

IS ANTI-ZIONISM ANTI-SEMITIC? JEWISH CRITICS SPEAK

Edward C. Corrigan¹

Mr. Corrigan, BA, MA, LL.B., is a lawyer certified as a specialist in Citizenship and Immigration Law and Immigration and Refugee Protection by the Law Society of Upper Canada in London, Ontario. He can be reached at corriganlaw@edcorrigan.ca or at (519) 439-4015.

When individuals, activists or politicians in the United States and Canada criticize human-rights problems in Israel or question the tenets of the political ideology of Zionism, they are attacked, and accusations of bias and even anti-Semitism are made in an attempt to discredit them.

The allegation that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic is used as an effective political weapon. To quote one anti-Zionist Jewish writer:

Criticizing Israel's mistakes is acceptable. But questioning whether Israel is a Jewish state with a racist apartheid system that renders non-Jews second rate citizens — that is not acceptable. It makes little difference whether the criticism is based on facts. Few people who cannot claim Jewish descent would dare to criticize publicly. They are afraid of being accused of "anti-semitism."²

Joel Beinin in "Silencing Critics Not Way to Middle East Peace," an article published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, discussed the campaign to silence critics

of Israeli policy. Beinin, a professor of history at Stanford University, is active in Jewish Voice for Peace and an editor of *Jewish Peace News*.³ Here is what he had to say about the campaign to attack critics of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians:

Why discredit, defame and silence those with opposing viewpoints? I believe it is because the Zionist lobby knows it cannot win based on facts. An honest discussion can only lead to one conclusion: The status quo in which Israel declares it alone has rights and intends to impose its will on the weaker Palestinians, stripping them permanently of their land, resources and rights, cannot lead to a lasting peace. We need an open debate and the freedom to discuss uncomfortable facts and explore the full range of policy options. Only then can we adopt a foreign policy that serves American interests and one that could actually bring a just peace to Palestinians and Israelis.⁴

In "Why It Is Essential for Jews to Speak Out as Jews, on Israel," Internet blogger Philip Weiss interviewed long-time Jewish activist Dorothy Zellner. She

is now working with “Jews Say No.” As Weiss notes, “A lot of activists would say that this is an American issue; everyone should be engaged. And a lot of left-wingers would say, religion/ethnicity is a tiresome traditional category, I don’t want to identify myself in such a manner.” Zellner responds to these arguments and explains why she believes that it is essential to address the Palestinian issue “as Jews, and speak to other Jews as Jews”:

But the sight of us doing the unthinkable has many benefits: There are a few Jews who are happy and relieved to see us because it opens the door for them. They have felt uneasy about Israeli policies for a long time, and seeing us seems to give them more courage to speak their minds. There are also some gentiles who are happy to see us because they have been afraid for a long time of being called anti-Semites if they criticize Israel.

Just think what it would mean if a significant number of people in our country started to break through the rigid, unthinking mindset of supporting Israel right or wrong! And just think what it means if we could have weakened the stranglehold of Israeli policies but chose not to do it!

Because we are Jews, we naturally have a certain currency in challenging Israeli policies. We identify with the Jewish people, and we respect Jewish culture. Some of us are former Zionists, and we know that Israel was never an empty land. We’ve been to Israel and Palestine more than once, and we’ve seen the checkpoints and the barbed wire and the guard towers with our own eyes. We’ve been angry and ashamed that this occupation is supposedly being done to protect us. Some of us have relatives in Israel. Some of us are the children of Holo-

caust survivors, and we say that what happened to our murdered relatives in Europe should not be the reason for Palestinian pain.⁵

Here is what Norman Solomon has to say about anti-Semitism: “As with all forms of bigotry, anti-Semitism should be condemned. At the same time, these days, America’s biggest anti-Semitism problem has to do with the misuse of the label as a manipulative tactic to short-circuit debate about Washington’s alliance with Israel.”⁶ He added,

The failure to make a distinction between anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel routinely stifles public debate. When convenient, pro-Israel groups in the United States will concede that it’s possible to oppose Israeli policies without being anti-Semitic. Yet many of Israel’s boosters reflexively pull out the heavy artillery of charging anti-Semitism when their position is challenged.⁷

Professor Michael Neumann had the following to say about anti-Semitism:

... to inflate the definition by including critics of Israel is, if not exactly incorrect, self-defeating and dangerous. No one can stop you from proclaiming all criticism of Israel anti-Semitic. But that makes anti-Semites out of Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu, not to mention tens of thousands of Jews. . . .

The best way to reserve “anti-Semitism” as a term of condemnation is to define it as hatred of Jews, not for what they do but for what they are. It is to hate them just because they belong to a certain ethnic group. [Abraham] Foxman is

right to suggest that you can be an anti-Semite without expressing any racist sentiments: Many anti-Semites confine themselves to expounding false claims about Jewish control. But you can also, without harboring anti-Semitic hate, criticize Israel and even the Jewish community for its failures. To suppose otherwise would be to suppose an inexplicable wave of anti-Semitism among both American and Israeli Jews, both of whom figure prominently among the critics.⁸

To quote George Soros on the use of anti-Semitism, a tactic he described as “the most insidious argument” to silence the political debate on Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians:

Any politician who dares to expose AIPAC’s influence would incur its wrath; so very few can be expected to do so. It is up to the American Jewish community itself to rein in the organization that claims to represent it. But this is not possible without first disposing of the most insidious argument put forward by the defenders of the current policies: that the critics of Israel’s policies of occupation, control and repression on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem and Gaza engender anti-Semitism.

The opposite is the case. One of the myths propagated by the enemies of Israel is that there is an all-powerful Zionist conspiracy. That is a false accusation. Nevertheless, that AIPAC has been so successful in suppressing criticism has lent some credence to such false beliefs. Demolishing the wall of silence that has protected AIPAC would help lay them to rest. A debate within the Jewish community, instead of fomenting anti-Semitism, would only help diminish it.⁹

Soros can hardly be considered a radical. He is also Jewish.

Ben Ehrenreich, author of the novel *The Suitors*, wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* on whether criticism of Zionism is anti-Semitic:

The characterization of anti-Zionism as an “epidemic” more dangerous than anti-Semitism reveals only the unsustainability of the position into which Israel’s apologists have been forced. Faced with international condemnation, they seek to limit the discourse, to erect walls that delineate what can and can’t be said.

It’s not working. Opposing Zionism is neither anti-Semitic nor particularly radical. It requires only that we take our own values seriously and no longer, as the book of Amos has it, “turn justice into wormwood and hurl righteousness to the ground.”

Establishing a secular, pluralist, democratic government in Israel and Palestine would of course mean the abandonment of the Zionist dream. It might also mean the only salvation for the Jewish ideals of justice that date back to Jeremiah. . . .

For the last several decades, though, it has been all but impossible to cry out against the Israeli state without being smeared as an anti-Semite, or worse. To question not just Israel’s actions, but the Zionist tenets on which the state is founded, has for too long been regarded an almost unspeakable blasphemy.

Yet it is no longer possible to believe with an honest conscience that the deplorable conditions in which Palestinians live and die in Gaza and the West Bank come as the result of specific policies, leaders or parties on either side of the impasse. The problem is fundamental: Founding a modern state on a single

ethnic or religious identity in a territory that is ethnically and religiously diverse leads inexorably either to a politics of exclusion (think of the 139-square-mile prison camp that Gaza has become) or to wholesale ethnic cleansing. Put simply, the problem is Zionism.¹⁰

Dissident Jewish groups and individuals, however, are generally ignored. For political purposes they simply do not exist. The mainstream media rarely cover these alternative Jewish perspectives. To publically recognize Jewish criticism of Zionism and Israel would raise serious questions about American support for Israel. However, there are rare exceptions; sometimes views critical of Zionism are published in the mainstream North American press.

INTERNATIONAL VIEWS

Most of the rest of the world has a much more critical view of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and supports the right of Palestinians to self-determination. On December 16, 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution supporting the right of self-determination for the Palestinians. The vote was 170 to 5 with one abstention. Those voting against were Israel, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau and the United States. Australia abstained.¹¹ In another vote, held on December 19, 2006, on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the tally was 176 to 5 in favor of the Palestinians. The countries that supported Israel were the United States, the Marshall Islands, Palau and Micronesia. Five countries abstained: Australia, Canada, the Central African Republic, Nauru and Vanuatu.¹² The entire rest of the world voted in favor of the right of Palestinians to self-determination.

However, in the mainstream North American press, these one-sided votes are almost never reported.

All human beings are entitled to basic human rights. Violation of the human rights of Palestinians have been documented by respected organizations such as Amnesty International,¹³ Human Rights Watch,¹⁴ the International Red Cross,¹⁵ the United Nations¹⁶ and even Israeli human-rights organizations such as B'Tselem,¹⁷ Rabbis for Human Rights¹⁸ and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel¹⁹ and many Israeli journalists.²⁰ However, these well-documented violations are attacked and buried under a barrage of criticism that they are biased, unfair for singling out the Jewish state or even anti-Semitic.²¹

My own record as a lawyer representing refugee claims against Israel by Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, is 29 positives to one negative, a 96.66 percent success rate. However, in the eyes of the supporters of Israel, this does not mean that there are serious human-rights problems in the Occupied Territories. To them, Israel can do no wrong. Therefore, they consider the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to be “anti-Semitic,” and the Jewish members of the IRB who rendered positive decisions on Palestinian refugee claims against Israel to be “self-hating Jews.”

DEFINITIONS OF IDENTITY

A Palestinian is simply an inhabitant of Palestine. There are Jewish, Christian, Muslim and non-believers who are Palestinian. The indigenous Palestinian Jews were opposed to the European Jewish settlers who flooded into Palestine with the support of Great Britain.²² Palestinian is simply a national designation like Canadian or American.²³

There are no racial, ethnic or religious criteria for being a Palestinian. Only by right of birth, naturalization and descent does one become a Palestinian, as in most other countries.

The Jewish state's citizenship and immigration processes are unique in the world. To qualify as a "Jew" in "the Jewish state," one must meet racial, ethnic or religious criteria.²⁴ The Jewish Law of Return grants almost immediate citizenship rights to Jews from anywhere in the world. Palestinians who were born in the country and forcibly expelled are, for the most part, forbidden to return. Israel defines itself as "Jewish" and structures itself to advance the interests of Jews at the expense of non-Jews, especially the indigenous Christian and Muslim Palestinian population.²⁵

In March 1919, U.S. Congressman Julius Kahn presented an anti-Zionist petition to President Woodrow Wilson as he was departing for the Paris peace conference. The petition was signed by 31 prominent American Jews, including Henry Morgenthau, Sr., former ambassador to Turkey; Simon W. Rosendale, former attorney general of New York; Mayor L. H. Kampner of Galveston, Texas; E. M. Baker of Cleveland, president of the Stock Exchange; R. H. Macy's Jesse I. Straus; *New York Times* publisher Adolph S. Ochs; and Judge M. C. Sloss of San Francisco.²⁶ Part of the petition read:

[We] protest against the political segregation of the Jews and the re-establishment in Palestine of a distinctively Jewish State as utterly opposed to the principles of democracy which it is the avowed purpose of the World's Peace Conference to establish. Whether the Jews be regarded as a "race" or as a "religion," it is

contrary to the democratic principles for which the world war was waged to found a nation on either or both of these bases.²⁷

The fact that these and many other Jews have criticized Israel and Zionism is deemed irrelevant today. Jewish critics are attacked as "self-hating Jews."²⁸

Here is the response of Bruce Jackson, one American Jewish academic, for being included on the Self-Hating, Israel Threatening (S.H.I.T.) List, which includes the names of over 8,000 Jewish academics, writers and other activists deemed to be critics who threatened Israel.

The most vicious anti-Semites in America aren't the few surviving retro fruitcakes with swastikas in their closets, but rather those self-righteous Jews who attack and try to silence — without conscience, doubt or scruple — any Jew who attempts to discuss seriously the ethics or morality or decency or utility of any action taken by the State of Israel or the illegal squatters in the Occupied Territories.

The latest in that venomous war against free, open and intelligent discussion is the Self-Hating, Israel-Threatening List (it's an acronym; get it? gee), which includes such enemies of thought as Gloria Steinem, Studs Turkel, Alan Trachtenberg, Woody Allen, Susan Sontag, Stew Albert, Susan Udin, Harvey Weinstein, Ed Asner, George Soros, Art Spiegelman, Uri Avneri, Richard Dreyfuss, Tony Judt, Neve Gordon, Jimmy Breslin (I guess they made him an honorary Jew), Andrew Cockburn, Barry Commoner, Sandy Berger, Phyllis Bennis. Such a list! The opening prose will give you a sense of the quality and character of mind involved in the compila-

tion of the list; the list itself is a roll of honor, and I'm delighted to have been found deserving of inclusion.²⁹

Mainstream Jewish organizations have also made similar charges. The American Jewish Committee published on its website (www.acj.org) an article entitled "Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism" by Professor Alvin H. Rosenfeld of Indiana University. The author argued "that Jewish critics of Israel, through their speaking and writing, are feeding a rise in virulent anti-Semitism." David Harris, executive director of the AJC, writes in his introduction, "Perhaps the most surprising — and distressing — feature of this new trend is the very public participation of some Jews in the verbal onslaught against Zionism and the Jewish State."³⁰

The article provoked a storm of controversy within the Jewish community.³¹ Allan Brownfeld, the editor of the American Council for Judaism's *Issues* magazine, wrote in response to the AJC attack on Jewish critics of Zionism and Israel that they are promoting anti-Semitism:

It's astonishing that in the 60 years since the Nazi extermination camps were liberated, anti-Semitism has revived and thrived. Still, it hardly makes sense to fight it by promiscuously throwing around the word 'anti-Semite' so that it loses its punch or to flay Jewish critics of Israel. I strongly disagree with some of these critics . . . but if somehow an anti-Semite finds common ground with them, that is hardly their fault — and certainly not their intent. . . . It's sad that the American Jewish Committee commissioned and published Rosenfeld's report. I can't imagine

what good will come out of it. Instead, it has given license to the most intolerant and narrow-minded of Israel's defenders so that . . . any veering from orthodoxy is met with censure or, from someone like Reinhartz, the most powerful of all post-Holocaust condemnations — anti-Semite — is diluted beyond recognition. The offense here is not just to a handful of relatively unimportant writers, but to memory itself. Shame.³²

One of the leading Jewish papers, *Forward*, responded to the attack launched by the AJC in an editorial entitled "Infamy":

It's hard to fathom what could have possessed the leaders of the American Jewish Committee to publish the screed posted on their Web site . . . "Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism," by Alvin Rosenfeld. . . . From its sensationalist title to its tired invocation of the Holocaust in the opening paragraph to its closing words about the "drift of 'progressive' Jewish thought," the slim essay is a shocking tissue of slander. . . . The fact that it was commissioned and published by an organization that once stood for dignity and civility in Jewish communal discourse speaks volumes about the state of Jewish leadership today.³³

One of the targets of Rosenfeld's ire, Professor Tony Judt, argued that the real purpose behind the campaign was to stifle harsh criticism of Israel. "The link between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is newly created," he asserted, adding that he fears "the two will have become so conflated in the minds of the world that references to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust will come to be seen as just a political defense of Israeli policy."³⁴

Judt was joined in his criticism of the AJC article by Alan Wolfe, a political scientist and the director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. Wolfe stated, "I'm almost in a state of shock" at the verbal assaults directed at liberal Jews. He lamented the growth of "illiberalism" within the organizations that claimed to represent the American Jewish community.³⁵

Michael Posluns, a political scientist at the University of Toronto, states on a web site that discussed anti-Semitism: "Sad and misbegotten missives of the sort below make me wonder if it is not the purpose of mainstream Jewish organizations to foster anti-Jewishness by calling down all who take from their Jewish experience and Jewish thought a different ethos and different ways of being as feeding anti-Semitism."³⁶

Here is the response of Lawrence Davidson, another Jewish academic, published in the American Council for Judaism's *Issues* magazine, to the equation of criticism of Zionism and Israel to anti-Semitism:

Those who assert that Zionism is the truest form of Judaism must dismiss or discredit the critics of Israeli policies. For these Zionists it is logically impossible for such policies to do damage to Judaism because faith and fatherland have been melded into one. Those who, like [Rabbi Jonathan] Sacks,³⁷ imply that Israel's behavior may indeed do such damage appear as traitors. Therefore, they must be rendered "irrelevant to the world Jewish community." It would be interesting to see how today's tribal Zionists would react to the statement made in 1961 by the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Essentially sharing Sacks's distress, Buber asserted that "only an internal

revolution can have the power to heal our people of their sickness of causeless hatred. . . . Only then will the old and young in our land realize how great was our responsibility to those miserable Arab refugees in whose towns we have settled Jews who were brought here from afar; whose homes we have inherited, whose fields we now sow and harvest; the fruits of whose gardens, orchards and vineyards we gather; and in whose cities that we put up houses of education, charity and prayer. . . ." Buber concluded that the situation was so morally reprehensible that "it is bound to bring complete ruin upon us." Buber too would now have to be labeled "irrelevant in the world Jewish community."

The continuing disagreement as to what constitutes the real values of the community has, in effect, split Judaism into majority and minority parties. The majority element, which controls the religion's institutional manifestations, openly identifies itself and its ethics with the expansionist, brutalizing policies of the Israeli tribal state. They have given themselves and their religion over to the Zionist dream of a Jewish state. What they have inherited, however, are the very worst aspects of nationalism that come when nationhood is pursued not in a pluralistic spirit, but in a tribal one: chauvinism, aggressiveness and xenophobia.

As a result there has been a militarization of the Jewish mind; the Passover ritual and other Jewish celebrations have been turned into paeans of nationalism, imperialism and colonialism; and Zionist nationalists have invented (as a vicarious act of fratricide) the category of "self-hating Jew" for those who share their religion but not their politics.³⁸

The prestigious *Economist* magazine in January 2007 also joined in this debate over criticism of Israel with an article entitled “Israel and the Jews: Diaspora Blues”:

The tendency to stand by Israel right or wrong . . . locks diaspora Jews out of the fateful and often bitter debates that rage inside Israel itself. Israel is an increasingly divided society. Secular and religious Jews used to have more beliefs in common . . . but for decades their interests have been diverging. They disagree on most basic questions: borders, who is a Jew, the role of religion, the status of non-Jews. . . . Helping Israel should no longer mean defending it uncritically. Israel is strong enough to cope with strong words from its friends. So diaspora institutions should, for example, feel free to criticize Israeli politicians who preach racism and intolerance, such as recently appointed cabinet minister Avigdor Lieberman. They should encourage lively debate about Israeli policies. Perhaps more will then add their voices to those of the millions of Israelis who believe in leaving the occupied territories so that Palestinians can have a state of their own, allowing an Israel at peace to return to its original vocation of providing a safe and democratic haven for the world’s Jews.³⁹

Rabbi Michael Lerner, head of the Tik-kun organization, also entered the fray:

The *New York Times* reported on January 31 [2007] about the most recent attempt by the American Jewish community to conflate intense criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. In a neat little example of the slippery slope, the report on “Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism,” written by Alvin H. Rosenfeld,

moves from exposing the actual anti-Semitism of those who deny Israel’s right to exist — and hence deny to the Jewish people the same right to national self-determination that they grant to every other people on the planet — to those who powerfully and consistently attack Israel’s policies toward Palestinians, see Israel as racist in the way that it treats Israeli-Arabs (or even Sephardic Jews), or who analogize Israel’s policies to those of apartheid as instituted by South Africa.

Meanwhile, the media has been abuzz with stories of Jews denouncing former President Jimmy Carter for his book *Palestine: Peace or Apartheid*. The same charges of anti-Semitism that have consistently been launched against anyone who criticizes Israeli policy are now being launched against the one American leader who managed to create a lasting (albeit cold) peace between Israel and a major Arab state (Egypt). Instead of seriously engaging with the issues raised (e.g. to what extent are Israel’s current policies similar to those of apartheid and to what extent are they not?), the Jewish establishment and media respond by attacking the people who raise these or any other critiques — shifting the discourse to the legitimacy of the messenger and thus avoiding the substance of the criticisms. Knowing this, many people become fearful that they too will be labeled “anti-Semitic” if they question the wisdom of Israeli policies or if they seek to organize politically to challenge those policies.⁴⁰

Rabbi Lerner’s conclusion:

When this bubble of repression of dialogue explodes into open resentment at the way Jewish political correctness

has been imposed, it may really yield a “new” anti-Semitism. To prevent that, the voices of dissent on Israeli policy must be given the same national exposure in the media and American politics that the voices of the Jewish establishment have been given.⁴¹

Another example of Jewish opinion that is critical of Israel is an Open Letter signed by 375 Jewish peace activists in defense of Hermann Dierkes, a trade unionist and leader of the Left Party (Die Linke) in the German city of Duisburg. The opening statement of the letter reads: “We are peace activists of Jewish background. Some of us typically identify in this way; others of us do not. But we all object to those who claim to speak for all Jews or who use charges of anti-Semitism to attempt to squelch legitimate dissent.”⁴²

There is clear evidence that the American Jewish community is not of one mind on the issue of Zionism, Israel, and America’s relationship with the Jewish state. The formation in 2008 of J Street, a new pro-Israel lobby group, is one example of divergent American Jewish opinion. The group defines itself as Zionist but “with progressive views” on Israel. In particular, it opposes the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and supports a two-state solution. Jeremy Ben-Ami, the founder and executive director of J Street, does not accept the “public harmony” dictum on Israel. In an interview published in the *New York Times*, Ben-Ami explained: “We’re trying to redefine what it means to be pro-Israel. You don’t have to be non-critical. You don’t have to adopt the party line. It’s not, ‘Israel, right or wrong.’”⁴³

Since the organization was founded, J Street’s budget has doubled, to \$3 million.

Its lobbying staff has also doubled, to six. It is tiny compared with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), whose “lobbying prowess is a matter of Washington legend.”⁴⁴ J Street is still not much more than “an Internet presence, launching volleys of e-mail messages from the netroots, as it is a shoe-leather operation.”⁴⁵ However, with President Obama committed to moving the Israel-Palestinian peace process forward, over the strenuous objections of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing government, the organization sees a role for itself. To quote the *New York Times* article, “on these issues, which pose a difficult quandary for the mainstream [American Jewish] groups, J Street knows exactly where it stands. ‘Our No. 1 agenda item,’ Ben-Ami said . . . ‘is to do whatever we can in Congress to act as the president’s blocking back.’”⁴⁶

CRITICIZING ISRAEL AND ZIONISM

There is no rational basis for the argument that criticism of the state of Israel and the political ideology of Zionism is anti-Semitic, just as it makes no sense to consider criticizing apartheid South Africa’s racist policies toward blacks as evidence of racism toward whites, or that criticism of Nazi policies toward the Jews should not be allowed because it is evidence of racism against Germans.

Similarly, if you criticize American policy toward the Iraq war and torture at Abu Ghraib Prison, or the Jim Crow laws that institutionalized discrimination against blacks in the southern states,⁴⁷ that you are racist against Americans. This argument is obviously absurd and should not even require a response.

In a free society, one has a basic right to evaluate and criticize a political ideology or movement and to review and criticize a state's policies. A critique should be evaluated on the basis of the truthfulness of the facts and the logic of the arguments presented. One also has a right to present alternative facts and engage in debate. When one side wants to avoid debate, divert the discussion or suppress the topic and launches personal attacks against its opponents, it is almost certain that it is hiding some uncomfortable truths.

Palestinians are, however, charged with anti-Semitism if they complain about the destruction of 531 of their villages; the ethnic cleansing of their cities;⁴⁸ the loss of their country and rights to citizenship, and then not being allowed to return to their homes in contravention of international law; or the discriminatory policies of the Jewish National Fund;⁴⁹ the inequities of the Jewish Law of Return;⁵⁰ house demolitions;⁵¹ discrimination against Muslims and Christian Palestinians;⁵² illegal Jewish-only settlements;⁵³ the more than 600 Israeli military checkpoints in the West Bank;⁵⁴ the 42 years of military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank; the program of targeted assassinations;⁵⁵ the well-documented cases of torture;⁵⁶ the imprisonment of more than 11,000 Palestinians, including women and children, many held without charge under what is called Administrative Detention;⁵⁷ or the recent slaughter in Gaza.⁵⁸

DEFENDING PALESTINIAN HUMAN RIGHTS

The Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims have many legitimate reasons to criticize the policies and actions of the Jewish state. No state is above criticism, particularly not a state that aggressively and repeatedly at-

tacks its neighbors, discriminates against its Arab population and is slowly but systematically ethnically cleansing its territory.

There is also much to criticize in the Arab world, but it would be absurd to say that one cannot criticize Saudi Arabia for its treatment of women or its human-rights record, because such criticism is racist against Arabs or is anti-Muslim. A person who made such an argument would be laughed at. No one would take him or the argument seriously.

Yet the allegation of anti-Semitism is a frequent smear tactic that has been used against non-Jewish individuals who have publicly supported Palestinian human rights.⁵⁹

To conclude, here is what Ran HaCohen, an Israeli academic, has to say about using anti-Semitism as a means of silencing criticism of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians.

The eve of the Jewish New Year is an excellent occasion for what Jewish tradition calls *Kheshbon Nefesh*, or soul-searching, on so-called "anti-semitism," which has now become the single most important element of Jewish identity. Jews may believe in God or not, eat pork or not, live in Israel or not, but they are all united by their unlimited belief in anti-semitism.

When a Palestinian kills innocent Israeli civilians, it's anti-semitism. When Palestinians attack soldiers of Israel's occupation army in their own village, it's anti-semitism. When the UN General Assembly votes 133 to 4 condemning Israel's decision to murder the elected Palestinian leader, it means that except for the US, Micronesia and the Marshal Islands, all other countries on the globe are anti-semitic. Even when a pregnant Palestinian woman is stopped at an Is-

raeli check-point and gives birth in an open field, the only lesson to be learnt is that Ha'aretz journalist Gideon Levy — who reported two such cases in the past two weeks, one in which the baby died — is an anti-semitic.

Anti-semitism is an all-encompassing explanation. Anything unpleasant to anti-Palestinian ears is just another instance of anti-semitism. Jewish consciousness focused on anti-semitism has taken the shape of anti-semitic conspiracy theories like that of *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*: whereas the anti-semitic classic relates every calamity to Jewish conspiracy, Jews relate to anti-semitic conspiracy every criti-

cism of Israel. As we shall see, this is not the only similarity between anti-Palestinianism and anti-semitism.

The abuse of alleged anti-semitism is morally despicable. It took hundreds of years and millions of victims to turn anti-semitism — a specific case of racism which led historically to genocide — into a taboo. People abusing this taboo in order to support Israel's racist and genocidal policy towards the Palestinians do nothing less than desecrate the memory of those Jewish victims, whose death, from a humanistic perspective, is meaningful only inasmuch as it serves as an eternal warning to human kind against all kinds of discrimination, racism and genocide.⁶⁰

¹ Palestinians, and for that matter everyone else, have every right to criticize the political ideology of Zionism and the policies of the state of Israel, but for the purposes of this article I am focusing almost exclusively on Jewish critics. I am solely responsible for any errors and omissions. An earlier version of this article was published by *Dissident Voice* on September 1, 2009, and republished in *Occupation Magazine* on September 5, 2009. The Canadian Jewish Outlook Society, which publishes *Outlook*, has also accepted the short version for publication.

² Lasse Wilhelmson, "'Anti-Semitism' as a Political Weapon," *Palestine Remembered*, posted May 25, 2005.

³ <http://jewishpeaceandnews.blogspot.com/>.

⁴ Joel Beinin, "Silencing Critics Not Way to Middle East Peace," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 4, 2007.

⁵ Dorothy Zellner, "Why It Is Essential for Jews to Speak Out as Jews, on Israel," www.mondoweiss.net, August 23, 2009.

⁶ Norman Solomon, "Gag and Smear: The Misuses of Anti-Semitism," www.counterpunch.org, May 8, 2006.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Michael Neumann, "Anti-Semitism: A Minor Problem, Overblown: Criticism of Israel — and Its Jewish Supporters — Is Not Anti-Semitism," *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 2003.

⁹ George Soros, "On Israel, America and AIPAC," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 54, No. 6, April 12, 2007.

¹⁰ Ben Ehrenreich, "Zionism Is the Problem: The Zionist Ideal of a Jewish State Is Keeping Israelis and Palestinians from Living in Peace," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2009.

¹¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 60/145.

¹² See Annex V: Vote on Palestinian Self-Determination: Draft Resolution III on the Right of the Palestinian People to Self-determination (document A/61/442) held on December 19, 2006.

¹³ See, for example, "Israel and the Occupied Territories: Israel Must Put an Immediate End to the Policy and Practice of Assassinations," Amnesty International Index Number: MDE 15/056/2003, 3 July 2003; "Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories: Impunity for War Crimes in Gaza and Southern Israel Recipe for Further Civilian Suffering," Amnesty International, July 2, 2009; "Israeli Troops Reveal Gaza Abuses," Amnesty International, January 22, 2009; "Israel Used White Phosphorus in Gaza Civilian Areas," Amnesty International, January 19, 2009. "Israel Cuts Electricity and Food Supplies to Gaza," Amnesty International, January 21, 2008. The Report states: "Israel has cut off the supply of electricity, fuel and humanitarian assistance to the population of Gaza, a move Amnesty International has condemned as collective punishment."

¹⁴ See for example, "Promoting Impunity: The Israeli Military's Failure to Investigate Wrongdoing," Human Rights Watch, June 21, 2005; see also "Israel: Investigate 'White Flag' Shootings of Gaza Civilians: Internal

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²³ See Uri Davis, *Citizenship and the State: A Comparative Study of Citizenship Legislation in Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon* (Ithaca Press, 1997), pp. 83-113.

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²⁵ See Hanna Braun, “A Basic History of Zionism and Its Relation to Judaism,” www.informationclearing-house.info, April 21, 2009.

²⁶ Alfred M. Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II: What Price Peace?* (North American, 1982), pp. 768-769.

²⁷ “Jewish Anti-Zionist Petition Presented to President Wilson in 1919,” *American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism Report*, No. 52, p. 138. The text of the statement is reproduced here at pp. 135-139.

²⁸ See “SHIT LIST...7000+ Self-Hating Israel-Threatening Jews. Self-hating, Israel-Threatening Jews are a threat to Israel. This page lists 8,000+ of the worst offenders. . . . Yes, a few of these Self-Hating and/or Israel-Threatening Jews may be well-intentioned but grossly misinformed... call it brainwashed by wave after wave of anti-Israel propaganda” (www.masada2000.org/shit-list.html). This site is no longer available on the in-

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³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Great Britain's Chief Orthodox Rabbi. See Jonathan Freedland, "Prophet of Hope," *The Guardian*, August 27, 2002.

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⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

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