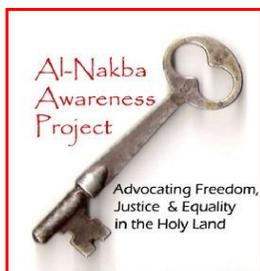


Reflections on “Progressive” or “Liberal” Zionism

Al-Nakba Awareness Project



The so-called “peace process” has been a convenient time-eater for some two decades while Israel has meanwhile built hundreds of illegal new settlements (euphemized as “neighborhoods”) in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. As Israeli historian Avi Shlaim and international attorney Francis Boyle report, Israel has never honestly sought peace and has never negotiated in good faith with the Palestinians. It has all been a cynical stalling tactic while stealing more and more land and ever-tightening their noose around the collective Palestinian throat.

“Two states for two peoples”

“The progressive Jewish two-state option is too limited, has become dishonest, and is discredited - it is simply a cover for power,” said Marc Ellis, Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University. Nevertheless, this has been the only model considered, promoted by the U.S., and supported by “progressive” or “liberal” Zionist organizations such as **J-Street**, **Tikkun** and **Americans for Peace Now**. These proponents imply a false symmetry of responsibility for the conflict and legality of claims, and use politically ambiguous language such as “two states living side by side in peace” while evading the words “equality” and “justice” or compliance with international law. Significant differences between their agenda and that of 1950 Mississippi white supremacists promoting segregation are difficult to detect.

Worse than Mississippi, Israel doesn’t even offer “separate but equal.” There would be no equality between Jews and non-Jews within Israel and no equality in land, resources or sovereignty between the two envisioned states. The latest “negotiated” version, the Geneva Initiative, would create a helpless, demilitarized Palestinian Bantustan on less than 20% of historic Palestine that was 94% Arab-owned in 1948, without control of its own borders, airspace or water, to which the several million Palestinian refugees could “return” if they so desired irrespective of their individual rights under international law.

The right of return

This right is specified under Articles 13 and 17 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was asserted for the Palestinian refugees by UN Resolution 194 in 1948, and was a condition of Israel’s 1949 admission to the UN - a condition never honored. Israel’s resistance to this is the heart of the ongoing impasse. There are now over 4½ million UN-registered Palestinian refugees, the largest and longest-denied refugee population in the world. All have the right to return to their homes of origin, not to a shrunken mini-state, nor can they be rightfully “returned” to another “Arab” state that is not theirs. Seen through racist eyes, all “Arabs” and “Arab states” are apparently indistinguishable to Israel.

Moreover, this “solution” would leave intact the apartheid system within Israel that discriminates against non-Jews in virtually every area of life and would provide a pseudo-state into which Israel’s unwanted 20% Palestinian minority could be “transferred,” thus completing the ethnic cleansing of 1948 and 1967 that has been ongoing ever since. Justice requires exactly the opposite. In a 2009 survey of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, 87% stated that “the right of return AND compensation” were “essential” to any final solution. And the feasibility of their return to Israel has been studied and affirmed with a detailed implementation plan by the admirable Israeli organization Zochrot (www.zochrot.org/en).

Israel is now promoting a new myth to neutralize Palestinian claims for repatriation: the score has already been settled by an equivalent number of Jewish refugees from Arab countries. This argument fails on several grounds. Jewish emigration was almost entirely voluntary in response to Israeli recruitment and panic caused by false flag Mossad bombings in Baghdad and Cairo. Since Jewish immigrants to Israel were given stolen Palestinian property, most did not become or remain landless. And Jewish refugees have not been denied the right of return. In fact, Egypt and Iraq have placed ads in major international newspapers inviting their former Jewish citizens to return. Moreover, bona fide Jewish refugees deny Israel the right to trade their rights for those of expelled Palestinians.

A Bantustan model

The proposed two-state model closely resembles South Africa’s creation of Bantustans into which their unwanted black populations could be herded to prevent a black majority and loss of white privileges and

control. It is a segregationist vision, pure and simple. Under the alternative model of a single, integrated democratic state with equality for all irrespective of religion and return of the refugees in compliance with international law, Israel would soon lose its Jewish majority and would be forced to settle for a normal multi-ethnic nation, a homeland not just for Jews but for the people whose homeland it had actually been for generations before Zionism intruded violently upon their lives, and for anyone else who wants to live there. But Israel dreads such pluralistic democracy as an “existential threat.”

No democratic right Thomas Jefferson held as “self-evident” is included or even mentioned in their two-state model - not justice for those they have murdered and dispossessed, not equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, not the real freedom of a politically and economically autonomous state. To avoid the demand for justice, balance the moral ledger and evade accountability, they address only the post-1967 occupation, not the crimes of the original 1948 Nakba, and redefine Arab resistance as unjustified aggression arising from anti-Semitism. They would only allow a few Palestinians to return to their own homes and lands, selected by Israel on “humanitarian” criteria. (The thief gets to decide how much stolen property he will return.) And this has all been negotiated with hand-picked quisling Palestinians not elected by their own people. Democratically elected Hamas, most refugees, the foreign diaspora, and the third-class Palestinian citizens of Israel were excluded, with no appeals of the final settlement permitted by these unrepresented populations. All Palestinians are presumed interchangeable by Israel.

A real solution

Clinging to the racist insistence upon a “Jewish” state on other people’s land, progressive/liberal Zionists oppose a democratic, egalitarian solution. They also oppose the appeal by Palestinian civil society for an international boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement to bring the same pressure to bear upon Israel that forced change in apartheid South Africa. The BDS movement includes boycott of products from illegal settlements and companies supporting the occupation (www.bdsmovement.net), refusal to support Israel's pretensions of national normalcy by rejecting academic and cultural exchanges (www.pacbi.org and www.usacbi.org), and a call for institutional divestment from companies that profit from the occupation (www.whoprofits.org). And it’s expanding.

Why is this necessary? Palestinians have long been practicing non-violent resistance on a nearly daily basis but cannot prevail alone against Israel’s overwhelming West Bank military occupation and siege against Gaza, subsidized and protected by the lobby-controlled U.S. government. BDS is a powerful non-violent resistance method available to the international community, needed to bypass U.S. political obstruction and help Palestinians to correct the power imbalance. And it is having an impact.

But self-described “progressive” and “liberal” Zionists have no interest in Palestinian rights. They remain Zionists, wanting peace and quiet for Israel with pretenses of “legitimacy” and “democracy” for Western eyes, not an enduring peace based upon justice for their Palestinian victims. Palestinians are perceived simply as a “demographic threat” to Jewish majority, supremacy and claims of democracy. In a CNN interview clip on the J-Street website, their executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami states this clearly:

“...I think the sense of urgency has never been greater to address the single greatest threat that Israel faces to its future ...which is the demographic reality that within a matter of years there will be more non-Jews than Jews between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean...to avoid that we have to find some way to get to a two-state solution and do it as quickly as possible.”

How would we react if white supremacists in power said this about citizens of color? Should we patiently await an evolution of moral consciousness or should we challenge segregation through civic action and enforcement of the law? We ended Jim Crow by choosing to challenge it.

There are several much better Jewish organizations challenging the impasse with honesty and principled activism. The *International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network* with an international campaign against the Jewish National Fund that masquerades as an environmental charity while stealing Palestinian land, and *Jewish Voice for Peace* with a TIAA-CREF divestment campaign, are noteworthy examples. Our local synagogue declines to include these Jewish organizations in their list of recommended web sites and organizational affiliations. Anti-Zionist Jews need not apply for inclusion in their community of worship.

For more information and documentation, see www.al-nakba-history.com