

The Lost Cause of Israeli Justice

When Israel was founded, there was hope among progressive Jews that the new country could rely on the best traditions of Judaism and teach the world how to navigate the shoals of bigotry and injustice, a vision that remains unfulfilled, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

An ideologue is someone who sees the world in the limiting terms of a doctrine or dogma. It is limiting because the human world does not operate or evolve according to any one dogma. Therefore ideologues must wear blinders that result in tunnel vision – a tunnel which, like a Procrustean bed, tries to force the world to fit their chosen ideology.

There are hundreds of ideologies out there, both religious and secular, and in every case the resulting tunnel vision eventually results in absurdities – claims about the world that, seen from outside of the ideology, make little or no sense. So it is with the ideology of Zionism and the doctrinaire interpretations its adherents make about their own behavior and the behavior of others who oppose them.

One such proponent of Zionist ideology is David Harris, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). The AJC describes its mission as “to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel.” This is a point of dogma for the Zionists – that the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel are bound together. I am often confronted with Harris’s ideological take on events because, curiously, he has me on his mailing list.

David Harris’s View

On Oct. 11, Harris posted an essay on the ongoing violence in Israel-Palestine. It is entitled “Attacks Against Israelis: The World’s Silence Is Deafening” and the entire piece can be found both on the *Huffington Post* and *The Times of Israel*. The essay seeks to promote a picture of Israeli victimhood. As such it opens up a clear window on the Zionist’s view of the present situation and therefore is worth taking a look at.

What I am going to do is take representative segments from Harris’s essay and show how the grievances he reserves for Israelis seem somehow wrong when considered from outside the Zionist perspective. Indeed, as Harris’s complaint about the “world’s silence” in the face of violence against Israelis suggests, for many people, his picture of Israeli victimhood is quite untenable. Because his ideology will not allow him to consider the possibility of Israel’s

responsibility for the present violence, the world's "silence" leaves him aggrieved and bewildered.

Here then are some representative parts of Mr. Harris's essay. He starts this way: "For days now, I have been watching in dismay as Israeli citizens face random attacks, some deadly, by Palestinian assailants on the streets of their cities and towns. Children have been orphaned, parents have lost children, and some survivors are doubtless scarred for life."

It is true that individual Israelis have been hurt or killed in the recent past in apparently random attacks by Palestinians. Unfortunately, this is as far as Harris's understanding goes. Thus, his tunnel vision renders invisible other perspectives, such as the possibility that dead and injured Israeli Jews, like the Palestinians themselves, are victims of the aggressive Zionist society and culture they live in, the government and laws they obey, and the racist policies they tolerate.

Given this perspective the present Palestinian violence becomes understandable as a product of anger and frustration caused by Israeli occupation and long-standing discrimination against Israeli Arabs. There has been no need for an indoctrination of hate by Hamas or any other religiously inspired group (a favorite red herring of Zionist ideologues) to explain Palestinian actions. Israeli policies and practices in and of themselves are quite sufficient.

Harris cannot perceive, much less understand, this perspective. Yet, in ever greater numbers, the people outside of Israel can see that any portrayal of Israeli victimhood is in conflict with an objective reading of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.

David Harris continues, "And I've been wondering, not for the first time, what it would take for the world to wake up and acknowledge that Israel, the lone liberal democracy in the Middle East, is facing violence that must be condemned unequivocally, and that it, like any other nation, has the obligation to defend itself."

This "wondering" is also a product of Mr. Harris's constricted view. There has never been any Zionist complaint, from Harris in particular, about the world's silence while the Palestinians experience "liberal" Israel's ethnic bias and occupation. Nor did he and his fellows take note of the world's silence when Palestine's own 2006 democratic election was suppressed by Israel and its American ally.

It is exactly this silence in the face of Palestinian suffering that has left Israeli power in place and allowed for its oppressive use. Yet this particular

silence has no place in Harris's ideologically constructed world.

Harris goes on, "It's striking how some otherwise intelligent and thoughtful people in government, media, or think tanks, just shut down their critical faculties. Instead, they resort to a Pavlovian response mechanism that essentially rejects any possible legitimacy for the Israeli position and blindly defends whatever Palestinian narrative comes along."

As noted above, an ideological outlook usually leads to absurdities. The truth is that until recently the Zionist narrative on Israel-Palestine held a monopoly in the West. Now, finally, Israel's consistent apartheid-like practices are being noticed and as a result that monopoly is crumbling.

The best Harris can do is evoke a fictional "Pavlovian mechanism" to explain the responses to Israeli policies. Nonetheless, the weakening of the Zionist narrative is at an early stage, which means that, even now, it is often not the Israeli narrative that has to fight its way into the media, think tanks and government councils. It is the Palestinian one.

There is much more to Harris's missive, and almost every paragraph is shaped by the doctrinal demands of his ideology. The ersatz victimhood he claims for the Israelis is, in fact, a measure of the resulting distortion. For he, and his fellow Zionists, have stolen that depiction of suffering from their own victims, the Palestinians. Such is the power of ideological blinders.

To pull off this reversal of roles and posit the Israelis as victims of the Palestinians, Harris's essay must leave out the seminal fact that for the past 67 years Israel has possessed overwhelming power. With this power Israel has oppressively controlled almost every aspect of Palestinian life. The inevitable result is the violence of resistance. Israelis who suffer from that violence should take this reality into consideration. But, few of them can do this.

The explanation for this inability brings us back to the problem of tunnel vision. Consider the following: many Palestinians can understand Western Jewish history, including the Holocaust, and recognize how it shapes, though ultimately cannot excuse, Zionist behavior. This ability to understand is facilitated by the fact that the Palestinians were not responsible for the suffering of Western Jewry.

Unfortunately, the Zionists can't reciprocate by understanding the history that drives Palestinian behavior. They cannot do so because their ideology precludes the possibility that they are, in fact, responsible for Palestinian suffering. Ideologues are not known for their skill at self-criticism.

One of the most renowned Jewish journalists, I. F. Stone, once said, referring

to his own Jewish brethren, “how we act toward the Arabs will determine what kind of people we become: either oppressors and racists in our turn like those from whom we have suffered, or a nobler race able to transcend the tribal xenophobias that afflict mankind.”

Well, the verdict is in, at least for those Jews who adhere to the Zionist ideology. For them “oppression and racism” has won out. And so has denial – just read David Harris.

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