

The Roots of My Activism for Peace in Israel-Palestine

ICUJP Reflection by Jeff Warner, September 20, 2013

Blue text are slight expansions from the presentation, plus an added section on resolving the conflict.

JEWISH CRITIC OF ISRAEL

I am a Jewish critic of Israel's treatment of [Israel, West Bank, Gazan, and refugee](#) Palestinians as sub-human, and all that follows from that assessment. Most Jewish Israelis, and many Jewish Americans, reject the humanity of Palestinians. How else to explain the ethnic cleansing, violent occupation, and cold-blooded murder of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers during the 2008-09 Gaza bombardment with no [subsequent accountability that are well documented in the Goldstone Commission Report.](#)

That said, we must recognize and admire the accomplishments of Israel since 1948; 65 years of building jobs, infrastructure, institutions, family, culture, science, and so forth.

My critique does not make me anti-Semitic or a self-hating Jew. Rather it is based on the ICUJP message of the humanity of all peoples. I stand for justice, and international law and human rights. I embrace the first half of Genesis 1:26 (repeated in 1:27) that preaches equality among all people; I recognize the humanity and relatedness of everyone, including the equality [and humanity](#) of Jews as well as Arabs, Palestinians as well as Israelis, [Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews, West Bankers and Gazans and refugee](#) [Palestinians.](#)

[Since mentioning Genesis 1:26 & 27, I note that I reject second half of those verses in favor of a Buddhist view that all life is equal, and a Taoist view that we must live in harmony with nature. But that is the subject of another reflection.](#)

This plays out indirectly [in dealing with the Israel-Palestinian issue.](#)

I criticize Israeli actions, but I am an American so my first responsibility is to work to get my government to act honorably. [And there is a lot of work because,](#) in spite of the rhetoric of American leaders, United States policies work to perpetuate, not resolve, the conflict.

The problem is the U.S. policy of unconditional diplomatic, financial, and military support of Israel, engineered by the Israeli lobby, even when Israel violates international law, ignores human rights, dispossesses Palestinians, and insults the American president. I am offended as an American and as a Jew.

I am convinced that without American protection and support, Israel would find a way to make peace with the Palestinians. But as long as unconditional American support continues, Israel will continue to do what it does. After all, why should Israel change how it behaves while being rewarded for doing what it does?

ZIONISM

Historically Zionism was a movement to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. I am not a Zionist, but I understand and sympathize with the Zionist drive to establish a homeland in Palestine where Jews have ancient, deep, and semi-continuous, roots.

Zionism succeeded with the formation of Israel in 1948. But instead of taking a win and bowing out, Zionism split into many strands:

- Israeli Jews use Zionism as a metaphor for Israeli patriotism and an excuse for defending or accepting whatever Israel does including dispossession of Palestinians and ethnic cleansing. Benny Morris said the 1948 ethnic cleansing was necessary to establish the Jewish state.
- Liberal Jewish Americans use Zionism to mean supporting and defending Israel as a homeland for Jews and a Jewish state in their ancestral land of Palestine. They are offended by the occupation, how Israel treats Palestinians, and at the growing racism among Israeli Jews. But community solidarity dampens almost any criticism of Israel
- Palestinian solidarity workers see Zionism as a movement to establish a Jewish state by dispossessing Palestinians and driving them from the land; i.e., ethnic cleansing. Their focus on the 1948 Nabka leads them to question Israel's

existence as a Jewish state, or even as a Jewish homeland, and to consider a single democratic state the only just future.

There is a lot of space among those strands. People in this room include both liberal Zionists and Palestinian Solidarity activists.

I note significant similarity between Israeli Jews and Palestinian solidarity workers in the view of Zionism. Both say Zionism is associated with ethnic cleansing and the occupation. Israeli Jews say Palestinian dispossession is collateral damage of Zionism's main driver of establishing and maintaining a Jewish State. Palestinian solidarity workers say Palestinian dispossession is a core tenet of Zionism. The difference is more intent than action.

I support a Jewish homeland, but not necessarily a Jewish state, and I am offended by the occupation. Does that make me a Zionist? I don't self-identify as one. In fact, I don't even use the word "Zionism" because of the ambiguity in its meaning. But some others would say it does.

U.N. resolutions that equate Zionism with racism are problematic. Clearly they don't make sense for the Jewish American Zionism. That label makes more sense for the Israeli Zionism, ignoring that it is religious-, not race-, based discrimination.

PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY

Being a non-Zionist does not mean I embrace Palestinian solidarity, that supports Palestinian actions that hurt their fight for freedom, and is more concerned with Palestinian suffering than Palestinian achievements. And yes, there are achievements, not the least of which is Palestinian steadfastness against the occupation, known by the Arabic word *Sumud*.

Palestinians are in big trouble. Local Palestinian leaders in 1948 and in 1967 wanted to coexist with Israel, long before Israel became a regional superpower. But in both instances they were overshadowed by Arab leaders and/or regional Palestinian leaders who threatened Israel's existence and did not stop violence & terrorism. That worked to deepen and perpetuate the conflict, and to this day ordinary Palestinians suffer.

- Palestinians need a unified government to fight for their freedom.

- They should clearly renounce terrorism and violent resistance. Even though rockets are ineffective, they are war crimes, and must stop. Rockets and stone throwing only give Israel an opening for anti-Palestinian rhetoric and very violent reprisals.
- Palestinian freedom will be advanced by an active, national non-violent movement that demands freedom, a campaign similar to, [although not identical with](#), the U.S. civil rights and Indian independence movements.

Imagine if 100,000 Palestinians from Ramallah marched to the Qalandia checkpoint next Friday morning demanding access to Jerusalem to pray at the Al-Aqsa mosque. And imagine similar marches with 50,000 Palestinians from Hebron at the Bethlehem checkpoint, and 75,000 Palestinians from Amman at the Allenby Bridge. And imagine those marches repeated week after week.

Israel will violently stop these marches. Palestinians will be jailed and tortured, injured and killed. But that is the cost of winning one's freedom. Martin Luther King said the Civil Rights movement would take time, organization, people will suffer, and some will die. 100s to 1000s of Palestinians will die in these marches, but not 10,000s.

Most important, these marches will capture the world's imagination. Israel brags that it allows access to all the holy sites, but it does not, and that is exactly what these marches would demand. Israel will be pressured to reach an agreement with the Palestinians by the civilian and governmental international community, and by its own conscience.

RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

I want to end with some thoughts about how to resolve the conflict. The lead article in last Sunday's NY Times magazine section was titled "The Two-State Illusion." It says the Oslo process (The Palestinian Authority) and Clinton negotiating parameters (the well-known compromises to a agreement) are a fantasy that will never lead to a

Palestinian state alongside Israel. Rather, they “keep[s] everyone from taking action toward something that might work.”

I agree. We have to get past the Oslo-Clinton mindset to think creatively of a solution that embraces ICUJP principles:

- Self-Determination -the right of Israelis and Palestinians to determine their own future.
- International law should be the basis for any agreement.
- Human, political, and economic rights for all people must be respected.

To move forward, the Oslo-Clinton failure must be abandoned. But that does not negate a Palestinian state alongside Israel, nor does it compel a single state between the River and the Sea.

What I favor does not really matter because I don't live in the region. But it seems to me that a Palestinian state alongside Israel is the only viable option. My arguments:

- The arc of history suggests that people want to express their national identity in a sovereign state.
- Maintaining a Jewish state is the number one priority of all Jewish Israelis – they will not give that up. [In fact, one way to get to a Palestinian state alongside Israel is to make a one-state solution seem possible. If that happened, I predict Israel would quickly find a way to allow an acceptable Palestinian state.](#)
- There is no example of sub-equal-size groups merging into one state, except under a military strongman. What is common is for states to split on religious, ethnic, and/or nationalistic criteria, and there are lots of examples of that that have happened in our lifetimes, and that may be about to happen.
- South Africa is not an example for Israel-Palestine, basically because of the demographic difference.

- An important reason the ANC succeeded in acquiring political power in South Africa is that from the 1950s onward the ANC preached acceptance of Afrikaans. For example, the 1954 Freedom Charter of the ANC and associated groups starts off by stating: “That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people.” There has never been a leader in Israel or Palestine preaching such inclusiveness.
- Overthrowing Israel to create a single state would destroy much of what Israel accomplished as noted above, and that may be as great a sin as the Nakba.
- Finally, I fear for the stability of a single state. The hatred between the groups, preached by leaders on both side, and fueled by thousands of acts of ordinary people, will surely lead to a deadly civil war like we see in many states with entrenched tribal organization.