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How

Long

Will

Israel

Get

Away

With

It?

By

Haim Bresheeth-Zabner

Bearing in mind that Israel and the Palestine conflict are some of the most researched and discussed topics one may think of, it is quite striking to note the great lacuna of knowledge and understanding about the Israeli settler-colonial state and its cruel realities.

While people found the apartheid regime in South Africa easy to comprehend and oppose, old clichés and propaganda still control most of the public's imagination about Israel, namely, that it is: a small state which successfully fought against larger Arab armies to gain its independence; a socialist society (the Kibbutz); a democracy where Arab citizens enjoy full rights; a state searching constantly for peace with its hostile neighbors; a secular, modern polity; a state of all Jews.

Starting from these misguided concepts promulgated by Israeli propaganda gets you nowhere.

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About This Issue

Our feature writer, Haim Bresheeth-Zabner, is a filmmaker, photographer and film studies scholar presently teaching at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. The son of two Holocaust survivors who emigrated to Israel, he was drafted at age 18 into the Israel Defense Forces and ended up a second lieutenant in the Golani infantry brigade, a position he held during the 1967 war. Following that war he moved to London. His most recent book is *An Army Like No Other*, on which this article is based.



Haim Bresheeth-Zabner

And, on page 15, we run the first Job Opening announcement in AMEU's 54-year history. The ad has been running on our website and already several strong candidates have expressed interest.

John F. Mahoney
 Executive Director

Indeed, such muddling has only intensified through the use of the Working Definition on Anti-Semitism put out by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as a political and ideological way for silencing the debate on Palestinian rights and Israeli wrongs by painting critics of Israel as dangerous anti-semites, especially if they happen to be Jewish or socialist, or both. The success of this deterring mechanism has raised the stakes with most politicians, public figures or intellectuals now terrified of criticizing Israel in any form or manner.

There is a clear need to assist decoding the Israeli enigma for Western readers, intoxicated and confused by a mixture of propagandistic mythologies, images of brutal attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, and media reports about the post-modern, (supposedly) post-Zionist, progressive Israel.

How does one speak about an advanced settler-colonial, apartheid society with its ultra-modern army, its system of exporting death, destruction and surveillance worldwide, its dependence on Jewish *Halacha* - a variant of a Sharia system, the extensive radicalization of the social structure, and a successful propaganda system, one of the most advanced in the new millennium, not to mention its use of hi-tech hardware and software for controlling millions of Palestinians lacking human or political rights for over five decades, and its seven decades of *Emergency Regulations* which have never lapsed?

How does one speak of Israel's ability to use exceptionalism as if it were a mighty world power, when it is the most financially and militarily-supported nation by the US taxpayer?

Or how does one speak of Israel's abuse of the Holocaust and of the history of anti-semitism in order to make itself immune from international law?

Israel has turned the *people of the book* into the people of the tank, gun, missile and drone. It has used bibli-

cal myths to construct an oppressive, ultra-modern military society. It has a history of endless wars and armed conflicts—more than any other modern nation. It has gained the support of both western liberal democracies and the most oppressive dictatorships and neo-fascist regimes of the new millennium.

What socio-political, conceptual lens would be the right one to focus the debate on this extraordinary polity: a twenty-first-century, ultra-modern Sparta operating a nineteenth-century model of racialized, militarized apartheid combined with dependence on pre-historical mythological foundations?

And the main question, mystifying many: How does Israel get away with it all?

The Israel Defense Forces

The first rule when analyzing such a complex phenomenon is not to limit oneself to describing symptoms, but to concentrate on its foundational tenets, causes, and the socio-political machinery for implementing these. I have chosen the *Israel Defense Forces* (IDF), because it is the most definitive, unique, and characteristic socio-political construction of Zionism. The IDF is the prime institution Zionism has perfected, the main machinery shaping and defining the Israeli society and state. To understand Israel, one has to understand the IDF - an army unlike the American, British, French, Russian, Chinese or any other national military force. As Israel is unlike most other states, the way to understanding the difference is not through the parallels with other modern states, but through its main characterizing dissimilarities, its typifying distance from most other nations.

There is a multitude of possible vantage points about Israel, each with its own inbuilt biases and pitfalls, its specific optical illusions. Many on the European left have traditionally seen Israel as a socialist society, where a strong Trades Union Federa-

tion, the *Histradruth*, was crucial in shaping society, as was the Kibbutz movement. It only takes realizing the Labor movement in Israel was the force that initiated the expulsion of two-thirds of all Palestinians in 1948, and that consistently denied their return despite numerous UN resolutions to that effect. That the Histadruth was the largest *employer* in Israel during its first two decades is also a telling detail flummoxing most Europeans with superficial knowledge of the society. That the Kibbutz movement actively supported apartheid, being open to Jews only and supplying the majority of the frontline officers and many of the soldiers in 1948 and later, might also supply a clue to the kind of socialism practiced. One cannot refrain from reflecting on the Whites' Trades Union movement in apartheid South Africa, whose battle cry was - "White Workers of the World, Unite!". Of course, this Israeli 'left' - such as it was - is a thing of the remote past; the Kibbutzim have been fully privatized, gaining ownership of land stolen from the Palestinians, and the grand Labor movement is no more, unlikely to even be represented in the next Israeli Knesset after the March 2021 election.

For many Israel is a sought-after tourist destination, offering sea, sun and sightseeing, avoiding the realities and contradictions of the colonial conflict. While tourism is always a distorting political optic, in the case of Israel it is doubly so; tourists are guaranteed not to be confronted in any meaningful way by the daily realities of the military occupation, the constant brutalities of the IDF towards the Palestinians, or the systematic denial of rights they experience. They may be served by an Arab Palestinian waiter, but are unlikely to recognize them as such, and even less likely to discuss daily realities of the occupation with them.

Many such tourists come to Israel through an interest in music, art or wildlife. In all such cases, they will be practically isolated from the ugly realities of militarized apartheid and the iniquities of the settler-colonial project. Another type of tourist is the academic coming for a conference or research symposium, in many cases paid for, at least partially, by the Israeli host. Thousands of academics visit Israel every year for such purposes, getting wine and

dined, and experiencing the most sophisticated propaganda machine anywhere, some become willing ambassadors of the regime if they were not so before.

The Israeli academia is endowed by the Israeli government (and richly assisted by EU and US funds) with large sums allocated for inviting and hosting large conferences of professional associations from many countries. Israel recognizes the importance of converting and persuading scientists from every discipline, and is successfully implementing the task, adding influential opinion-formers to the ranks of its highly-placed supporters. It is well known that politicians of all hues enjoy preferential treatment and lavish funding - most US lawmakers are generously supported by pro-Israeli funding. Such important visitors are exposed to complex, carefully-planned propaganda events, designed to convert them to the Israeli political perspective. The success of such efforts is clear - the Israeli perspective is supported by all parts of the western world, and a great many other countries as well. That Israel spends enormous sums each year on such efforts is not a financial burden - Israel is the largest receiver of US and western financial support in history, as well as the largest per-capita receiver of foreign aid.

Such power relationships form long-term political realities in the west. Israel's illegal, let alone immoral moves are, without exception, supported politically and financially by all western nations; its apartheid iniquities, as well as its war crimes in Gaza, Lebanon and elsewhere are immune not just from prosecution and juridical investigation, but also from the court of public opinion. The Glasgow Media Research Group has spent decades publishing much research work and two books, *Bad News From Israel*, and *More Bad News From Israel*, on how news reporting in the west is skewed to suit the Israeli perspective. Much work has been published about the workings of the Israeli Lobby, especially but not exclusively in Washington.

What Do Israelis Believe?

So far, we have concentrated on the view from abroad. But what do Israelis themselves believe are the most trusted institutions of their society? Here, pollsters have an easy task. Every poll on this topic came up with the same results during the last couple of decades. The 2019 poll of the *Israel Democracy Institute* (IDI) demonstrates this most clearly:

Which State Institutions do Israelis Trust?



It is also interesting to note the difference between the percentage of Jews and Arabs polled who have trust in the IDF. The same report quotes the results of the public trust in the statement: "The IDF is the People's Army" - 76% of Jewish respondents agreed with this sentiment in 2019. The missing 24% group is mainly made up of Ultra-Orthodox Jews who refuse to serve due to religious reasons. The IDI saw no reason to ask Arabs the same question - a fascinating decision for an institution trumpeting what it defines as 'Israeli democracy'.

It is clear that beyond the trust invested in the IDF by Israeli Jews, this public is even more supportive of the murderous attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, killing mainly civilian victims. In 2014, during the most brutal attacks on Gaza, 95% of Jewish Israelis supported the atrocities, according to a detailed report by Zack Beauchamp in *Vox*, July 31, 2014. Similar figures were attained during the 2006 Lebanon War, the

2008/9 and 2012 attacks on Gaza. What explains such incredible and unique support for brutal force used for committing war crimes and other illegal actions both in Palestine and elsewhere?

To answer this question I go back to the events before 1948, ones which formed the Israeli state that we know today.

In 1920, two crucial institutions were created by the Zionist movement - the *Histadruth* and the *Hagana*, the clandestine Zionist army that served as the main foundation of the IDF before 1948. The creation of this army came out of necessity, as any group of colonial settlers must expect forceful opposition by the indigenous population they intend to displace and expel. In a late colonial undertaking such as the Zionist project strong Arab opposition was to be expected, and was present early on, becoming entrenched as dispossession persisted and intensified. Hence, the setting up of an army to support the project was a foregone conclusion. Without the *Hagana*, and later, the IDF, the Zionist project could not have been realized.

Both the *Histradruth* and *Hagana* were large popular bodies with mass memberships. Ben-Gurion, leader of political Zionism in Palestine and later to become Israel's first prime minister, realized that while he created an army and most of the other state institutions even before 1948, and the state itself in May 1948 - there was still no Hebrew Zionist *nation*. Of this lacuna he admits, as late as 1954, "We have a state, but there is no nation." (See my book *An Army Like No Other*, p.73).

This is hardly surprising as most nations take long to be imagined and created, to be forged and made cohesive out of heterogeneous populations. The great diversity of the Jewish community in Palestine did not form a nation, and thus, a nation had to be hammered out of dissimilar communities, with their

markedly dissimilar histories, languages, traditions and inclinations. This gigantic task of social engineering had to be achieved in record time, in very difficult circumstances. To carry out this task, a popular institution was required, one with a wide catchment of the Jewish population in Palestine. Ben-Gurion built the IDF to fulfill this function during the latter part of 1948, and it included almost every single able-bodied mature Jewish male, as well as many women - only the very young and the very old were excluded. As the biggest club in the country, the IDF was the ideal organization to create and form the nation. The members of this future nation spent most of 1948 in it, fighting the Palestinians and rump Arab armies which came to their assistance, demonstrating the shortcomings of the regimes which dispatched them to Palestine. The results of the armed conflict were pre-determined even before the war started.

The badly trained and weakly motivated invading armies were in many instances also badly equipped and poorly coordinated. The potentates who dispatched them had poor intelligence about the IDF and inclined towards armed conflict less by the need to save the Palestinians than by the wish to cut a daring figure on the Arab political stage. The Palestinians themselves did not have anything like a modern armed force - what there was of it was decimated by the British authorities during the Arab Rebellion of 1936-39, through the decisive British military advantage and brutal use of force. This ragbag of local militias and poorly trained Arab armies was faced by a united, modern well-trained force - many of the IDF soldiers gained battle experience serving in the British army during WW2; the IDF was stronger and larger than the combined Arab forces facing it. Despite the resistance both by Egyptian units and the Jordanian Arab Legion, who fought well and bravely, they failed to stop the IDF which, by the end of 1948, had taken over most of Palestine with substantial parts of North Sinai to boot. This rather striking success of the young IDF would be crucial in shaping both the army it would later become, as well as the nation this army has shaped and formed.

One of the important tools of creating and forging

the nation was the Hebrew language - one which many of the recruits, having just arrived from the Displaced Persons Camps in Europe, did not speak beyond their prayer-book acquaintance. Teaching Hebrew became one of the tasks of the IDF continuing well into the 1960s, with female recruits teaching newcomers from the Arab world - none of whom could converse in Hebrew - the language of the new nation they were made to join. Ben-Gurion was extremely hostile to the two diasporic languages - Yiddish of European Jewry and Arabic of the Jews of Western Asia and North Africa. Measures were introduced, turning the two languages into 'exiled tongues,' and all state services were offered only in Hebrew to the incoming migrant Jews, who would soon double and then triple the original Jewish population of Israel. The young nation had to run before it learnt to walk, and this unmitigated social engineering brings to mind similar efforts in Europe during the 1930s, both by fascism and Nazism, as well as by communist Russia. The New Jew - the Israeli soldier - was hammered out of the despised Ghetto Jew, practically exterminated by the Nazi Holocaust, leaving behind the few young Jews who somehow survived the death camps, ending up in Israel. Both incoming communities - Arab Jews and Holocaust survivors - were made to understand that their past life was shameful, the silencing of their languages a potent symbol of the rejection of their past that was required and expected from them.

A crucial characteristic of the IDF, in comparison to other armies one may think of, is its total involvement in all parts of Israeli 'civil' society. In a sense, there is no real civil society in Israel. Whether one examines finance, industry, academia, health, research, media, culture, art and obviously - politics - one finds the systemic participation of the IDF, including the role it had in shaping modern Hebrew itself, especially Hebrew slang. From controlling media channels and press outlets, publishing, theatrical and dance troupes, academic institutions and research funding, to education at all levels - the IDF has played a crucial role in all registers of Israeli social life. It is impossible to think of another, contemporary army which comes close.

An *Army Like No Other* attempts to address this *Hydra*, to describe analytically its complex and developing history that shaped this unique settler-colonial society, one oddly and uncharacteristically emerging so late in colonial history, with earlier colonies in terminal decline.

The book introduces the peculiarities of the Israeli social, political, racial, intellectual, cultural, and economic project of military settler-colonialism; the IDF serves as the scaffolding supporting the modern Jewish Sparta, justifying and preserving its exclusivist Jewish apartheid. It is the only institution in which almost every Israeli Jew partakes and supports, with most deeply divided on most other social and political institutions and issues.

The IDF is Israel at it clearest, pure and simple.

The Material Realities of Military Conflict

The activities and practices of the IDF are not the results of an abstract, ideological structure - they are well-integrated into financial, industrial, academic and labor market realities of the Israeli state. Indeed, one may say they are the realities of the state, forming its material conditions of successful operation, its economic base.

What one *does* - Marx tells us - determines and shapes what one *is*, how one conceptualizes; material practice determines how we conceive options for action, how we perceive reality. By specializing in conflict, military oppression, denial of human rights, development of armaments, tactics and strategy of militarized control, methods of legal oppression, and the trading and exportation of such knowhow, Israel

has become what it now is. The Israeli perceives the world through a gunsight. Israel is an army which has built itself a state, forming the nation in its image to serve its colonial aims.

The clearest evidence of this is the Israeli Military-Industrial-Complex. The IDF and companies connected with it form the largest industrial sector in Israel, responsible for the largest portion of income from exports, between \$12 and 18 billion annually. Such figures should be understood as *indicative only* as much of the Israeli arms trade is not in the public domain, invisible even to research organizations such as SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), that publish annual and periodic reports about international arms trade. Selling to more than 135 countries, Israel is one of the main arms dealers on the planet, always amongst the top ten.

Israel has turned armed conflict into a thriving industry. It made adversity into commercial success, building on the marketing phrase 'tested in action': in reality, tested on Arab and Muslim people, and especially, on Palestinian civilians. Israel has turned Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and some other countries into the largest testing grounds of modern armaments. The business model includes thousands of hi-tech companies set up by IDF ex-officers, who together with the nationalized armament and security companies are the largest sectoral employer in Israel.

All Israeli academic institutions enjoy substantial research funding disbursed by the IDF, the Defense Ministry, and the various security organizations. Such universities and colleges also run training pro-

**Israel is an Army
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grams for the IDF and related bodies. For example, The Hebrew University in Jerusalem includes a large army camp at the heart of its campus on Mount Scopus, with hundreds of soldiers studying and living there behind barbed wire. It is difficult to think of similar arrangements elsewhere in the world. The income from such activities ties the universities financially, politically and ideologically to the Israeli security apparatus.

As currently set up, the Israeli militarized financial system and industrial base are integral parts of a war economy. This destructive, violence-oriented economy is the mainstay of Israel's prosperity. Since its inception, Israel has received more foreign support than any other country, mainly from the US and Germany. This has financed its wars, occupations, widespread destruction in countries of the region, and the lawlessness and continuous massacres of tens of thousands. It proved to be good business for Israel, as the hefty occupation costs are normally covered by the US and the EU. Unless this situation changes, there is no reason for Israel to change its tactics and strategy. An example is the Israeli-developed anti-missile system Iron Dome, that was financed by a special subvention from Washington. In the summer of 2020 it became known that the Israeli developer, Raphael Advanced Defense Systems, had entered into a joint venture agreement to establish an Iron Dome production facility in the US. In January 2021, we learned that the United States is expected to soon begin deploying the Israeli-manufactured Iron Dome missile defense system in its bases in the gulf states. Thus, the US is first investing huge sums, financing Israeli development of weapon systems, then paying Israel for the right to use the resulting product, and requesting permission to use it. Such arrangements are exclusive to Israel; the financial risks are born by Washington, and Israel enjoys the military, financial, economic and political windfall.

It is important to realize that such massive financial support is not offered as charity, but as payment for services rendered, or a guarantee towards future services. Some have called Israel a 'US Aircraft-Carrier anchored in the Eastern Mediterranean', which seems an apt description of its function in the region.

Thus, it would be churlish to claim, as some have done, that Israel is a mere client state rendering services for a fee. While the size difference implies a clear power-relationship, it is still true that some dogs may indeed be wagged by their tails - if not permanently, at least periodically. The Presidency of Donald Trump and even the last two years of President Obama's tenure clearly demonstrate that Israel is far from a servile and insignificant partner, but one with its own agenda, which it succeeds in forcing upon larger and more powerful political entities such as the US and EU. The spectacle of Netanyahu berating Obama before the joint members of the House and Senate, in an attempt to spike the Iran Nuclear agreement, was certainly an object lesson; a state supported since its inception by incredibly generous US funding takes a position against the American President and US interests, trying to sway US elected representatives to support this brazen move. Certainly, we have not seen this before or after, and no other head of state is ever likely to ever try this trick, or be allowed to.

The recent normalization with the Arab world, the result of a Trump-Netanyahu initiative, is greatly adding to the potential clientele of the Israeli Military-Industrial-Complex. The gulf states are some of the richest anywhere, and very keen to purchase Israeli armaments and security technologies and training. We are likely to see the results over the next few years, as such arms deals are signed and delivered. Indeed, even countries which have refused for decades to recognize Israel, have been quietly buying Israeli arms. Azerbaijan, for example, between 2006 and 2019, bought arms for around \$825 million from Israel, a fact that came to light as the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia revealed this long-term relationship. Many other Muslem countries buying arms from Israel have kept it a secret, for obvious reasons, as did Israel as part of the agreement. This is one of the reasons that the official figures of Israeli arms sales are accounting for about half of the real figures. Another reason is that Israel is reselling arms to third-world countries which it had purchased from the US or another western country, under agreement not to resell them. A number of such deals have been discovered, but no action has ever been taken against Israel. The reason is simple, the

US frequently uses Israel to sell American technology to regimes with which it is not allowed to deal directly. One such famous secret deal was the Iran Contra Affair, when Israel sold US cruise missiles to Iran as part of a larger deal. Azerbaijan's war against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh was determined greatly by the autonomous Israeli drones *Harpy 2*, which destroyed numerous Armenian positions. This success immediately led India to order a large number of the drones.

Israeli arms deals are not limited to conventional weapons. In the 1970s Israel, Apartheid South Africa and Iran under the Shah shared nuclear technology. South Africa provided Israel with uranium for enrichment for use in nuclear installations, and Israel had assisted South Africa and Iran in developing nuclear devices. A huge flash recorded by satellites off the South African coast in 1979, was identified as a nuclear device exploded allegedly by Israel. Recently, India (under PM Modi) has become Israel's largest arms buyer, and Israel has also become India's largest supplier. Such relationships are much more than purely commercial: India, a rising power, has also become one of Israel's most important supporters and backers. Thus, Israel has used arms sales as a political leverage ever since the early 1960s, which may explain why very few states are prepared to criticize Israel or vote against it at the UN General Assembly or the Security Council. Such behavior adds to Israel's virtual impunity from accusations of war crimes, making it immune to international law, as very few countries are prepared to face Israel squarely, knowing that it will be, more often than not, automatically protected as the protégé of the US. Thus, Israel's Military-Industrial-Complex is not just the financial support system of Israel but serves also as a political and diplomatic shield.

Is The IDF All That It's Cracked Up To Be?

Of course, the many arms deals and the IDF vast training package marketed globally are predicated on the claimed supremacy of the IDF. Examining a long view of its history, this presumed supremacy becomes very questionable indeed. My book surveys the various major wars the IDF was involved in: 1948, 1956 against Egypt, 1967 against Egypt, Syria Iraq and Jordan, 1973 against Egypt and Syria, 1982 mainly against the PLO and Syrian forces in Lebanon, the First Intifada, 1987-1993, and 2006 against Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the conclusion is that the IDF's myths seem to be unjustified.

If Israel 'won' the first three listed wars, it was in very favorable conditions that it did so, and the chapters dealing with each of the conflicts carefully examine such imbalances. However, since 1973, the IDF cannot be described as winning any of the conflicts it has waged, either militarily or politically. The 1973 war, which the IDF did not initiate and was badly surprised by, was not only an operational failure, but a deep failure of intelligence, in both senses of the term. This led to the Israeli public questioning its ability to trust its political and military leadership. In some respects, this has remained the case ever since.

The first Lebanon war only deepened the crisis of trust with the crude lies which enabled Sharon to start a war he was unable to bring to a close. This was a war not just against the PLO in Lebanon, but also against the Syrian units there, and mostly against millions of civilians trapped in their capital city. The death toll of more than 20,000 civilians, mainly in Beirut, forms one of Israel's worst war crimes, and involved it in holding on to South Lebanon for 18 years. Not one of its political leaders saw his way to ending the occupation, until Prime Minister Barak was forced into a hasty retreat in 2000, as tens of thousands of unarmed Lebanese virtually pushed the IDF out of its latifundia in Lebanon. Arguably, these thousands of Lebanese protesters have done a great favor to the IDF, enmeshed as it was in an illegal and irrational occupation which had no real political or security function, and involved constant war crimes, torture and great cost in human, materiel and financial terms.

But, despite this painful lesson in humility which the IDF and the political leadership seem to indicate they learned after 1973, when the combined Arab armies inflicted a terrible cost on the IDF, no real lessons were ingested. The reasons for this failure are complex and show up clearly during the 2006 war in Lebanon, as well in the numerous attacks on Gaza in 2008/9, 2012, and 2014.

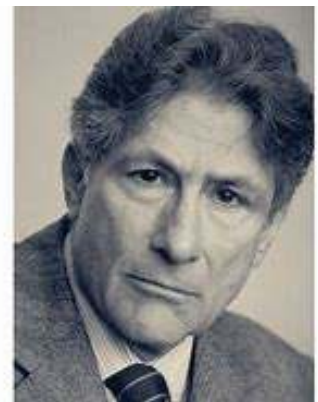
The first element of change in 1973, was the fact that this war, difficult as it was for the IDF, marked a great change; it was its last in more than a generation waged against state armies. All conflicts since then were against civilian populations, be it in Lebanon, Gaza or the West Bank. The signing of peace agreements with Egypt and later with Jordan, meant the end of state conflict for the foreseeable future; Syria, which did not sign such an agreement, having been out-maneuvered in 1979 by Begin and Sadat, found itself isolated, unable to initiate military conflict with Israel, or protect itself from Israeli attacks. Thus, Israel achieved the utter removal of the surrounding states from the military conflict. Such states have abandoned the cause of the Palestinians, and hence gained respite from Israeli military threats and periodic attacks.

Israel found itself able to concentrate on its main mission - removing as many Palestinians from their land and homes and making life impossible for those who stayed. The main task of the IDF, as analyzed by Neve Gordon in his *Israel's Occupation* (2008) became the legal, financial, regulatory and military control of the Palestinian territories overrun in 1967. This was unlike fighting state powers - the IDF had to mutate into a well-honed policing force, implementing the illegal occupation on a daily and continuous basis. No longer was the IDF fighting trained and armed soldiers in large theaters such as Sinai or the Golan Heights - it was involved in policing civilians in large conurbations and a multitude of villages and towns, destroying homes, uprooting millions of trees, and finally, building the most formidable wall of modern times, separating Palestinians from their land, and protecting the massive settler-colonial

population with nearly 20% of Israel's Jews living illegally in the occupied territory. Now there was no one to deter Israel from this dispossession - the Arab polities have removed themselves, a process cresting in the 2020 so-called *Abraham Accords*, leading to 'normalization' with most Arab countries, and leaving the Palestinians in inglorious isolation, with no clear course of action.

This process was initiated and enabled by the Oslo Accords in 1993, during which the PLO signed away its rights and obligations to free Palestine from occupation, as well as its struggle to achieve some form of political independence and self-determination.

The process of transformation starts even earlier when, in 1988, the PLO, having misread the First Intifada, abandoned its historical solution to the conflict, giving up on the *one democratic, secular state* solution, which depended on winding up the military conflict through the ending of Israeli Apartheid, and settling on total equality for all between the river and the sea, Israelis and Palestinians. It also involved the return of the refugees, if not to their actual homes, at least to their country. Such a return as part of a just solution was supported historically by the UN Resolution 194 of December 1948, which was an effort to correct the unjust Resolution 181 of November 1947 that had initiated the 1948 war and the Nakba by dividing Palestine unjustly, bowing down to Zionist and western pressure. By abandoning the *One-State* solution the PLO abandoned any hope of real justice in Palestine. Few understood that clearly at the time, the notable exception being Edward Said, whose insightful *The End of the Peace Process* (2000)



Edward Said

had fathomed the depth of the PLO's betrayal of the Palestinian people.

Despite's Said's clear analysis many have wishfully believed that the PLO did achieve a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza, though this was never in the cards. What was achieved instead was the end of the PLO as an organ of genuine resistance and potential liberation, and its transformation into a security setup responsible for guaranteeing the Israeli occupation and settlement of Palestine. In so doing, it has wrestled the political initiative from the Palestinians who, in December 1987, rose up in the First Intifada against the iniquities of the Israeli occupation, causing Israel a great human, military, financial and political cost. Having failed to squash the Intifada despite the great brutality employed by the IDF, Israel badly needed a way out. Only the Oslo Accords brought the Intifada to an end, as the Palestinian population placed its hopes on the PA administration, only to be betrayed and bitterly disappointed.

So, while Oslo has frustrated any hopes Palestinians may have harbored for democracy, self-determination and just peace, it has delivered to the Israeli mini-empire a cheaper, manageable occupation. When Ehud Barak, who had been Chief of General Staff of the IDF during the Intifada, switched to politics and was elected prime minister in 1999, he carried forward the plan he initiated as leader of the IDF. The plan for a "small, smart army" was made possible after the removal of the Arab states from the conflict. Now, based on the achievements of the Oslo Accords, the PLO itself was removed as an opponent, instead becoming the security contractor in the Occupied Territories. No longer, claimed Barak, did the IDF need huge mobile forces, it should modernize using technologies of the coming millennium, such as drones, web scanning, high flying and satellite

surveillance, and other intelligence-gathering means to limit the ability of enemies to surprise the IDF.

Part of this modernization was played by a bizarre development: the adoption of French post-structuralist theorists - mainly Deleuze, Guattari and Debord's work on understanding modern spaces. This led to the thinking, strategies and tactics developed by a group of officers led by Aviv Kokhavi, commander of the murderous attack on Jenin in 2002 and recently appointed IDF Chief of the General Staff, and Brigadier General Shimon Naveh, the 'intellectual father' of this disturbing use of theoretical work in the service of brutal ethnic cleansing.

These new tactics used in order to subjugate Jenin



The Israeli armored Cat D9 leveled the Jenin refugee camp in 2002. Its driver, nicknamed "Bear the Kurd," drove his "Teddy Bear" 72 straight hours demolishing house after house, whether inhabited or not.

Miko Peled, mintpressnews.com

and other centers of resistance during 2002 were based on their readings of theories of covert and liminal spaces, and held the key, they believed, for a small and smart army subjugating urban resistance forces - difficult to defeat by conventional army tac-

tics. In Jenin such tactics, employed together with the brutal use of huge D9 Caterpillar bulldozers which flattened the camp causing hundreds of deaths, have helped the IDF to suppress the Second Intifada. It seemed that the time of the Barak's model army has become a reality.

Interestingly, two factors have combined to arrest this scaling-down of the IDF. Barak's premiership only lasted until 2001, when Arik Sharon easily defeated Barak, becoming Israel's eleventh premier and one of its most popular, despite the many war crimes he was involved in, not least the 1982 war against the PLO in Lebanon. Indeed, with the gradual but decisive shift to the extreme right in Israel's Jewish society, it seems that it was exactly such infamous actions which made him so popular. Sharon never supported the move towards a smaller, professional and technological army, perceiving the IDF through Ben-Gurion's eyes: a national machinery for shaping and holding the nation together, the core of Israel's Zionist existence. In that, he was close also to an earlier general-cum-politician, Moshe Dayan, who in the 1950s projected the future of Israel as a nation of eternal, Spartan warriors, never to let go of their weapons. For both of these warriors, fighting was the essence of being Israeli, and the very idea of peace was upsetting -- the one trick never seriously tried by Israel.

With the construction of the Military-Industrial-Complex as Israel's financial mainstay and the IDF as the most expensive institution in Israel, Sharon never considered a small army as an option. It so happened that a year after his departure to a hospital ward in vegetative state after a stroke, his replacement in the role, Ehud Olmert, took the decision to improve his ratings by a frontal attack on Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the large formations so beloved of Israeli generals came into their own. This seemed to offer an object lesson for the IDF, though it missed it altogether.

The chief of staff at the time, General Dan Halutz, was also a follower of the notions developed by Naveh, Barak and Kokhavi, and believed that he could win the 2006 attack without physically endangering huge

forces. As a former air-force chief, his strategy was to bomb Hezbollah out of existence, while also destroying the infrastructure of South Lebanon and Beirut. As Hezbollah was a small force, this was thought to offer a quick and efficient solution, without putting Israeli soldiers in harm's way, yet eliminating Hezbollah.

Arguably, never before had an Israeli chief of staff experienced such a total upset of all his strategies. The agility and sophistication of Hezbollah, and its complex preparation for exactly such an operation meant that the attack was a deep failure. The infrastructure of Lebanon was indeed destroyed, like so many times before, with many civilians killed in urban areas, and more than a million refugees. But Hezbollah continued to fight with incredible skill and flexibility, dispatching medium and long-range missiles into Israel, disabling normal life, industry and education, with hundreds of thousands fleeing their homes, many dead and injured, and large damage across the north of Israel.

When, after a month of bombardments and shelling, the IDF was nowhere near winning its objectives, the decision was taken to abandon reliance on the air-force, missiles and drones, and to inject large formations into Lebanon to complete the mission.

By entering with over 100,000 soldiers and enormous armored formations, Israeli casualties quickly mounted, with Hezbollah fighting with skill against the large forces entangled in Lebanon's narrow mountain roads, which turned into death traps for the Israeli Merkava tanks - advertised as the 'most advanced in the world', and 'tested in action'. A fast US intervention was solicited to get Israel out of an impossible spot of its own making, in order to stop the rout, and the attacks by Hezbollah missiles onto population centers.

So What Are We To Conclude?

The assaults against Gaza between 2008 and 2014, by huge army formations, causing the death of thousands of civilians and widespread demolition of infrastructure and housing, proved again that the IDF's model of engagement is based on destruction and mass murder of civilians, unable to win against small well-trained and highly-motivated resistance forces such as Hamas or Hezbollah. The IDF, reinforcing the errors of the US in Vietnam, is proficient at mass destruction, but unable to win its own declared objectives, which are more political than military.

While the IDF cannot, and indeed, did not offer a solution to the existential difficulties of the settler-colonial project of Zionism, it has unfortunately boosted the support of Israelis not just for the IDF, but for military solutions to political problems. This is the main danger the IDF currently stands for.

A similar conclusion faces anyone who examines the operations of the IDF as a militarized policing force for the subjugation of Palestine. Instead of merely managing the Palestinians, the IDF is employed as an ideological army of occupation, protecting and enlarging the settlement project, directed at making life insufferable for most Palestinians; in other words, the IDF is employed as an ethnic-cleansing apparatus, possibly leading to wide-ranging forced expulsion of the type used in 1948, when political and other conditions may be judged as favorable.

To bring the region to the brink of a breakdown, various modes combine to keep the West Bank and Gaza at a boiling point: frequent and brutal illegal house demolitions, pre-dawn attacks on towns and villages, numerous arrests and administrative detention without due process, destruction of schools, clinics and other public facilities, the uprooting and burning of millions of trees to scupper Palestinian agriculture, the use of the Apartheid Wall to cut off

communities from each other and from their fields and arbors, and recently, even the destruction of specially-constructed COVID-19 testing and treatment facilities, while denying the vaccine to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, in contravention of the Geneva Conventions and international Law.

Israel works together with the repressive and undemocratic social forces in the Arab world, which have successfully defeated the so-called Arab Spring after 2011; it uses investment, tourism and arms sales as prizes for those regimes which collaborate with it, not to mention mediation on their behalf with the Trump regime in Washington. Israel is thus doing all that is humanly possible to dislodge the Palestinians from their land. This aim has never changed since the early days of Zionism in Palestine, and the IDF is crucial for its successful completion of the expulsion project. That it is now able to concentrate on this task, no longer bothered by Arab armies' intervention on behalf of Palestine, is certainly an important boost for the settler-colonial effort. This is not fully realized by many western progressive groups, some who welcome the 'normalization' process as 'peace', rather than as part of the regressive coalition of anti-democratic forces in the region, directed at tighter control over repressed and oppressed populations.

A note of caution is in place here, nonetheless. We should not overlook the IDF's destructive potential, part of which is, of course, the nuclear arsenal rumored to be over 200 devices with their airborne, missile and nuclear submarine delivery systems. While such devices may be impossible to use in Palestine, for obvious reasons, they are now certainly taken into account by Israel's military leaders as they plan an attack on Iran while Biden is considering the revival - total or partial - of the Obama-negotiated Iran Nuclear deal of July 2015.

Indeed, the same General Kokhavi who excelled in destroying the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, is now commander of the IDF. His intentions were clarified as he spoke days after Biden's inauguration. He found it acceptable and necessary to warn Israel's

main political, financial and military supporter that he is ready to act if Biden fails the test: "Israel's military chief Tuesday warned the Biden administration against rejoining the 2015 Iran nuclear deal even if it toughens its terms, adding he's ordered his forces to step up preparations for possible offensive action against Iran during the coming year." (*The Independent*, 26 January, 2021) Biden will be badly-advised to ignore such threats from an Israeli administration conditioned by the last President to expect just about anything it demanded.

**The danger is not
the non-existent, unlikely
Iranian bomb,
but the very real nuclear
power called Israel**

Both Israel and the US clearly realize and appreciate the fact that Iran is currently unable and unwilling to go all the way and produce nuclear weapons. It has used this ruse to get the strategic agreement with the US, so as to improve its economic performance and bring about the end of sanctions.

The danger is not the non-existent, unlikely Iranian bomb, but the very real nuclear power called Israel, whose devices stay beyond international control and monitoring. This special allowance for Israel's breaking all rules in the book, part of its wide-ranging impunity, is what is at stake. Instead of forcing Israel into the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the only step which makes political and security sense, the US continues to provide it with political,

military and financial protection against any criticism or international action. We know that the Biden administration is unlikely to reverse this policy of collusion with Israel's disregard to international law, but the recent challenge by Israel to Washington is one which may force a showdown between the two allies-in-crime against Palestine.

It may well be that Israel's constant requirement for a substantial enemy as a national-unification stratagem, one which has driven its policies for over seven decades, has now compelled it into a tight corner in its relationship with the new president in Washington, and a confrontation which Biden cannot lose without also losing credibility. Knowing the tenacity with which Israel defends its absolute right for attack anywhere, we should all be mindful of the terrible dangers ahead. The fragility of the new administration in Washington may offer Netanyahu a temptation he is unable to resist. ■

AMEU Seeks New Executive Director

- This is a full-time position with an anticipated start date of mid-2021. The Executive Director reports to the AMEU Board of Directors and serves as a voting member of the Board.
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