



**Zionism and Racism:
The Not So Subtle Difference**

The Myth of Israeli Apartheid

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Zionism and Racism: The Not So Subtle Difference

Racism claims superiority, while Zionism merely claims distinctiveness. Racism seeks the persecution of powerless groups, while Zionism seeks to protect the members of a group long persecuted. Racism seeks to degrade its victims, while Zionism seeks to protect those who have been victims of degradation.

Racism refers to beliefs and practices that assume inherent and significant differences exist between the genetics of various groups of human beings; that assume these differences can be measured on a scale of “superior” to “inferior”; and that result in the social, political and economic advantage of one group in relation to others. Apartheid is the social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination based on the notion of inherent racial superiority.

Jews, Judaism, Jewish Law, and Jewish Zionists hold that any person may choose to become a Jew, via prescribed conversion procedures, and enjoy all the benefits and responsibilities of membership. Since anyone (i.e. regardless of race) can join the Jewish people and enjoy the benefits of membership equally, we must conclude that Zionism is **anti-racist**. One of the benefits of membership, according to the Zionists, is the right to live freely without fear of persecution, as a Jew, in the national homeland Israel.

The Meaning of Zionism

The key to understanding Zionism is in its name. Mount Zion was the name given to the easternmost of the two hills of ancient Jerusalem in the tenth century B.C. In fact, the name Zion, referring to Jerusalem, appears 152 times in the Old Testament. During the centuries the term Zion grew and was expanded to mean the whole of Israel. The Israelites in exile could not forget Zion. The Hebrew Psalmist sat by the waters of Babylon and swore: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." This oath was made over seven hundred years before the advent of Christianity and over twelve hundred years before the advent of Islam – and Zion came to mean the Jewish homeland, symbolic of Judaism and of Jewish national aspirations.

Our brothers in Africa have begged, pleaded, requested – DEMANDED the recognition and realization of our inborn right to live in peace under our own sovereignty in our own country. How easy it should be, for anyone who holds dear this inalienable right of all mankind, to understand and support the right of the Jewish People to live in their ancient Land of Israel. All men of good will exult in the fulfillment of God's promise, that his People should return in joy to rebuild their plundered land. This is Zionism, nothing more, nothing less.

Martin Luther King
(1929-1968)

While praying every Jew, wherever he is in the world, faces towards Jerusalem. For over two thousand years of exile these prayers have expressed the yearning of the Jewish people to return to their ancient land of origin, Israel. In fact, a continuous Jewish presence – in larger or smaller numbers – has been maintained in the country over the centuries.

Zionism became the name of the national movement of the Jewish people and is the modern expression of the ancient Jewish heritage. The Zionist ideal, as set out in the Bible, has been, and is, an integral part of the Jewish religion.

Zionism is one of the most dynamic and vibrant national movements in human history. Historically, it is based on a unique and unbroken connection, extending some four thousand years, between the People of the Book and the Land of the Bible. Its culmination is the establishment of a nation state for the Jewish people in its ancient homeland.

The Origins of Zionism

Rather than an **expression** of racism, Zionism is a **response** to racism. In the late nineteenth century, spurred by the forces of anti-Semitism, the Jewish people organized the Zionist movement in order to transform their dream into reality. Zionism in essence embodies the notion of Jewish national liberation, the understanding that Jews are a people, that Judaism is not just a religion, and that Israel is the Jewish homeland. Zionism, as a political phenomenon, was the revolt of an oppressed nation against the depredation, the wicked discrimination and oppression prevalent in the numerous countries where anti-Semitism flourished.

Zionism is nothing more – but also nothing less – than the Jewish people’s sense of origin and destination in the land linked eternally with its name. It is also the instrument whereby the Jewish nation seeks an authentic fulfillment of itself... The question is at what point Arab nationalism, with its prodigious glut of advantage, wealth and opportunity, will come to terms with the modest but equal rights of another Middle Eastern nation to pursue its life in security and peace.

Abba Eban, former
Foreign Minister of Israel
(1915-2002)

Support for the aim of Zionism was written into the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine and was again endorsed by the United Nations in 1947, when the General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority for the restoration of Jewish independence in the ancient Jewish homeland. In fact Zionism is to the Jewish people what the liberation movements of Africa and Asia have been to their own people. The re-establishment of Jewish independence in Israel, after centuries of struggle to overcome foreign conquest and exile, is a vindication of the fundamental concepts of the equality of nations and of self-determination.

To question the Jewish people’s right to national existence and freedom is not only to deny the Jewish people the right accorded to every other people on the globe, but is it also to deny the central precepts of the United Nations.

The Origins of the Claim that Zionism is Racism

The attempt to equate Zionism with racism (and the later attempts to portray Israel as an “Apartheid State”) began to emerge with the 1975 UN resolution (**Resolution 3379**), which was in fact part of the Soviet-Arab Cold War anti-Israel campaign. The “Zionism is Racism” campaign in the United Nations was initiated by the Soviet Union in response to United States proposals for UN resolutions against discrimination that were critical of the Soviet Union. From the Arab point of view, it constituted a **strategic diplomatic offensive** against the notion of Israel as a Jewish nation-state, in the wake of the dramatic failure of the **strategic military offensive** when a concerted Arab attempt was launched to destroy Israel in a surprise attack in October 1973.

When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews, You are talking anti-Semitism.

And what is anti-Zionist? It is the denial to the Jewish people of a fundamental right that we justly claim for the people of Africa and freely accord all other nations of the Globe. It is discrimination against Jews... because they are Jews. In short, it is antisemitism.

Martin Luther King

In order to gauge the true motivation behind the resolution it is highly instructive to examine the libertarian credentials of the countries that sponsored and supported the resolution, and compare them with those that opposed it.

Among the 25 sponsor nations were were Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libyan Arab Republic, Morocco, North Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Yemen, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates.

The 47 states that supported the resolution included the USSR, and a bevy of Soviet satellite states under Moscow’s yoke such as the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia,

Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria, as well as Albania (under the harsh despot Hoxha), the People's Republic of China, Cambodia (under the murderous Khmer Rouge), Mongolia, Mozambique (under the one-party FRELIMO regime), Uganda (under Idi Amin), Iran, Burundi, Congo and Rwanda.

By contrast, the countries that opposed the resolution included virtually all the major liberal democracies of the world – Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America.

Accordingly the substantive validity and moral merit of the “Zionism is Racism” resolution must be assessed by the fact that the nations that sponsored and supported it were, to put it mildly, not paragons of libertarian values. Neither could it be claimed that a steadfast stance against ethnic persecution, nor an unflinching stance on individual freedoms and human rights, were the hallmark of their regimes. Quite the contrary is true. Indeed, the numerous instances of massacres, oppression and persecution that characterized many of the sponsors and supporters of the infamous Resolution 3379 are a matter of historical record. One is thus forced to the conclusion that their purported concern for egalitarianism and liberty must be considered highly suspect. This is a conclusion of course greatly strengthened by the fact nearly the entire democratic world rejected the proposal, which in fact was overwhelmingly rescinded in 1991 (**Resolution 4686**) with only a handful of nations (almost exclusively authoritarian and/or Islamic) opposing the resolution.

The Absurdity of the Claim that Zionism is Racism

Arab MK appointed deputy Knesset speaker

Ahmad Tibi (United Arab List) was chosen to serve as deputy Knesset speaker for two years. Tibi was appointed to the role after the Knesset committee decided to enlarge the number of deputies to eight, in order to allow representation of the Arab sector.

Ynetnews, May 17, 2006

The accompanying excerpt referring to the selection of a vitriolic anti-Zionist Arab member of the Israeli parliament as the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset (the Israeli legislature), a post which could in certain circumstances result in his becoming acting President of Israel, underscores how ludicrous are the accusations of Zionism being racism or of Israel being an apartheid state. For while life in Israel may be based on Jewish culture, heritage and symbolism, it is patently absurd to depict it as a society founded on the concept of race. Even the most casual glance at

passersby on a city sidewalk or at the students in a college classroom will reveal a kaleidoscope of racial characteristics – from the Black African features of citizens of Ethiopian origin to the blonde, blue-eyed fair-skinned Israelis who hail from the Scandinavian and Baltic regions. Indeed, the Israel population embraces dark-skinned individuals from India, Morocco and Yemen, and those of Caucasian appearance from South and North America, Australasia and the entire European continent from London to the Bosphorus; it includes significant communities from Russia, Ukraine and the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. Just how a movement which brought together, in a single society, people from virtually every ethnic origin and manifesting the entire range of ethnic attributes from physical appearance to socio-cultural norms can be besmirched as “racist” is unbelievable.

Even with regard to non-Jews, the claim is manifestly absurd. Non-Jews (including Arabs) have been elected to parliament, appointed to high-level diplomatic and judicial positions, and promoted to the most senior ranks in the military.

Indeed one wonders why, if the accusation of such racist policies were in fact true, why the non-Jewish inhabitants of Israel – particularly the Arabs – are not clamoring to emigrate to other countries – particularly neighboring Arab countries – where they would be free of the alleged discrimination they purport to suffer in Israel. Moreover, one wonders why, if the accusation of such racist policies were in fact true, why the neighboring Arab countries are not urging allegedly persecuted kinsfolk to immigrate and offer them shelter from the alleged iniquities of the “racist Zionist regime”. After all, that is exactly what Israel does whenever Jews are subjected to oppression anywhere in the world, mobilizing all its efforts to extricate them from their oppressor, and bring them to build a new and productive life within its borders – whether black-skinned Ethiopians, brown-skinned Iraqis or white-skinned Russians. The fact that there is not any sign whatsoever of similar measures on the part of the Arab world exposes either the absurd deceit of its accusation – or its callous indifference to the plight of its kinfolk.

For the first time in history, thousands of black people are being brought to a country not in chains but in dignity, not as slaves but as citizens.

William Safire, *New York Times*,
January 7, 1985, on Operation Moses,
the secret rescue of Ethiopian Jews
and safe evacuation to Israel

The Hypocrisy of the Claim that Zionism is Racism

The blatant hypocrisy of the “Zionism is Racism” allegation is reflected in the appalling human rights records of the instigators of the accusation (mainly the Arab states) who nearly all are guilty of every kind of insidious bias imaginable, openly practicing discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, religious belief and political dissidence.

Religious Repression: Across the Arab world, religious repression is the rule rather than the exception. In many countries, conversion to Christianity is a punishable offence that carries heavy penalties—including lengthy imprisonment and even death. The unfortunate fate of Copts in Egypt and their persecution is a matter of documented record.

Indeed even the *Guardian*, usually stridently hostile to Israel is forced to admit that the situation of Egyptian Copts is far worse than that of Arabs in Israel (“**Do not treat Israel like apartheid South Africa**”, *Guardian*, **July 23, 2002**). In Saudi Arabia, it is illegal for Christians to gather together to practice their faith. Churches are totally forbidden and nothing relating to the Christian faith may be displayed, including personal items such as a necklace with a cross or a Bible. In Sudan, the horrendous plight of Christians (of whom, according to some reports, over one million have been butchered by official and unofficial Muslim militias) and other non-Arab ethnicities are regularly reported in the world media ... and equally regularly ignored.

“If we do not oppose and defeat Islamic Gender Apartheid, democracy and freedom cannot flourish in the Arab and Islamic world... If we do not join forces with Muslim dissident and feminist groups; and, above all, if we do not have one universal standard of human rights for all – then we will fail our own Judeo-Christian ... ideals.”

Prof. Phyllis Chesler
Testimony on “Gender Apartheid
in Iran and the Muslim World”
before US Senate, December 2005.

Gender Apartheid: Gender discrimination is also rife among Israel’s most vociferous critics. Perhaps the most blatant instance is Saudi Arabia where women, whether Saudi or foreign, suffer discrimination and human rights

violations as a matter of routine because of the gender bias in law, social mores and traditions. Indeed in Saudi Arabia discriminatory practices against women are not only prevalent, they are also prescribed by law. Strict segregation of the sexes, an integral part of Saudi Arabian society, has adverse and unfair effects on women, who are denied equal educational opportunities, are forbidden to drive, and may work only in certain occupations. Human Rights Watch reports that apart from Saudi Arabia, women in Morocco, Jordan and Kuwait face government-sponsored discrimination that renders them unequal before the law – including discriminatory family codes that take away women’s legal authority and place it in the hands of male family members – and restricts women’s participation in public life. Indeed, women’s empowerment and employment in the Arab world are among the lowest in the world and their participation in their countries’ political and economic life is the lowest in the world (The *Economist*, July 4, 2002).

Today's Rendition of the Claim that Zionism is Racism

The latest form of the racist accusations against Israel have centered on the construction of the Security Fence and have brought forth allegations that Israel has begun implementing an Apartheid policy. Again these claims are totally baseless. For whereas Apartheid was the social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination based on the notion of racial superiority, the sole purpose of the Security Fence (as stated in the Israeli Government decision of July 23 2001) is to provide security for its citizens – Jews, Muslims and Christians – who have all been victims of the horrific wave of terrorism emanating from Palestinian administered territories in Samaria and Judea otherwise known as the “West Bank”.

Since there is there is no border or natural obstacle between these areas and Israel, terrorists have had almost unhindered access to targets inside Israel. The Security Fence is thus a central component in Israel’s efforts to thwart Palestinian suicide bombers who infiltrate into Israel with the sole intention of killing innocent civilians regardless of their nationality or religious affiliation.

Do not treat Israel like apartheid South Africa

... the comparison with South Africa is intellectually lazy, morally questionable, and possibly even mendacious. Inside the state of Israel there is no apartheid. In proportion to its population, Israel has the largest minority within its borders of any country in the Middle East. The official figure for Copts in Egypt is 10%. Non-Jews, mostly Arab Muslims, make up 20% of the Israeli population, and they enjoy full citizen’s rights. Israel is one of the few Middle Eastern states where Muslim women are allowed to vote... A more apt comparison with Israeli policies would be India’s war in Kashmir. There, too, the victims are mostly Muslims....Dozens of Kashmiri victims – the number of people killed in Jenin – would not even reach the news. And if you think Kashmir is brutal, what about Chechnya?...No one is proposing a boycott of universities in Delhi or St. Petersburg. I can think of one or two reasons for these double standards, but whatever they are, I believe that they tell us more about the boycotters than about the subjects of their rage.

Ian Buruma
The Guardian, July 23, 2002

It should also be remembered that the notion of the Security Fence (or the “separation” fence, as it is often called) is a **tactical-operational response**, not a **strategic-ideological initiative**. It arose only as a result of the failure of the original concept of regional integration and the vision of a “New Middle East” that underlay the Oslo Agreements in the mid-90s and were enthusiastically embraced by the majority of Israelis. This should dispel any thought that notions of racial superiority and segregation lie behind the construction of the fence.

The same is true for the hardships that other responsive measures such as road blocks and checkpoints have brought on the Palestinians. These are all manifestations of Israel’s basic commitment to defend its citizens, and to improve its ability to prevent the infiltration of terrorists and criminal elements into Israel, bent on carrying out murderous attacks or smuggling in arms and explosives for such attacks – whose victims often include Israeli Arabs.

It is of course true that the construction of the Security Fence has caused some inconvenience for some Palestinians, particularly for those who reside close to its route. However such inconvenience, which can be readily compensated for by money, is counterweighed – indeed outweighed – by other considerations, which cannot easily be compensated for financially, such as the loss of life and limb wrought by terror.

The Real Racism in the Claim that Zionism is Racism

The accusations of racism on the part of Israel are aimed at its policies which are designed to ensure the continued existence of the country as the nation-state of the Jewish people – both in terms of its socio-cultural fabric and in terms of its physical existence. So in effect, these accusations are a call on Israel to desist from these policies. Were Israel to heed these calls, it would in

fact imply acquiescing to demands to forgo the Jewishness of Israel – either by allowing a non-Jewish (Muslim) majority to develop and swamp the Jewish population, or by exposing the country’s security to untenable vulnerability. This would bring about the demise of Israel as the nation-state of the Jews. It would be tantamount to denying a people which, unlike the Palestinians, has a unique religion, a unique language, a unique script, a unique history and unique customs, the right to national self-determination. Moreover it is a call on the Jews to relinquish this right in favor of a people who have no such uniqueness,

To question the Jewish people’s right to national existence and freedom is not only to deny to the Jewish people the right accorded to every other people on this globe, but it is also to deny the central precepts of the United Nations.

Chaim Herzog, sixth
President of Israel
(1918-1997)

...Israel, by virtue of its being Jewish and of having a Jewish population, defies Islam and the Muslims... Hamas has been looking forward to implement Allah’s promise whatever time it might take. The prophet, prayer and peace be upon him, said: The time will not come until Muslims will fight the Jews (and kill them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: O Muslim! there is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him!

Article Twenty-Eight
The Hamas Charter

who commonly refer to Jews as “pigs and monkeys”, and who demand the eradication of any sign of Jewishness in territories under their administration. Indeed if apartheid sought to prevent racial mixing, this is precisely what Israel’s adversaries endorse. For they demand the exclusion of Jews from Arab lands, the dismantling of Jewish settlements, the expulsion of their inhabitants, and the prohibition on the entry of Jews (not only Jewish Israelis) into many Arab lands.

This – and not Zionism – is the epitome of racism.

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