

DOES THE US SUPPORT RACISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

Israel's assault on Gaza this past summer was the third such attack in six years. Though Israel presented its actions as "self-defense," the warfare resulted from provocations by Israeli military over several months following the breakdown of the latest round of "peace talks" the preceding spring.

The UN has repeatedly condemned Israel's failure to reach a final settlement with the Palestinians, to abide by international treaties regarding its treatment of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, its confiscation of land, house demolitions, and building of new Israeli cities (called "settlements") and restricted highways in the West Bank – all violations of its obligations as an occupying power under international law. Now Israel's rightist leaders speak explicitly about never giving up the territory conquered in 1967, even though Israel is a party to international treaties that forbid acquisition of territory by conquest.

The series of Gaza wars, and the rhetoric of Israeli officials as they waged them, show a clear intention to demoralize Palestinians through massive onslaughts on civilians and their housing, hospitals, community centers, religious buildings and places of employment in Gaza. The Israeli attack had little if any impact on its alleged target – the feeble rockets of Hamas – and was thus criminally disproportionate to the threat to Israel, under the laws of war.

Facing these conditions, responsible leaders of Palestinian civil society called earlier for an economic boycott of Israel, for divestment of stock holdings in companies that operate in Israel, and for sanctions against Israeli institutions that support Israel's policy of conquest over the Palestinians. Known as BDS, this movement has begun to gain support around the world among individuals and groups supporting peace and human rights.

BDS is modeled on the efforts used successfully a generation ago to oppose apartheid in South Africa. That movement grew slowly, but finally world public opinion was so well mobilized that governments embraced it as well, and the racist white colonial regime in South Africa agreed to make peace with the African majority. The Palestinian BDS movement is gaining supporters worldwide and causing Israelis to recognize it as a serious challenge to the unjust status quo.

Some apologists argue that Israel is not an apartheid state – a country that discriminates on the basis of race. Unfortunately the facts are otherwise. The Zionists who established Israel aimed to create a Jewish nation state in all of Palestine. Even before they declared their new country in May of 1948, they had begun to forcibly expel the unarmed Palestinians. The new Israeli army ended

up seizing more land than the UN authorized, expelling over 720,000 civilians from their homes and destroying over 560 Palestinian villages. Israel refuses to this day to allow refugees to come home or even retrieve their property, a policy contrary to international law. More refugees were created by the Six Day War of 1967, when Israel occupied Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Despite this ethnic cleansing, some Palestinians remained. They are now 20 % of Israel's citizens. To ensure that they would never out-number Israeli Jews, the government recruited Jewish immigrants from other countries of the middle east and North Africa. This introduced a new dynamic into the country. The Zionists who founded Israel were Ashkenazi Jews from eastern Europe. They considered the new arrivals, Mizrahi Jews, to be of lower culture.

Today, Ashkenazi Jews dominate all major economic, cultural and political institutions. Mizrahi Jews are a disadvantaged lower caste, though they amount to 50% of Israeli citizens. Palestinian citizens are even more disadvantaged, with at least fifty laws that discriminate against them. Meanwhile, the millions of Palestinians in the occupied territories have no citizenship rights at all.

As Israel enters a national election campaign, the rival party leaders argue over whether Israel should "never" give up the occupied territories (the right wing position) or "maybe partly, maybe someday" (the so called left wing position). Both positions are contrary to commitments Israel previously made in international treaties and in the 1990's Oslo agreements. The net effect is that the Ashkenazi elite are presiding over a racially discriminatory social order that fully parallels the apartheid policies once in effect in South Africa.

Israel has only been able to pursue these policies because of ongoing US support. Over \$3 billion annually makes Israel the single largest recipient of US foreign aid, most of which is spent on armaments made in the US., while US support for Israel's policies intensifies popular dislike for the US internationally.

Now, with popular outcries against persistent racism in policing in America, **it is a good time to ask why US political leaders who claim to disapprove of racism continue to support Israel's racist policies toward Palestinians. It should be clear by now that we can't defeat racism here in America if we fund it elsewhere**
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