

ON THE DELEGITIMIZATION OF ISRAEL

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Ladies and gentlemen, I want to start with a very old and interesting story straight out of the Bible. From the book of Numbers. (It's chapters 22 and 23, in case you're taking notes.) The Israelites have been wandering in the wilderness for close to 40 years since leaving Egypt, and are now on the plains of Moab, an area east of the Dead Sea; it's now a part of Jordan. There are a lot of them camped there and the king of Moab is afraid of them. So he calls in a big-time prophet/soothsayer/magician by the name of Balaam from somewhere north in Mesopotamia and commissions him to curse this hoard of invaders.

You know parts of this story—how the donkey he's riding on sees the angel blocking the path but the prophet doesn't (which says something about the quality of Mesopotamian prophets!)—and Balaam is quite honest with his employers. He can only say what God wants him to say and cannot say anything God doesn't want him to say.

Well, Balaam goes up three times on a hilltop and looks over the Israelite encampment, and the very first time he sees them he utters these words:

AS I SEE THEM FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOPS
GAZE UPON THEM FROM THE HEIGHTS
THERE IS A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS APART
AND IS NOT RECKONED AMONG THE NATIONS.
(NUM. 23:9)

"A people that dwells apart..." is that a curse or a blessing?

- a) I wouldn't mind (I suppose) being a people that dwells apart; the Jews are sort-of like that anyhow.
- b) But it's not going to happen, and never really did in the past.

First, because the Jewish people don't want it. They are/have been hugely active in world civilizations, wherever they lived; influential far beyond their numbers or percent of the population. And second—and this is what I want to think about with you—because the outside world won't let Israel be a people that dwells apart. The world is concerned with us, busy with us, focused on us, obsessed with us. With Israel, 6½ million Jews; that's the size of Denmark and Nicaragua. Add 1½ million Arabs and you get to about 8 million, the populations of Austria and Honduras.

- a) So why are WE always in the news, and Denmark & Nicaragua & Austria & Honduras aren't?
- b) Because Israel always seems to be at war. (That's weird!)

Well, I know that there is no real fighting going on here these days, but we are at war nevertheless. It's a war about our legitimate right to exist at all. And I have a sinking feeling that that we're losing.

- a) The President of the United States has recently upgraded the Palestinian Mission in Washington DC to the status of Delegation and authorized them to fly the Palestinian flag from their building.
- b) And sooner or later the UN will officially recognize Palestine as a sovereign State, with Jerusalem as its capital, even though the idea of a state without a territory or any clear areas of sovereignty is *prima facie* absurd.
- c) A dozen South American countries have done likewise, and even Russia joined them, although without the bit about Jerusalem as capital.
- d) And all this is happening when the Palestinian campaign to delegitimize Israel, to deny its history and connection to the land, is growing day by day
- e) While Europe is sinking into an anti-Semitic rut which we thought World War II had wiped out forever.

I want to address the 6 sides in the war we are now fighting:

- a) the United States
- b) the American Jewish community
- c) Europe
- d) the United Nations
- e) the Arabs
- f) the Israelis

The United States

It seems clear that the overwhelming consensus in America is favorable to Israel (a look at how both houses of Congress received Prime Minister Netanyahu last month seems to illustrate this).

- a) This sympathy comes primarily from shared values; democracy, a free press and judiciary, etc.,

b) And also from the Israeli contribution of technology which American companies (like Intel) benefit from, and our research and development that the whole world learns from.

c) It comes from the fact that Israel is a reliable ally—the only reliable ally—of the Americans in the Middle East, and when Israeli jets shot down Russian MIG airplanes (which the Arabs were using) the United States learned important lessons about the value of its machinery.

d) It comes from the fact that Jews are a political force in America; they vote in high percentages and in crucial districts.

e) And we gain because of religious reasons and the fact that Israel enjoys enthusiastic and overwhelming support from the evangelical Christian community, which is large and politically powerful.

We will be ok as long as all of this lasts. Because there are problems here, the greatest of which is the present American administration, an administration seen by Israel as a hostile entity.

NOTE PLEASE that I am not dealing with President Obama as an American President with a domestic agenda: (budget, health care, housing, unemployment, etc.). These are American issues and I am absolutely not qualified to deal with them. My concern is only with his policy vis-à-vis Israel. And I note the following:

A. In May 2009, President Obama met Prime Minister Netanyahu for the first time. That's when he sprung his first surprise; Israel settlements in the Occupied Territories are against peace and must stop, he said. That was new; the stopping of settlements had never before been part of the negotiations between the sides until President Obama introduced it. The Palestinians gleefully agreed, of course; it immediately became another of their demands.

B. On June 4, 2009, President Obama delivered a speech in Cairo in which he called for a new relationship with the Muslim world. Fair enough. He said good things about Islam, and against violence, and talked a lot about Israel too. He said that just as the Israelis had suffered and fought, so too had the Palestinians. Which sounds great.

a. If you ignore the fact that the Israelis accepted the 1947 UN partition plan, while the Palestinians rejected it and attacked the next day.

b. If you think, therefore, that aggression is the same as defense.

c. If you believe that the connection to the Land of Israel of the Jews, which goes back 3 thousand years at least, is equal to that of the Palestinians, who weren't even invented in 1948 and whose national consciousness was created by Yassir Arafat in the 1970s and 80s.

That speech sounded great if you ignore history, religion, and the facts. And ignore what else is going around the Middle East. The speech in Cairo ignored the flagrant human rights abuses common to the whole of the Arab world: the murder of women in the name of "family honor", the mistreatment of women in a hundred other ways, of homosexuals, of converts, of non-Muslims in general (the Catholic Bishop of Turkey was murdered, and the Egyptians are waging war against 10% of their population which is Coptic Christian). The Cairo speech was very good, except that the history was wrong and human rights weren't in it.

C. In September, 2010 President Obama told the United Nations that "...when we come back here next year we can have an agreement...that will lead to a new independent sovereign state of Palestine." Presto! We've got another surprise from President Obama, a deadline. We've now got September, 2011—one year later—as the date for Palestinian declaration of statehood.

D. Netanyahu was in Washington again in May 2011. On May 19th, the day before the visit, President Obama gave a speech (it was an ambush; he didn't have to give it and had committed to not talking about Israel if he did) to the State Department. Here he added another new element to the negotiations, another item that had never been on the table before: declaring that the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the lines of 1967. On its own terms that was problematical, because you can't do Israel-Palestinian borders without considering Jerusalem, which was left till later. And more disturbing, it was the 4th time that the United States government was negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians, putting forward positions when it should have been butting out to let the sides negotiate with each other.

E. In addition to these specific insults and injuries, we see an administration which never noticed that Gaza has a long border with Egypt, which could easily supply it with everything it needs, with imports and exports, but doesn't, so the pressure is always on Israel because we're the one who are supposed to be isolating Gaza. Even though to this day it's Israel (not Egypt) which supplies food, water, medicine, electricity, emergency hospital care in serious cases, etc. Despite the fact that Gaza isn't occupied any more because we pulled out completely in August of 2005.

F. In addition to all of the above, we see note an administration which would not tolerate any State of the Union forbidding Jews to build houses on land that they own, but demands (see No. 1 above) exactly that of the Jews of Israel.

G. And an administration which would never for a moment tolerate rockets and mortars coming down on its towns from across the border at the rate of 6-10 a week—still!—but is quick to call for us to hold back from retaliating because that's "collective punishment."

And so on, ladies and gentlemen. I have listed enough to make my conclusion unavoidable: we are living with a hostile American administration and will just have to learn to cope with it.

The American Jewish Community

The second problem with America is the American Jewish community. The American Jews are terrific! They are a community that is educated and accomplished and active everywhere, pulling way beyond their weight. They have become so successful as Americans, however, that being Jewish is no longer part of their core identity or their life experience any more. So they have raised a generation of Jewish kids who are for the most part illiterate Jewishly. Who know nothing of Bible, history, religion or Israel. The community is trying to deal with this—programs like Birthright and some campus programs are doing good work—but essentially the illiteracy rate is growing with the rate of assimilation and the rate of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews is above 50%. The American success story has become a Jewish disaster.

The other problem with the American Jewish community is demographic. You need 2.1 children per family to survive as a group. And the Jews of America (and certainly the Jews of Europe!) aren't getting that. So the future doesn't look too great for the Jewish people outside Israel. And that's a long-term political problem.

The good news is that if Jewish support is wavering as the community is shrinking (as evidenced by a group like J Street), Christian support—especially Evangelical Christian support—is rock solid.

And that's all I want to say about America.

And the Rest of the World?

Don't ask. Europe is going through a bad time now. It is being flooded with Muslims who are not interested in joining any mainstream in their host countries but want simply to establish their own Muslim entity (shariah law and all) wherever they live. The Europeans are unhappy about this, of course; they are losing their own countries to an influx of foreigners. But they need these foreigners because they are the work force that drives the huge economy of the European Union.

This Muslim community, from Algeria to Pakistan, continues its ancient root hostility to Israel and the Jewish State. And the Europeans—anxious above all to avoid civil unrest—go along and placate this Muslim minority in their towns and cities by letting them do what they want and acting in a way designed to keep the Muslims happy. Because if they are unhappy, there's violence in the streets.

It's a serious problem too, ladies and gentlemen. France, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands are already 5% Muslim. Rotterdam, the 2nd largest city in the Netherlands and the largest port in Europe, is 13% Muslim. There are more Muslims in Germany than in Lebanon, and—by the way—more in China than in Syria.

Add to all this the oldest and most pernicious of European prejudices, hatred of Jews—rooted in Christian theology since Justin Martyr—which is still alive and well in Europe even after the Nazis wiped out most of the Jews who had lived there. But it is not socially acceptable to be anti-Semitic these days, and it is, indeed, usually a crime to say or do anything identifiably anti-Semitic. So anti-Israel has replaced anti-Semitic. "We are not against the Jews; only against the Zionists and the State of Israel." Right? Sure!

That's the argument going around these days. And it is, of course, a fraud. Criticizing Israel has lost all proportion and balance compared to what's going on in the rest of the world. WE have become a world-wide obsession which far surpasses any possible sin the Israeli government can be accused of.

The United Nations

This hatred is internationally institutionalized in the 4th player on my list, the United Nations. And especially in the United Nations Human Rights Council. It's record is summarized by Wikipedia as follows:

From its creation in 2006 to October, 2010 the Council has held, adopted and pronounced:

- One single urgent debate – on Israel
- Nine special sessions that criticized countries; with six of them being on Israel
- 40-odd Council resolutions that criticized countries, 35 of which were on Israel
- Five "fact-finding" missions, all on Israel, all with the guilty verdict declared in advance

To which one needs to add the infamous Goldstone report. Anti-Israel sentiment now fills not only the beer cellars of the skinheads but the halls of universities and colleges in Europe and in America. Hatred of Israel is thus both a left-wing and right-wing phenomenon now for the first time in history.

As all this comes together, we know that we are in the presence of obsessive behavior, not political criticism. It's not about what Israel does; it's about what Israel IS. Namely a country of the Jews. In a word, it is anti-Semitism, by whatever name one chooses to call it.

The Arabs

The Palestinians—the 5th group of players we are considering—are the smartest and coolest players of them all. They know they cannot defeat "the Zionist entity" by force of arms. And indeed prefer us to be there to protect them from foreign interference and keep them clean and safe. Because without us the Palestine

Authority would be as corrupt and fragile as the rest of the governments in the Middle East. So their rejection of the legitimacy of Israel remains constant and absolute, yet they can continue to pretend to negotiate because they don't actually have to exert themselves. The Americans are negotiating for them.

Anyhow, there's not much they can do; we are called upon to give away real things (like property) while they have nothing to give that we don't already have. Except real peace, which they will never give; Islam would never allow that.

The Palestinians, therefore, are free to mount their diplomatic campaign without fear of consequences or compromise. They have mobilized the Muslims of the world (for whom being anti-Israel is useful as the one point they can all agree on), tapped into the anti-Semitism of the European and American left-wing and right-wing, played off the fear of violence from countries with large Muslim communities, utilized the political correctness of a timid American administration and an emasculated press which fears the accusation of Islamophobia more than it loves the truth—you can't call them "terrorists" any more; even the Army doctor who shot up Fort Hood was an "activist"—harnessed the naiveté or the ideological blinders of the deluded Jewish left wing to give legitimacy to their campaign of de-legitimizing the very existence of Israel. And the world is buying it.

So there's no peace process and no negotiations; it's enough for the Palestinians to just sit back and let the American and the Europeans, and the Quartet, the UN, etc. do the negotiating for them.

And We're Not Helping Much

Finally, there's us, the 6th player in the game. Israel can't help itself all that much. Mostly because it has a truly awful system of proportional representation that makes it very difficult to decide on a coherent policy about anything. In our system, no elected official is responsible to the people who voted for him/her but rather to the Party that put him/her on the election list. Thereby producing a Knesset (Parliament) full of party faithful, rather than people of brains or energy.

It is a system that allows 30 political parties to run for the Knesset, allows them to split in to separate parties after they're elected, and which therefore requires excruciating negotiations to form a coalition (of 61 seats) that can stand a no-confidence vote in the (120 seat) Knesset. It is a system which creates a government that needs to spend most of its energy keeping itself together and not much in dealing with the nation's problems, not least of which is this delegitimization campaign going on in the world out there.

The government of which Netanyahu is Prime Minister is a perfect example of the defects of our electoral system. The largest party in the Knesset, Kadima, has 28 seats. But it couldn't form a coalition after the last election. Tsippi Livni, party leader, balked at doing a deal with the Orthodox. So the next largest party, Netanyahu's Likud, with 27 seats, was given the task after the other had failed within the appointed time. He did the deal.

So Netanyahu governs thanks to a coalition that includes Avigdor Lieberman, his Foreign Minister, from the hard right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel is our Home) party—a party supported mostly by the Russians in Israel, a group that was never either liberal or tolerant, especially not vis-à-vis the Arabs—which has 15 seats, the ultra-Orthodox Shas party (11 seats), and the poor, wretched remains of the Labor party which was once a left-wing group and once ruled the country under Ben Gurion and Golda and Rabin for 30 years. Labor is now reduced to 13 seats (but they have since split into 2 rival factions), the only important member of which is the Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, whom Netanyahu needs and keeps no matter what. A small nationalist party of 3 seats completes his coalition. Thus, as long as he can keep juggling between their demands (none of which ever gets properly met, however well-deserving), the government will stay in power. Fortunately, Bibi (which is what everybody calls Netanyahu) is a really good juggler.

So the government is stable for the time being, but that's no way to run a country. No way to make a coherent long-term policy about anything, least of all what to do about the Palestinians and the Territories. Nor to get anything else done in a consistent way or to plan for the future at all. The country is essentially un-governable, and it can't be helped.

Actually, it can be helped, but that would require an overhaul of the electoral system. But it's hard to see our distinguished lawmakers agreeing to any plan which would put most of them out of a job.

It is a miracle that Israel works as well as it does. That it works at all! Yet it is working well. We are taking our lumps out there, but we'll be OK, ladies & gentlemen. I absolutely believe that. As the old Israeli song goes (sort-of), we have survived Pharaoh and will survive Obama.

Meanwhile life in Israel is certainly interesting. And quiet, which is surprising when you look where we sit, on the 32nd parallel which runs from Algeria to Iran and Pakistan. That whole world is falling apart and we sit in the eye of the storm, safe and prosperous, peaceful, strong and secure. Like the man said; "a people that dwells apart and is not reckoned among the nations."