

# A Jewish State

By Gerald Steinberg

One hundred and ten years ago (1897), during the first World Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, Theodore Herzl “founded the Jewish state,” as he wrote in his diary. His words and the actions of the Zionist movement to restore Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel after 2,000 years in exile, and to transform the Jewish people into a nation like all the others, electrified the Diaspora.

Fifty years later, on November 29 1947, more than two thirds of members of the United Nations agreed. They voted to approve the plan to create two states – one for the Jews, and one for the Arabs. But the Arabs refused, launching a campaign of terror, followed in May 1948 by a full scale invasion. And after they were defeated, they adopted a political strategy by exploiting the plight of the refugees and inventing the "right of return" mythology, (aided by the United Nations) as a means of seeking to reverse the outcome.

Sixty years have passed, and this rejectionism remains in place. At times, its expression has been muted for tactical reasons, particularly following Arab military defeats, in order to allow time for recovery and planning for the next assault on Israel. After the 1967 war, the language shifted to condemnations of settlements and "occupation", but the goal did not change, as restated by the Arab leaders meeting in Khartoum. In 1993, Yassir Arafat and his PLO movement seemed to accept Israel's legitimacy by appearing in public with Prime Minister Rabin and signing letters of mutual recognition. But Arafat's intention was entirely different, and he clung to the 1947 policies by repeating the language of rejectionism, and avoiding changes in the refugee myths.

The Arab and Moslem rejectionists cultivated allies among intellectuals, radical academics, journalists, political leaders and activists, and antisemites, particularly in Britain and Europe, but also in North America and elsewhere. The 1975 United Nations resolution declaring “Zionism is racism” was one expression of this rejectionism, and it was repeated in the NGO Forum of the UN's 2001 Durban conference, which included “respected groups” such as Human Rights Watch. This goal is also behind the boycotts of Israeli universities, publicity on the BBC and elsewhere for the "one state solution" (meaning the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state), "apartheid week" activities at universities, and the barrage of false claims of "war crimes", human rights violations, and "collective punishment".

Such campaigns are central to the obsessive efforts to deny the Jewish people the right to national self-determination. For some leaders of the Anglican Church in the UK, Catholic theologians, and others, this objective reflects antisemitism, in the form of replacement theology, which views the Exile of the Jewish people is a form of divine punishment. For them, the return of the Jews to the world stage, and sovereign equality with the Christian nations of Europe is unacceptable, regardless of

boundaries, policies and other details. Others reflect the “Lawrence of Arabia syndrome”, patronizing the Arabs as compensation for the sins of colonialism, particularly under the British. The efforts of both groups have intensified as they understood that Israel is not simply going to fade away in a few years, as many had expected.

In response, Israelis have started to demand explicit public and unambiguous acceptance as a Jewish state, reflecting Jewish culture, holidays, language, etc., just as France is French, Italy is Italian, Iran is Islamic, etc. Fourteen years after the exuberance of Oslo, with the renewal of peace talks at the Annapolis meeting, Prime Minister Olmert put the recognition of the right of the Jews to sovereign equality squarely on the table. Unless the Palestinians, the Saudi leadership, Bashar Assad’s regime in Syria, and others who claim to be interested in peace end their campaigns to delegitimize Israel, the conflict will continue. Similarly, as long as the demonization continues in the United Nations, and has strong support in the UK and Europe, these governments cannot be considered to be serious partners in peace efforts.

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