

**14.03.2018 - Famous American Zionist turns his back on Israel**

## **The implications of Trump's Jerusalem ploy (\*)**

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**Henry Siegman, a Holocaust survivor and today in his late eighties, was president of the Project US-Middle East and a former member of the Foreign Affairs Council. He once was head of the American Jewish Congress and the Council of Synagogues of America.**

**As a high ranking representative he over the years came into conflict with the US and the Jewish establishment for counselling the American Jews to give up their attachment to Zionism and prepare for a future, in which Israel will be isolated as a pariah state, facing a significant exodus of Israeli Jews. For him, the two-state-solution is dead and buried. His lucidity, his critical views and his courage, to renounce the political faiths of his life and engage in a political dispute are impressing. We wonder whether his words have a chance to be published by more Media in order to contribute to the freedom of expression and debate, defying chancelor Merkels "reason of state" (i.e. to collaborate with Israel whatever it may cost notwithstanding its outright crimes against international law and human rights). Central thoughts and perspectives of Henry Siegmans argumentation have been developed and defended courageously since years by critical scientists and outstanding activists of the Palestinian and Israeli Left, a.o. by Ali Abunimah, Omar Barghouti, Jeff Halper, Ilan Pappé and Michael Warschawski.**

**(\*) First published by [mondoweiss.net](http://mondoweiss.net)**

The Implications of President Trump's Jerusalem Ploy

Henry Siegman

January 23, 2018

The question whether "liberal Zionism" can survive the far right trends that now dominate Israel's political life was raised forcefully in the New York Times by its columnist Michelle Goldberg. It was prompted by Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, which Goldberg described correctly as "another nail in the coffin of 'liberal Zionism'."

While the reactions to Trump's initiative have not yet fully played out, much is already evident. To begin with, they have exposed the stunning level of ignorance and misinformation that exists on this subject. Trump tried to soften the destructive impact of his declaration by insisting it would not affect any of the final-status issues that are to be the subjects of the peace talks he is trying to restart. He is obviously unaware that Jerusalem is exactly that—a final-status issue. Indeed, it is the most sensitive of the final-status issues. Unlike the others, it led Mahmoud Abbas, the most moderate of Palestinian leaders, to break off relations with the Trump administration.

Trump's statement and much of the favorable commentary it elicited emphasized the history of Jerusalem and the attachment of the Jewish people to the city from Biblical times. Trump and his supporters also argued it is high time to recognize the "reality" that Jerusalem serves as Israel's capital, implying that no matter how egregiously the reality created by Israel violates acceptable norms and international law, it creates its own legitimacy. Trump also stressed that every country has the right to determine the location of its own capital.

Opponents of Trump's declaration cited the attachment of over a billion Muslims to Jerusalem, and questioned why that attachment weighs so much less than the Jewish one, especially since Muslims actually lived in Jerusalem and worshipped at the Noble Sanctuary for over a millennium. Most Jews did not make their lives in Jerusalem during these past two millennia, even in times when they were able to do so. Instead they ascribed the yearned-for return to Jerusalem to eschatological time.

In fact, the Jewish attachment to Jerusalem related not to its status as a capital city but to the location of the Batei Hamikdash, the two ancient Temples; Jerusalem was not known as Yerushalayim Habira (Jerusalem the Capital). When the second Temple was destroyed and the sages deferred its rebuilding and the resumption of its rituals to messianic times, there was no longer a compelling reason to live in Jerusalem. The small

Orthodox community that continued to exist in Jerusalem considers Zionism a heresy and to this day does not recognize the religious or political legitimacy of the State of Israel.

The founders of the Zionist movement had little regard for the Messiah, and even less for Jerusalem. The notion of a rebuilt Temple in which the cult of animal sacrifices of the ancient Israelites would be renewed, the priesthood reestablished and the royal House of David restored (goals prayed for in Orthodox synagogues all over the world and today fanatically championed by the religious nationalist Temple Faithful followers who are funded by Israel's government) was seen by them as an embarrassing anachronism. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, granted the small ultra-Orthodox community in Israel certain privileges, like exemption from the military, because he was convinced that religious Jewry would not survive the new secular Zionist state.

But the exact reverse happened. Not only are the ultra-Orthodox groups thriving, and it is difficult for any coalition government to be formed without them, but the most reactionary political, cultural and religious forces have come to dominate the country's life. While the overwhelming majority of the world's Orthodox Jewry considered Zionism a heresy until World War II, after the Six Day War mainline Orthodox Jewry ascribed messianic meaning to the State of Israel, much as Evangelical Christianity does.

Ironically, the deepest hostility to Zionism is to be found today not in Arab countries, some of which now see Israel as an ally in their conflict with Iran, or even among certain anti-Semitic groups that now see Israel's Zionism and its privileging of its Jewish citizens as a model for their white and Christian supremacism, but among some of the ultra-Orthodox groups in Israel and in the United States that recognize neither the religious nor the political legitimacy of the State of Israel, and therefore do not see Jerusalem as a capital of anything. They are still awaiting the Messiah.

Critics of Trump's declaration warned that it will put an end to what prospect there may still have been for a resumption of the peace process. Apparently word that the peace process is dead and buried never reached them. The fiction of its existence served no purpose other than to provide Netanyahu cover for his lie that the reason Israel is not already an apartheid state is that he is waiting for the resumption of the peace process with a more accommodating Palestinian leadership.

The leaders of Western democracies have yet to end their shameful collaboration with this Israeli scam. Not that they ever believed it, but they needed to pretend that they do,

for otherwise they would have had to explain why they urged the security council to impose sanctions on Russia for its land grab in the Ukraine but refused to impose sanctions on Israel for its land grabs in the West Bank and Jerusalem. This pretense was also what led President Obama to say in one of his speeches to the UN Annual Meeting of the General Assembly something that is outrageously untrue?that the UN is not the place to which Palestinians can bring their quest for self-determination and statehood because that can only be resolved in direct negotiations with Netanyahu. No one knew better than Obama that the UN was established exactly for that reason?to help populations under former colonial control achieve self-determination. And he surely also knew that the very last person Palestinians could receive a fair hearing from is Netanyahu.

It is true, as Trump's defenders claim, that Israel has every right to determine the location of its capital without any outsider's intervention?provided that location is within its own internationally recognized borders. No country has a right to grab territory outside its own borders, whether for its capital or a parking lot. So the issue is not the status of Jerusalem as a capital, but whether Jerusalem is within Israel's borders. It is not. That is so because both the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice (in its Wall Decision of 2004) ruled unanimously that territory beyond the pre-1967 Armistice line?which is where East Jerusalem is located?does not belong to Israel, and that changes in the pre-1967 Armistice line can only be made by agreement between the two contending parties.

There is an additional problem. While West Jerusalem is within Israel's pre-1967 Armistice line, the UN's Partition Plan of 1947 (which was cited by Israel's Declaration of Independence as the source of Israel's legitimacy) explicitly excludes Jerusalem from the territory assigned to these two states, declaring it to be a *corpus separatum*, a separate entity to be placed under international jurisdiction.

This provision was never implemented, but it served to deny both Israelis and Palestinians the right to claim sovereignty over the city. However, in the bilateral agreement known as the Roadmap for an Israel Palestine Peace Agreement of 2003, Israel and the Palestinians committed themselves to reach agreement on the future status of Jerusalem in the context of their negotiations for a two-state peace accord. The Road Map, endorsed by the Security Council and signed onto by the United States and the European Union, forbids unilateral changes in the pre-1967 line. In its Resolution 2334 of 2016, the Security Council condemned Israel's "flagrant violations" of this agreement.

The real issue raised by Trump's declaration?the status of Israel's borders, and not the location of Israel's capital?is determined by international law, not by Trump's whims nor by Israel's unilateral actions. Clearly, East Jerusalem is on the Palestinian side of the pre-1967 Armistice line, and therefore not within Israel's internationally recognized borders. What Trump was therefore saying to the world is that, like Netanyahu, he gives not a fig for international law.

It is that disdain, and not anything else, that has utterly destroyed any possible basis for renewed peace talks. It would be madness for Abbas to resume negotiations that both Israel and the self-appointed mediator have publicly declared allow Israel to grab Palestinian territory. For what do the powerless Palestinians have going for them in these negotiations other than international law?

Israel's contempt for international law is matched by its indifference to the deeply democratic ethos of its own founders. This was inevitable, perhaps, given the inherent contradiction between that democratic ethos and Israel's dispossession of Palestinians even from that part of Palestine recognized by the UN Partition Plan as their legitimate patrimony. Yes, I know, Palestinians and Arab countries went to war to prevent the implementation of the Partition Plan. They did so not because Palestinians uniquely dislike partition plans, but because, like most people, including Jews, they dislike homelessness and disenfranchisement. Arguably, the expulsion of Palestinians from the areas assigned to the Jewish state would have happened even without the war started by Arab countries, for otherwise it would only have been a question of a short time before Israel's Jewish population would have found itself a minority in its new state.

For all of all its embarrassingly self-serving pretensions to be "a light to the nations," Israel has been moving ever closer to the authoritarianism of certain central European countries whose leaders have alt-right and anti-Semitic proclivities. Tom Segev, the prominent Israeli historian, described the situation in his country to Roger Cohen, the New York Times columnist, as follows: "Our government is more and more right wing, racist, anti-Arab. If they were members of a government in Austria, we'd recall our ambassador in protest." It is to these authoritarian leaders that Netanyahu feels a special kinship, as does Trump. Both men went out of their way last year to express that kinship demonstrably by meeting with them while shunning the European leaders who speak up in defense of democracy.

And there is more?sadly, much more. Netanyahu felt no need to disown his son's attack on a liberal Israeli NGO in a tweet in which his son included anti-Semitic and Nazi iconography. (The son is reportedly being groomed to enter Israeli politics.) Nor did Netanyahu utter a word of criticism of Trump's scandalous moral equation of the neo-Nazis, racists and anti-Semites in Charlottesville and those who turned out to condemn their hatred and violence.

I happened to be in Israel during a launch of a new book by an author and historian, Raphael Israeli, a professor emeritus at the Hebrew University. The event, which drew a large Likud crowd, including government ministers and Knesset members, reminded me?like nothing else ever did in my over sixty years of professional engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict?of how woefully uninformed not only the American public but our government officials and academics are about the realities on the ground in Israel and in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The central thesis of this new book, titled "The Arab Minority in Israel" (published only in Hebrew), is that Israeli Arabs are a fifth column "who suck from the state's teats" and cannot be integrated into Israeli society. Expressing admiration for the Americans' internment of its Japanese citizens during World War II, the author advocates the confinement of Israeli Arabs in concentration camps. The author sees Israel's failure to have taken such measures as a sign of "an enfeebled Israel that has lost its will to exist." For "although the Arabs openly identify with our enemy . . . [n]ot only are they not incarcerated in camps, we allow them to stand on our platforms."

These are not Palestinian residents of the West Bank, but Palestinian citizens of the State of Israel that he is describing. And these are views that are shared not only by the Likud members in attendance at this book launch. As far back as 2006, a Pew Research Center study found that half of Israel's Jewish population believes that Israel's Arab citizens should be expelled from the country. If this is how many Israelis view their own fellow citizens, then imagine how they will treat the millions of Palestinians in the West Bank who they now intend to keep under permanent military occupation.

The theoretical possibility that a two-state accord has not yet been decisively eliminated by the irreversibility of Israel's settlements will certainly be taken care of by Trump's peace envoys, the wrecking crew headed by his son-in-law Jared Kushner and his ambassador to Israel David Friedman. Both are longtime promoters and funders of the settlements, and they will surely manage to firmly close the door to Palestinian statehood

in the three or seven years left in Trump's presidency.

Israel's dominant political culture is today far more reflective of Trumpian and similar mid-European authoritarian values. It is the predictable by-product of a culture shaped by the unrelenting repression and total disenfranchisement of millions of people under Israel's military rule that is now in its fiftieth year. Virtually every young Israeli Jewish citizen spends three impressionable years of his young life looking at Palestinians through his rifle's sights as potential targets to be eliminated. What is amazing is that some of them still emerge from this dehumanizing experience with enough of a conscience to support human-rights organizations like BT'selem, Breaking the Silence and Ir Amim, organizations that Netanyahu and his government are doing their very best to discredit, demonize and destroy.

The above notwithstanding, Trump's ill-conceived Jerusalem initiative may yet have a positive consequence, however unintended. Nothing has been as harmful to the Palestinian struggle to end Israel's occupation and unrelenting theft of territory intended for its state as Abbas' insistence on the preservation of the Palestinian Authority and the myth that it serves as "a state in formation," when it so clearly allowed Israel to solidify its occupation. Trump's move on Jerusalem achieved what years of Israel's settlements failed to do?shatter the illusion of a two-state outcome, and allow the Palestinian national movement to turn into a struggle for rights, which is to say a struggle to end Israel's de facto apartheid regime, a course I have advocated for over a decade, and now increasingly embraced by younger Palestinians. What is particularly significant is that this younger generation is opting for a struggle for equal rights in a single state not because they despair of achieving a state of their own, but because it is their preferred solution. It is the right choice, for their struggle for a state of their own is one Palestinians cannot win, while a struggle to maintain an apartheid regime is one Israel cannot win.

If after what undoubtedly would be a long and bitter anti-apartheid struggle Palestinians prevail, they will be in the clear majority. Having established the principle that the majority can impose on the minority the religious and cultural identity of the State, Israel will not be in a strong position to deny Palestinians that same right. That will lead in time to a significant exodus of Israel's Jews.

If Palestinians do not prevail, then the undeniable apartheid character of the state and the cost of the ongoing struggle will lead to the same result?an exodus of Israel's Jews over time, creating an even greater demographic imbalance between the country's Jewish and

Arab populations. Palestinians will not leave because they will have nowhere to go.

The outcome is therefore likely to be the end of Israel as a Jewish state. If so, it will be an outcome brought about not by BDS movements but by Israelis themselves, not only because of their rejection of the two-state solution, but because of their insistence on defining Israel's national identity and territorial claims in religious terms. A state that fast-tracks citizenship through government-sponsored religious conversion to Judaism, as Israel's government now does, cannot for long hide that it privileges its Jewish citizens?just as the United States could not have claimed to be a democracy if conversion to Christianity were a path to U.S. citizenship. New legislation endorsed by Netanyahu and the ruling Likud that explicitly allows democratic principles to be overridden by Israel's legislature if they clash with certain Jewish religious principles demonstrates that the notion of a Jewish and democratic state may have been an oxymoron from the outset.

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