and Israel has not had to launch as many "reprisal" operations which have caused so much suffering in the past. Though reasonable people might disagree on the route of the barrier, how can we say that the barrier itself is unjustified? Do we want to bring back suicide bombings?

The International Court of Justice, when it ruled against the so-called "Security Barrier" in July 2004, specifically exempted that part of it which is located within the "Green Line", Israel's internationally-recognized border. It also explicitly affirmed Israel's "duty" to protect its own civilians from attack. Pro-Israel propagandists often talk as if international bodies like ICJ or Human Rights Watch are demanding that Israel do nothing at all to protect itself. But this is simply not the case. No one can stop Israel from building a wall on its own border.

The problem is that the Barrier supposed to protect Israeli civilians is mostly being built inside the West Bank, not between the West Bank and Israel. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, when the project is complete, **NO LESS THAN 85% of the BARRIER WILL BE INSIDE THE WEST BANK.**

The route of the wall cannot be explained by legitimate considerations of "security". It rather reflects Israel's desire to annex territory. UN Security Council Resolution 242 declares the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war". However, Israel is keen on territorial expansion through settlement of the territories conquered in the 1967 war (which, by the way, was an aggressive war, not a defensive war).¹

"Fingers" of the Barrier snake around large Israeli settlements built deep inside West Bank (eg. Kedumim, Ariel and Ma'ale Adumim). These settlements are all illegal according to international law. (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49). Even if we grant for the sake of argument that the wall helped end suicide bombings, we cannot justify it on that basis, because a wall built on the Green Line would be presumably also be effective for that purpose. We have to remember that both Israelis and Palestinians, not just Israelis, have legitimate security interests. If we take seriously the interests of both peoples, then we have to conclude that the wall which actually exists is morally repugnant and indefensible. Its route is redundant for Israeli security and does hideous damage to Palestinian security.

All too often, defenders of Israel talk as if only Israeli lives were important and Palestinians were expendable. Any measure which seems useful against Palestinian terrorism is automatically assumed to be legitimate, regardless of the cost to the Palestinians and the availability of less damaging alternatives. Those who accuse Israel's defenders of suffering from a profound moral blindness and a pervasive and deep-seated racial bias may have a point.

Of course a wall on the Green Line cannot protect Israeli settlers. But their safety can best be assured by removing them from the West Bank entirely. Israel certainly has no right to add to its violations of international law by taking extreme measures to protect settlements which are illegal in the first place.

At present, 27,000 Palestinians are trapped in a kind of no-man's land between the Barrier and the Green Line. **They actually have to get permits from Israel to remain living in their own homes!** The Barrier is devastating to the Palestinian economy. It is carving up and rendering unusable large tracts of arable land. It separates farmers from their fields and businesses from local markets. The simplest daily transactions become a logistical nightmare because of the elaborate regime of gates, permits and checkpoints.

When the wall is complete, 125,000 Palestinians in 28 communities, including the large town of Qalqilyah, will be surrounded on 3 sides. 26,000 people will be surrounded on 4 sides, with only a tunnel or a small road to connect them to the rest of the West Bank. The majority of Palestinians in East Jerusalem will be trapped between the wall and the Green Line. In its advisory opinion, the World Court expressed the suspicion that, in trapping people in this way, Israel's real aim is to drive them out. This suspicion is very well justified.²

Make no mistake about it: by building the "Security Barrier", Israel is imprisoning an entire population, not mainly to protect itself, but in order to steal Palestinian land and resources. We cannot honestly talk about the "route" of the wall as if it were some small detail on which "reasonable people" could differ. It is the heart of the matter. The Israeli Supreme Court has ordered alterations of the route here and there, supposedly in the interest of the Palestinians. But it has never changed the essential facts on the ground.

Anyone with a conscience who looks at the facts can hardly fail to condemn Israel's racist policy.

Q: GAZA, "ETHNIC CLEANSING", AND THE PROSPECTS OF PEACE.

Another audience member raised a question about Israel's 2005 "Disengagement" from Gaza. Israel, he said, "ethnically cleansed" the Gaza Strip of its Jewish settlers and was rewarded with a hail of rockets. Doesn't this prove that Israel had better not give back any more territory unilaterally but wait for an overall peace settlement?

First of all, it is an abuse of language to call the removal of the Gaza settlers "ethnic cleansing". In fact it is shameful to talk this way. There is no parallel whatsoever between the forced removal of a native population from its homeland and the reversal of an official policy of territorial annexation through state-sponsored demographic incursion or colonization.

When the French in Algeria drove out large numbers of native Arabs in order to annex and colonize parts of their territory, that was a case of “ethnic cleansing”. When the Japanese colonists in Manchuria were forced out at the end of WWII, that was not.³

Imperial Japan promoted colonization of Manchuria by Japanese civilians as way to strengthen its hold on the territory. Those colonists did not somehow magically acquire the rights of natives merely by living in Manchuria. Their expulsion was certainly unpleasant, and they can be viewed as victims in a way: of the Japanese regime which installed them in the first place and of the Chinese who dealt with them very brutally. But they did not actually have a right to live in Manchuria without Chinese consent, or under the laws and jurisdiction of Japan.

The removal of the Gaza settlers was assuredly not a case of ethnic discrimination. Legal residency or citizenship rights are granted by sovereign governments, but in this case Israel, by violating the native Palestinian right to national self-determination, prevents the relevant sovereign government from coming into existence. The settlers carry Israeli nationality and Israeli law with them and thereby become the instrument of Israel’s illegal annexation of somebody else’s country.

Ideally, perhaps, people of all ethnic and sectarian backgrounds, with an appropriate history of residence in the area, should be permitted to live and exercise full citizenship rights anywhere in Palestine-Israel, including in the Occupied Territories. But those who defend the concept of Israel as a sectarian state reserved for Jews and who deny the right of return for Palestinian refugees would be ill advised to make that argument. The simplest way to establish equal citizenship rights and end discrimination would be to abandon the attempt at a sectarian partition of the country and to replace Israel with a non-sectarian successor state. Those who balk at that solution cannot reasonably complain about the removal of the Gaza settlers in 2005.

Was Israel unwise to act unilaterally in 2005? Perhaps so, but in that case the questioner should really direct his criticism to the policy of Ariel Sharon. Many people thought he should have coordinated his disengagement with Mahmud Abbas, whom he praised as a real “partner for peace”. But Sharon chose to act unilaterally instead. He preferred to snub the Arabs, even “good” Arabs, for the sake of the old Zionist principle of self-reliance. He was never really interested in a negotiated peace, with its unsavory connotations of equality between partners. The ethos of Zionism is “Maccabean” aggressiveness and self-assertion. Negotiation and compromise tend to be stigmatized as symptoms of the supposed “weakness” and “decadence” of the Jewish “exile” (galut).

As for the Qassam rockets, they can come as a surprise only to those who suffer from a kind of moral tunnel vision.

Pro-Israel propaganda subsists not on lies, exactly, but on certain carefully edited half-truths, which support a self-righteous, self-pitying narrative of Israel as the eternal “victim” for whom “no good deed goes unpunished”. By manipulatively playing upon Western guilt over the treatment of Jews in Europe, Zionists seek to blind us to the very humanity of the Palestinian people. Their rhetorical strategy is to equate concern about the plight of the Palestinians with the evil Western legacy of slander and “blood libel” against the Jewish people. Right-thinking people are supposed to automatically accept all of Israel’s acts of collective punishment against the Palestinians as “regrettably necessary” and to dismiss all evidence of Israel’s own territorial and demographic

expansionism. The fact that Israel regularly steals land and engages in dramatic “overkill” at the least sign of Palestinian resistance is supposed to pass politely unnoticed. But this tactic is getting old and more and more of us recognize it for what it is.

In 2005, Israel withdrew its soldiers and settlers from inside Gaza but remained in complete control of the territory, whose economy was already devastated by its closure policy. After January 2006, Israel sought relentlessly to overthrow the freely elected Hamas government, despite the latter’s commitment to a ceasefire.

Hamas tried to form a unity government with Fatah in Feb 2007, which would have involved indirect recognition of Israel. It committed itself to respect all past agreements between the PLO and Israel, including the 1993 Declaration of Principles, in which the PLO formally recognized Israel’s “right to exist”. But the US and Israel rejected this plan and continued economic sanctions against the Palestinian government. In June 2007, a Palestinian civil war fomented by the US and Israel led to Hamas’s takeover of Gaza. In December 2007, Israel rejected Hamas’s proposal for a new ceasefire and launched a massive assault on Gaza; even though, as McClatchy reported that same month, Israel had suffered only 5 civilian casualties all year.

Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire in June 2008, but Israel proceeded to violate it the following November; as even CNN acknowledged. Israel used Gaza’s retaliation as an excuse to launch the horrific assault of Dec 2008-January 2009, which killed 1400 Palestinians, mostly civilians. Meanwhile, Israel’s intensive blockade of Gaza has caused a food crisis, a fuel crisis, a water and sanitation crisis and a medical crisis on a massive scale; as international aid agencies regularly report. The majority of Gaza’s 1.5 million suffering residents are children under age 14. But Israel and its fans care little about them.⁴

The people of Gaza are caught in a trap. They are enclosed by a wall; sea lanes are blocked by the Israeli navy, which regularly fires on their fishing boats; their air space is dominated by the Israeli air force, which terrorizes their children with sonic booms. Indiscriminate shooting, bombing, shelling are a daily occurrence.

Gazans are the victims of a colossal humanitarian disaster brought about as a result of deliberate state policy. The State of Israel has destroyed their economy and made normal life impossible. It has relentlessly sought the overthrow of their government, whether it agrees to a ceasefire or not. It refuses to seriously negotiate a peaceful compromise with Mahmud Abbas, but continues to expand settlements and encroach on what little is left of the Palestinian homeland. It punishes Palestinian “militants” but does nothing to reward the “moderates”.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that people should conclude that their enemy is bent on destroying their society and driving them out, regardless of what they do. It is not at all surprising that they should choose to fight back with such poor weapons as they have available: the primitive Qassam rockets which rarely injure anyone, however many thousands they fire.

When you point to all this devastation and suffering and Israel’s persistent refusal to try to resolve the crisis peacefully, you are virtually assured of getting the same stock answers:

“Yes, but they’ve still got Gilad Shalit. And they still fire Qassams”— as if that proved that Palestinians were the evil persecutors and Israel the hapless victim. The single Israeli P.O.W.

is supposed to matter more to us than hundreds of thousands of malnourished Palestinian children.

But when you hear the same stock answers over and over again, regardless of the monstrous asymmetry in the power relations and the suffering on both sides, you begin to suspect that you are dealing, not with an ordinary political point of view, but with the kind of conviction which normally goes deeper than politics.

This is in reality a kind of chauvinist religiosity for which the concept of human equality is altogether alien. It is prejudice so deep that it can withstand absolutely any argument, any proof, any faint, fleeting glimmer of a recognition that a place like Gaza is inhabited by human beings.

NOTES

1. On the nature of the "Six Day War":
Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War", *MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL*, vol. 60, no. 2 Spring 2006 pp. 281-309. "[T]he claim of an impending Egyptian first strike was devised in order to convince both the civilian leadership in Israel as well as the main ally, the United States, of the necessity for a military solution to the crisis."
cf. Yitzhak Rabin, Interview with *LE MONDE*, Feb 29, 1968: "I do not believe Nasser wanted war. The two divisions he sent into Sinai on May 14 would not have been enough to unleash an offensive against Israel. He knew it and we knew it.", cited in David Hirst, *THE GUN AND THE OLIVE BRANCH: THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST*, Third Edition, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2003 p. 337).
2. cf. UN OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, "FIVE YEARS AFTER THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE ADVISORY OPINION: A SUMMARY OF THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF THE BARRIER", 10 August 2009 at www.ochaonline2.un.org
3. On French Algeria :
David Proschaska, *MAKING ALGERIA FRENCH: COLONIALISM IN BONE, 1870-1920*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, esp. pp.64-65;
John Ruedy, *MODERN ALGERIA: THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A NATION*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp. 70-71:
The French confiscated "state land", even though most of it was not vacant but let out to Algerian farmers in return for various services. It was treated as "vacant" and turned over to French settlers. Again, "(m)ost (really) vacant lands became so through the flight of populations fleeing before the French army. Still others reverted to the state when, pursuant to the Land Ordinance of 1846, all claimants to vacant land had to submit their titles for verification to a Council of Claims. The procedure resulted in state appropriation of thousands of hectares of 'empty' land, much of which had in fact been communal grazing land of the nomadic or village communities...Finally, the government resorted to the procedure of judicial condemnation in the public interest, the public interest being defined in this case as the need to settle Europeans on the affected lands."
The same procedures of legalized robbery and confiscation have been used to convert Palestine into "Israel", after the wars of 1948 and 1967:
cf. Ian Lustick, *ARABS IN THE JEWISH STATE: ISRAEL'S CONTROL OF A NATIONAL MINORITY*, University of Texas Press, 1980, pp. 170-182:
"Abandoned" land from which Palestinians were driven out was confiscated and turned over for exclusively Jewish use. "Emergency Regulations...have been used to expel who villages from 'security zones', making possible the subsequent expropriation of their lands". The British survey of land titles in Arab areas had been incomplete by 1948. "In 1958...occupiers of unregistered lands were required to demonstrate unchallenged possession, not for ten years, as had been the rule, but for fifteen or twenty five. Under this law Arabs were forced to produce records from the British Mandate period", though Israeli officials knew that those records were incomplete. Those who lacked the requisite "proof" thus had their land stolen by the immigrants' state.
In 1956 the "Law for the Acquisition of Property in the Public Interest was used to confiscate much of the best land in Nazareth. "The 'public interest' for which the land had been expropriated was designated as the construction of housing and privately owned factories for the nucleus of a new Jewish township, Upper Nazareth".
"Still another technique employed quite often to expropriate Arab land involves the use of Article 125 of the Emergency Regulations (which empowers the Defense Minister or his agents) to prohibit entry of persons into designated 'closed areas'...An area enclosing Arab-owned agricultural lands is declared a 'closed area'. The owners of the land are then denied permission by the security authorities to enter the area for any purpose whatsoever, including cultivation. After three years pass, the Ministry of Agriculture issues certificates which classify the lands as uncultivated. The owners, still barred by the security authorities from entering the 'closed area' within which their lands are located, cannot resume cultivation. The lands are then expropriated and become part of the general land reserve for Jewish settlement." (pp.177-78).
These are the sort of tricks used to create an Israeli "national territory" within the Green Line. But the same tricks are being used today to annex the West Bank.
cf. B'Tselem: Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, *LAND GRAB: ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT POLICY IN THE WEST BANK*, May 2002, chapter 3, pp. 47-63 "Land Seizure Mechanisms". Among the mechanisms mentioned are "seizure for military needs", "declaration of land as state land", confiscation of land uncultivated for three years, confiscation of "absentee property", and "expropriation for public needs"
The truth is that the State of Israel, like French Algeria, is a foreign settler colony established and maintained in somebody else's country by the forcible dispossession of the native population; a process which continues to this day.
French Algeria lasted from 1830-1962, 132 years; Israel has been in existence less than half as long. French Algeria also had its idealists, its great writers and intellectuals like Albert Camus, and even its own socialist experiments. During the Franco-Algerian War (1954-62) many people thought that it would be unjust and "unrealistic" to abolish the colonial regime. Algeria, they said, was as much a part of France as Brittany or Provence. The Algerian rebels also practiced horrific acts of terrorism against the colonists, and many thought that they must first be defeated before a political compromise could be reached. De Gaulle finally gave up on Algeria because the continued attempt to hold on to it was destabilizing the French homeland.
The supporters of French Algeria turned out to be on the wrong side of history. Algeria is no longer French, but it remains a deeply troubled country. It is a sign of what can happen when the wrong kind of political "dream" is pursued for too long.
On the Japanese in Manchuria:
Louise Young, *JAPAN'S TOTAL EMPIRE: MANCHURIA AND THE CULTURE OF WARTIME IMPERIALISM*, University of California Press, 1998,
Especially chapter 8, "The Migration Machine"; "Not only did imperial privilege allow Japanese settlers to take prime lands away from Chinese farmers, but it also facilitated exploitation of the labor power of many of the same people they had just displaced" (p.403); On their expulsion: pp. 409-411. Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories carry the equivalent of an "imperial privilege".
4. Despite its observance of a ceasefire, Israel and the US planned the overthrow of the newly elected Hamas government:
Danny Rubinstein: "Sometimes one has to rub one's eyes in disbelief when one sees Hamas activists demanding with all their might that (Palestinians) refrain from violence and maintain the calm...No Hamas activists have been involved in terror attacks recently." in *HA'ARETZ*, 12/12/05

In January 2006, Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections. Though it still observed the ceasefire, Israel and the US at once began trying to overthrow that government. (cf. Steven Erlanger, "US and Israelis said to talk of Hamas ouster", *NEW YORK TIMES*, 2/14/06.)

Seymour Hersh wrote later, on the basis of intelligence intercepts, that Hamas decided to return to armed resistance in May 2006 because it determined that it got no benefit out of the truce and was losing standing among the Palestinian population. (cf. Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon", *NEW YORKER*, 21 August 2006.)

In February 2007, Fatah and Hamas agreed to the formula of a unity government, according to which the former honor all prior agreements between the PLO and Israel, including the PLO's formal recognition of Israel in 1993. (cf. Avi Shlaim, "How Israel brought Gaza to the brink of humanitarian catastrophe", *GUARDIAN*, 1/7/09; AP "Text of the Mecca Accord for the Palestinian coalition government, 2/8/07.)

Israel and the Bush Administration rejected this proposal and continued economic sanctions against the Palestinian government. They then tried to arm Abbas and Fatah to overthrow the Hamas government in Gaza. But Hamas turned the tables and overran the Strip. Israel then imposed a near total blockade on Gaza. (cf. David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell", *VANITY FAIR*, April 2008.)

2007 turned out to be a very peaceful year for Israel. As McClatchy reported in December of that year:

"2007 is on track to become the safest year in Israel since before the second Palestinian uprising more than seven years ago. There has been only one suicide bombing in Israel this year, a bungled attack in January that killed 3 people at a bakery in the Red Sea resort of Eilat. A Palestinian shift to rockets and mortar attacks as their main weapons has proved largely ineffective: only two Israelis have died from more than 2000 qassam rockets and mortars fired into Israel."

"Only 1 suicide bombing hit Israel so far this year",
MCCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE, 12/7/07.

Despite this, Israel went on the offensive just days after the McClatchy report, launching a major incursion into Gaza with tanks and armored bulldozers. (cf. "Israeli tanks push deep into Gaza", *BBC* 12/11/07.)

And soon thereafter, Israel turned down Hamas's call for a ceasefire. (cf. "Israelis cool on offer of truce from Hamas", *NEW YORK TIMES*, 12/20/07; "Olmert rules out Hamas ceasefire", *AP* 12/23/07.)

In June 2008, Israel finally agreed to a ceasefire. But then it blew it up on 4 November 2008, election day in the US. (cf. Sara Roy, "If Gaza falls", *LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS*, 1 January 2009.)

Even CNN admitted that Israel was the one who broke the truce. (cf. CNN Newsroom, "Who started it?", available on Youtube under the title, "CNN confirms Israel Broke Ceasefire First".)

Human rights organizations investigating Gaza are unanimous in concluding that Israel committed war crimes there and deliberately targeted innocent Palestinian civilians. Many Israeli soldiers confirm this. Judge Richard Goldstone, a respected international jurist well known for his inquiry into the Rwanda genocide, made the same finding in his recent report to the UN. He also condemns the conduct of Hamas. But that does not stop Israel and its fans from accusing him of "bias" and "slander". (cf. Kenneth Roth, "The Incendiary IDF", *HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH*, 22 January 2009, on the illegal use of phosphorus bombs in crowded urban areas. Mothers and children were incinerated by these bombs; "Israel: Stop Shelling Crowded Gaza City", *HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH*, 16 January 2009: "The attacks on Gaza City occurred after the Israel Defence Forces had warned Gaza residents to flee to the city centers. According to the Israeli government, on January 3, the IDF began broadcasting warnings that told people, among other things, that 'For your own safety, you are required to leave your homes immediately and move to the city centers. Despite these warnings, the IDF has launched attacks against the Gaza city center, causing civilian casualties. (cf. Amos Harel, "IDF killed civilians in Gaza under loose rules of engagement", in *HA'ARETZ*, 3/19/09; "Shooting and Crying", in *HA'ARETZ*, 3/20/09")

"I don't understand. Why did he shoot her? (Soldier answers) 'That's what's so nice, supposedly, about Gaza. You see a person on a road, walking along a path. He doesn't have to be with a weapon, you don't have to identify him with anything and you can just shoot him.

With us it was an old woman, on whom I didn't see any weapon. The order was to take the person out, this woman, the moment you see her." (cf "Breaking the Silence" www.shrovrimshatika.org. Testimonies of IDF soldiers in "Operation Cast Lead". and "Breaking the silence on Gaza abuses", *BBC*, 15 July 2009.)

For the living conditions in Gaza, the reader should consult OCHA's Humanitarian Monitor at the above website.

For violence in a time of peace, consider the following news item: "A Palestinian medical official on Thursday said that an Israel gunboat firing off the shores of Gaza City has wounded a man and a girl. The IDF said that it was firing to deter a Palestinian fishing vessel that had strayed off limits...Gunboats have been firing off the Gaza's shore for several days, despite the ceasefire..." ("Palestinians: Shell fired from Israeli gunboat wounds 2 in Gaza", *AP* 1/22/09)

PJP-24. The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily represent the opinions either of Mr. Goodner or of my fellow members of IC-PJP.

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