

60 Years on the Map

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May 5, 2008
The Jerusalem Post

Israel's major accomplishment in 60 years of independence is surviving - staying on the map as a sovereign state, with equal status among the nations of the world. The many economic and cultural achievements have helped to contribute to this survival, while the desire for peace with our neighbors remains unfulfilled, but the triumph is that we are here.

The primary goal of Zionism was and remains the re-establishment of sovereignty and self-determination for the Jewish people in our homeland. In addition to fulfilling the 2,000-year-old desire to return to Eretz Yisrael, the history of persecution (particularly in Christian Europe), expulsions, and pogroms culminating in the Holocaust demonstrated the dangers of dependence on others. In the modern world, the Jewish people could only survive, both physically and culturally, by regaining and maintaining national independence, equal to the Christian nations of Europe, the Moslem nations of the Middle East, and the others across the globe. The alternative was to disappear from the stage, along with the richness of the Hebrew language, and the heritage of 4000 years of Jewish history and tradition.

Sixty years ago, as the British prepared to leave and the Arab armies planned their invasion, most observers and policy makers predicted disaster for the nascent Jewish state. Arab leaders, such as Azzam Pasha, who was Secretary-General of the Arab League, boasted: "This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades." American and European military officials and diplomats looked at the apparently overwhelming Arab advantages in weapons, population size and territory, and urged the Jews not to declare independence.

AGAINST THESE predictions, the tenacity and motivation of Israelis, aided by the intense identification and support from the Diaspora, have ensured the independence of the Jewish state.

For the Arab and Moslem "rejectionists" (including the Iranians, who are claiming leadership of this group), the idea of Jewish sovereignty in the "Moslem Middle East" was and remains unacceptable. This fundamental conflict, and not differences over borders, post-1967 settlements and occupation, is the core of the conflict and has led to the wars of aggression and mass terror attacks against Israel. This rejectionism is often expressed through proposals for the "one-state solution," the nullification of the Jewish symbols of the Israeli state (including the calendar and flag), and the demand that millions of Arabs who claim refugee status from 1948 have a "right of return," and thereby create an Arab majority. Similarly, the attempt to deny the 4,000-year-history of Jewish Jerusalem, as expressed in Palestinian textbooks, and by Yasir Arafat at the Camp David summit with President Clinton in 2000, also reflects this effort reverse Israel's status as an independent Jewish state.

The campaigns in Western Europe and elsewhere that use labels such as "apartheid" and "racist" in reference to Israel and Zionism, and the strategy of boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) are part of the efforts to deny the legitimacy of Jewish sovereignty. The same is true for the blanket condemnations of Israeli responses to terror attacks and the attempt to deny Israel the right to self-defense enjoyed by all other sovereign and independent nations. Similarly, the false claims of "war crimes" and "collective punishment" are used constantly to demonize Israel in the United Nations and by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that exploit the rhetoric of morality to demonize Israel. This was also the main objective of the infamous 2001 Durban Conference, and the planned 2009 Review Conference, to be led by Iran, Libya and Cuba.

THE DELEGITIMATION and demonization of Zionism, and the singling out of Israel for special treatment, while erasing the context of Palestinian terrorism and other violent attacks, have become the modern form of anti-Semitism. In many examples, particularly among some of the leaders of the boycotts in British churches and universities, the themes of classical Christian anti-Semitism, including blood libels, have been revived as part of the intense anti-Israel propaganda. The few outspoken Jewish academics who confront this form of racism are themselves subject to anti-Semitic attacks.

In the face of this intense and ongoing hostility, Israel's ability not only to survive, but to thrive, is the main story marking 60 years of independence. With 6 million Jewish citizens of Israel, ten times the population in 1948, the Hebrew language has been reinvigorated, and the Jewish culture has been preserved.

At the same time, progress towards the acceptance of Jewish sovereignty equality among the nations of the world is painfully slow, and the struggle has been and will continue to be exhausting. But there are no better choices - there are no alternatives for Israel and the Jewish people.

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