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# Israel, Settlements and Democracy

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As Israel continues to defy international law, including countless United Nations resolutions, and builds more and more settlement on land stolen from the Palestinians, its reputation as a model democracy is taking a well-deserved beating.

Last year, Israel took a dramatic step in violating whatever semblance of democracy it ever had. On July 11, 2011, the New York Times reported this: "The Israeli Parliament on Monday passed contentious legislation that effectively bans any public call for a boycott against the state of Israel or its West Bank settlements, making such action a punishable offense." While opponents say that this law compromises the freedom of expression, its supporters, ironically, say that it is necessary to fight the 'global delegitimization' of Israel.

Shortly prior to the passage of this law, Israelis successfully brought down the price of cheese, by boycotting that industry. One wonders why the price of cheese is seen as a legitimate purpose for a boycott, but human rights is not.

There are a number of global initiatives to boycott Israel, and apparently they are all legal, except for any such efforts in Israel itself. The obvious question, 'What does Israel have to be afraid of,' is too easily answered to even be asked.

But does the further eroding of democracy, such as it is, in Israel, really matter? Not so, according to the words of wisdom from one Benny Katzover, described as a 'veteran settler,' having joined the first group of occupiers in the northern West Bank nearly forty years ago. Mr. Katzover makes no bones about Israel's purpose. In a recent interview he said: "We didn't come here to establish a democratic state, we came here to return the Jewish people to their land." He continued: "Across the country, these ideas, that democracy needs dramatic change, if not dismantling then at least dramatic change, these ideas are very widespread."

How Israel can be seen as a democracy when it has occupied another nation and oppressed its people for decades, after a policy of radical ethnic cleansing followed by one of gradual ethnic cleansing, is a mystery that only members of the U.S. Congress, who have been bought and paid for by the American Israeli Political Affairs Committee, can answer. When settlers, residing in homes that violate international law, can, with impunity, burn mosques, destroy orchards and burn cars, the concept of democracy is a distant one indeed.

But Mr. Katzover has pulled the veil back from the eyes of those not blinded by AIPAC dollars. A secure, democratic Israel is not now, and never has been, the goal. Returning the Jewish people to land that they have determined is rightfully theirs, regardless of the centuries during which another people has populated that land, is, and always has been, the goal. Depriving Palestinian farmers of their livelihood by destroying their orchards, or establishing such convoluted roadblocks that a 10-minute walk 'as the crow flies' turns into an hours-long ordeal; preventing students from going to school by the same means; forbidding the injured and ill from obtaining medical services, do not promote national security, or demonstrate democratic principles. They are, simply, racist practices of an oppressive, imperial government dead set on the ethnic cleansing of the land they illegally occupy.

And what, one may reasonably ask, does that shining star, the world's foremost beacon of peace and freedom (at least according to its own cheerleaders), have to say about this? What does the illustrious United States of American, the so-called land of the free and the home of the brave, say about the repression of the Palestinian people, and the continual murders of these truly brave people? Well, basically, not much. Without a powerful lobby, really, why should Congress or the President pay much attention? Can the Palestinian people pay for the votes of members of the U.S. Congress? Can they wield sufficient electoral influence to terrify the men and women who walk those hallowed halls?

Do those members of Congress salivate to bow before some Palestinian lobby, as they do before AIPAC? Well, until these conditions are met, Israel's constant, inhuman, shocking violations of the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people will be ignored by the U.S. government. Human rights, we must remember, are for the wealthy and influential.

Once again, so-called negotiations, this time at a very low level, have broken down. Israel claims it wants to 'negotiate' with no pre-conditions, and the Palestinians want an end to new, illegal settlement activity before they will return to the negotiating table. It's all pointless. Israel has always wanted all of Palestine, and has succeeded in seizing most of it in the last 60-plus years. Israel has one of the most powerful military machines in the world, and is sponsored by the most powerful government in the world. Why negotiate with a nation it has turned into a third world country? What do the Palestinians have that Israel cannot simply take? When was 'compromise' ever wanted, if, as Mr. Katzover says, providing all the land of Palestine for the nation of Israel has always been the goal?

Any sense of fairness compels one to recognize the need for Israel to surrender this stolen land, so it can be returned to its rightful owners, people whose families have owned it for generations, not people who believe themselves promised it in the Bible.

But, one might ask, should the over half a million illegal settlers who now make their home in Palestine really be forced to leave? Wouldn't that be a gross injustice? The answers to these two questions, this writer can categorically say, are yes, they should be forced to leave, and no, it wouldn't be an injustice of any kind. One does not have to look far to see a precedent. In the time span of 1947 to 1948, more than half of Palestine's native population, nearly 800,000 people, were uprooted, many of them killed, and over 500 villages were entirely destroyed. If Israel could cause that atrocity to occur, certainly the orderly, planned removal of half a million Israelis who are illegally occupying the land can and should be accomplished, with no concern about injustice.

The U.S. has proven to be a stumbling block to the rights of the Palestinian people to live in peace, dignity and freedom. President Mahmoud Abbas is right to petition the United Nations for recognition as a member state. It can only be hoped that that request is soon acted upon, so the suffering Palestinian people can begin to see a glimmer of hope for a free and independent nation.

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*Post-scriptum :*

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<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/01/27/israel-settlements-and-democracy/>

*Robert Fantina is author of Desertion and the American Soldier: 1776–2006*