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Israel Remains Faithful to the Fundamental Ideology of Zionism

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The recent appointment of the Soviet-born Avigdor Lieberman has aggrieved many liberal supporters of Israel. The man is on record as a proponent of ethnic cleansing, bombing the Aswan Dam in Egypt and stripping Arabs of Israeli citizenship.

These critics bemoan an alleged betrayal of the ideas of the founders' generation, such as Ben Gurion and Golda Meir, by the current Israeli leaders. I strongly disagree with these critics. Rather, today's government of Israel, both its executive and legislative branches, reflect remarkable continuity and unswerving loyalty to the fundamental ideology of Zionism. Massive ethnic cleansing took place in 1947-8 under the command of Ben Gurion.

All Israeli governments have ordered bombings raids on the neighbouring countries. Government threats of bombing Iran have been routine for a good decade. Arabs were placed under military rule from 1948 to 1966, a period of continuous rule of "the left". Lieberman is no different from the founding fathers.



The Zionist project in Palestine developed under the motto of *hafrada,* separate development. Zionist settlers did not mean to join and develop the existing economic and social systems in Palestine but, rather, pursued policies typical of settler colonialism. The goal of occupying a maximum of land with a minimum of Arabs has been the policy of all Israeli administrations. So has the fundamental idea that Israel is "the state of the Jewish people" rather than a state of its citizens. This naturally reduces Arab citizens of Israel to a second-class status.

Israeli society and its elites adopted, from the very inception of the Zionist enterprise, a reductionist view of the "Arab" akin to racial anti-Semitism. On the ground, it made possible discrimination against Palestinian Arabs, Jews from Muslim countries as well as immigrant workers from Asia and refugees from Africa. Massive demonstrations have taken place in Israel against intimate relations between Jews and Arabs, and there is no civil marriage in Israel, which could have made mixed marriages possible.

The right and the extreme right around the world have long admired the unfettered nationalism that underlies the State of Israel. For example, the White nationalists of South Africa identified with the State of Israel and lent it their support since 1948, while at the same time their National Party would not admit Jews. The close collaboration established between the Zionist State in Asia and the Apartheid State in Africa reflected not only a confluence of interests but, equally, ideological affinities.[2]

This shows that anti-Semitism can co-exist with admiration for the valiant and intrepid New Hebrew Man, for the Zionist ideology that has shaped him. It sought to regenerate "the Jewish race" deemed degenerate by prominent Zionist ideologues and practitioners. Social Darwinism, an important aspect of many right-wing ideologies, was part of the Zionist project from its inception.

Prior to unleashing a world war Nazi leadership treated Zionists as "favoured children," helped them train settlers for Palestine and allowed them to emigrate with their assets. SS officials were guests of the Zionist leadership in Palestine and returned to Germany with admiration, which they expressed in German press. A commemorative medal was even minted in honour of one such visit. (A recent Israeli documentary, *The Flat,* recounted this story in some detail; it also shows a medal coined on that occasion: with the star of David on one side, and the swastika on the other.) Several right wing groups known for their anti-Semitic past—the Dutch Freedom Party, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the English Defence League in Great Britain, and the Bündnis Zukunft Österreich in Austria—have all rallied enthusiastically to the cause of Israel in recent years.[3] Herzl's belief that anti-Semites will be "our best friends and allies" continues to ring true.

European and American Islamophobes admire Israel. In an admittedly extreme case, the perpetrator of the massacre of dozens of people in Norway in the summer of 2011, Anders Breivik, cited 359 times in his manifesto the Zionist State as a rampart against Islam and an example of armed resolve.[4]

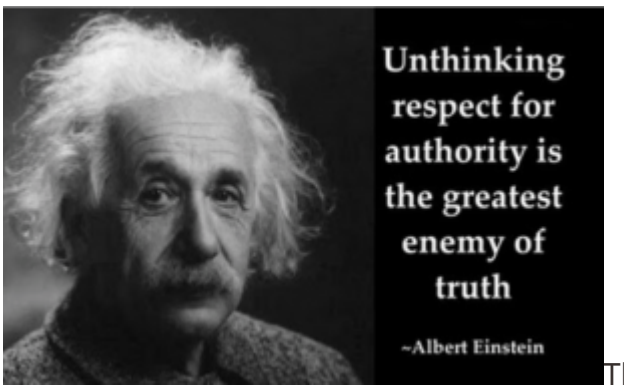
The right likewise appreciates the dominant role played by former military officers in Israeli economic and political life, which legitimizes the conflation—usually more discrete in other countries—of politics and the military-industrial complex. Socialist Zionist movements withered within Israel, while the poverty rate there became the highest among the OECD

nations, and Israel came to share with the United States the record of socio-economic inequality. This pauperization of masses of citizens has provoked relatively little social protest, and the little that did not take place was defused by the usual means of invoking "existential threats", be it Hamas, Iran or the BDS. This has turned Israel into a poster boy for neo-liberal economic policies, an attractive country for direct foreign investment, firmly integrated into the globalized economy.

When they overlap with systemic ethnic discrimination, socio-economic disparities, tend to provoke violent reaction, usually termed as terrorism and insurgency. Israel's extensive military experience enabled it to become a major exporter of security equipment and anti-terrorism knowhow. Thus Israel not only shows how the ruling elites can defuse social unrest with references to internal and external enemies, but also provides material means to deal with violence if such distraction is not effective. The many decades of occupation have made Israel a world leader in counter-insurgency expertise. The State of Israel remains vital to understanding not only today's world but also the way its history can be manipulated to justify the rule of the right.

Wedded to unbridled nationalism, Israel, which Sami Michael, one of its distinguished authors, characterizes as "the most racist state in the industrialized world,"[5] preserves the European tradition of the use of force to ensure colonial settlement. This tradition is certainly not of Jewish origin. But it reflects the historical role of which the State of Israel is proud: the affirmation of European values such as assertive military behaviour. Following the Nazi period and during the decolonization undertaken in the context of the Cold War, the principles of racial equality and aversion for war temporarily prevailed in European societies. While the ideology of racial and ethnic superiority went into eclipse in Europe between 1960 and 1980, it is gaining ground once more, particularly since the end of the Cold War.[6] Eastern Europe is awash in it.

While the use of force as a matter of course against "people of colour" in far-off countries had fallen into temporary discredit, throughout all its existence Israel has regularly attacked neighbouring countries and the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank. Israel has become a major source of specialists and equipment in the "war on terror." Western countries and their allies draw upon Israeli expertise when they prepare their armed and police forces not only for operations in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and other Muslim-majority countries, but also for social control and repression of their own societies.[7]



The right wing nature of political Zionism had long been clear to those who cared to pay attention. In 1935 Albert Einstein, along with other Jewish humanists, denounced the Betar youth movement founded by Vladimir Jabotinsky, the spiritual father of the current Israel government, calling it "as much of a danger to our youth as Hitlerism is to German youth."[8] Einstein, who espused cultural and humanist Zionism, was openly opposed to the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine

and repeatedly criticized the rightward drift of the Zionist movement in the 1940s.[9] Irving Reichert (1895-1968), a Reform rabbi, pointed to a dangerous "parallel between the insistence of some Zionist spokesmen upon nationality and race and blood and similar pronouncements by fascist leaders in certain European dictatorships."[10] A graphic illustration can be found in a memoir of life in a Lithuanian town between the two world wars: "In Biliunas Street, a member of the Young Lithuania movement [which carry out massacres of Jews during the war] wearing a green uniform met a member of Betar, in gray-brown [a Zionist militarized youth movement]; they greeted each other raising their arms in the fascist salute."[11]

The very nature of settler colonialism invariably exacerbates ethnic nationalism. The Israeli historian Benny Morris explains this logic:

> Zionist ideology and practice were necessarily and elementally expansionist. Realizing Zionism meant organizing and dispatching settlement groups to Palestine. As each settlement took root, it became acutely aware of its isolation and vulnerability, and quite naturally sought the establishment of new Jewish settlements around it. This would make the original settlement more "secure" — but the new settlements now became the "front line" and themselves needed "new" settlements to safeguard them.[12]

Hannah Arendt, an erstwhile Zionist and political philosopher had well understood this tendency and wrote in 1948, when Palestine was aflame:

> And even if the Jews were to win the war… [t]he "victorious" Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders, absorbed with physical self-defence…. And all this would be the fate of a nation that—no matter how many immigrants it could still absorb and how far it extended its boundaries (the whole of Palestine and Transjordan is the insane Revisionist demand)—would still remain a very small people greatly outnumbered by hostile neighbours.[13]
>
> Hers was as much a prophesy as a warning.

The world continues to pay a high price for ignoring such warnings.[14] Those who warned against the creation of a Zionist state saw their words treated with disdain, or at best with condescension. However, these same Jewish authors have proven to be prophetic in identifying early on the trends that have now become dominant in Israeli society. They had, in particular, foreseen the upsurge of chauvinism and xenophobia, the militarization of society and the popularity of fascist ideas. While only few Israeli politicians, such as Miri Regev, are "happy to be fascists", most frequently fascism is treated as a threatening spectre invoked by former prime ministers, journalists and even military brass.

These warnings deserve more than the "condescension of history." The State of Israel has been a vanguard and a barometer of right-wing trends that have taken place in economic and social developments, in international relations and warfare since the turn of the century. The inclusion of Lieberman and his extreme-right party in the government coalition is part of the country's genetic code. Israel remains faithful to its principles. This is important to realize if one is to understand what is modern Israel and what roles it plays in the world at large.

Notes

[1] *The author is Professor of History at the University of Montreal ; his recent book is What is Modern Israel (Pluto Press), also available in French, Japanese and Russian. His previous book A Threat from Within : A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism is available in fourteen languages, including Arabic and Hebrew.*

[2] Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

[3] Adar Primor, "The unholy alliance between Israel's Right and Europe's anti-Semites," *Haaretz*, December 12 2010.

[4] Ben Hartman, "Norway attack suspect had anti-Muslim, pro-Israel views." *Jerusalem Post,* July 24 2011.

[5] This characterization belongs to Sami Michael, an acclaimed Israeli novelist and Nobel nominee: Lisa Goldman, "Sami Michael: 'Israel – Most racist state in the industrialized world'", *+972,* August 2, 2009; http://972mag.com/author-sami-michael-israel-is-the-most-racist-state-in-the-industrialized-world/52602/

[6] Paul Hockenos, *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, New York: Routledge, 1993; John Palmer, "The rise of far right parties across Europe is a chilling echo of the 1930s", *Guardian* November 15, 2013; http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/15/far-right-threat-europe-integration; M. Golder, "Extreme Right Parties in Europe", *Annual Review of Political Science,* 19(1), 2015.

[7] Edmund Sanders and Batsheva Sobelman, "Israeli firms see a global market for their anti-terrorism know-how", *Los Angeles Times,* November 27, 2010; http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/27/world/la-fg-israel-homeland-security-20101128

[8] Peter A. Bucky, *The Private Albert Einstein*, Kansas City, MO: Andrews and McMeel, 1992, p. 64

[9] Fred Jerome, *Einstein on Israel and Zionism: His Provocative Ideas About the Middle East,* New York, St. Martin's Press, 2009

[10] Quoted in Ross,, *Rabbi Outcast: Elmer Berger and American Jewish Anti-Zionism,* Washington, DC: Potomac, 2011, p. 37

[11] Rimantas Vanagas, *Nenusigręžk nuo savęs: gyvieji tilta.* Vinius, Vyturys, 1995, pp. 69-70

[12] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, New York, Vintage Books, 2001, p. 676.

[13] Hannah Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland," (published in May 1948), in *Jew as Pariah*, New York, Grove Press, 1978, p. 187

[14] Adam Schatz, *Prophets Outcast,* New York: Nation, 2004, p. xii.

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